'LA RECHERCHE DE L'ABSOLU'
AN ANALYSIS OF THE ABSOLUTE
IN
THE WORKS OF MICHEL TOURNIER

by

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A thesis submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy
in the University of London

1991
ABSTRACT

Over the past decade, Michel Tournier’s writing has received an increasing amount of critical attention from both the media and the academic establishment. However, in many cases, the standard and the approach of criticism have been less than satisfactory; the present study, it is hoped, will partially redress this situation.

This thesis provides a thematic study of the works of Michel Tournier, from his earliest existing (unpublished) work, (a maîtrise on Plato, submitted in 1946) to his most recent publication, *Le Médianoche Amoureux* (1989).

The first chapter demonstrates that the impetus which informs all Tournier’s writing is the ‘recherche de l’absolu’, a philosophical preoccupation with the nature and destiny of the absolute. Particular attention is paid to Tournier’s earliest published work, ‘L’Impersonnalisme’ (1946) in which he sets out the framework of a personal philosophy of the absolute, not only because Tournier has subsequently referred to it as ‘la base cachée sur laquelle j’édifie toutes mes petites histoires’ (*Le Vol du Vampire*, p.299), but also because it has so far escaped critical attention. The following chapter proposes a method which enables the reader to engage with Tournier’s self-commentaries in a manner which permits independent speculation; the Tournierien absolute is then examined in the
light of its philosophical allegiances and idiosyncrasies.

The search for, and disclosure of the absolute is of fundamental importance to all thematic and structural studies of Tournier's writing, given the range of motifs and themes which are thereby encompassed in his work. Part II examines the manifestations of the absolute in Tournier's writing, under the headings of landscape, language, laughter, art and myth, in which subsidiary themes, such as sexuality, inversion and the perspective of the child will also be examined.

Part III contrasts the marriage of philosophy and literature discerned in Tournier's writing with that exhibited in three other texts: Rousseau's Emile, Valéry's Monsieur Teste and Sartre's La Nausée.
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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to express my gratitude to all those who have given their time, their encouragement and their support during the preparation of this thesis.

For her kind hospitality, both in Paris and London, I would like to thank Ann Longwell; and for putting up with me and the dog during the final preparation of this thesis my apologies and thanks go to Juliette Uebel, David Underwood and Eric Odone. My sister, Islay, has been more than generous with both practical and moral support in the printing and proof-reading of this volume.

For their discussion and encouragement I would like to thank Arlette Bouloumié, Bill Cloonan, Colin Davis, Nicol degli-Innocenti, Mario Diaz-Tomé, Ann Longwell, Eric Odone, Lynn Salkin-Sbiroli and Mireille Rosello. I owe a particular debt of gratitude to Colin McGinn of Oxford University for introducing me to the rigour and charm of philosophical debate.

I am especially grateful to Professor Annette Lavers of University College, London, for granting me a bursary to interview Michel Tournier at his home in France, and indeed to Michel Tournier for agreeing to that interview and for the copy of his maîtrise which he kindly sent me.

It is a particular pleasure to express my thanks to Michael Worton who has supervised this thesis with great tact and patience, and whose acuity and enthusiasm have never failed to inspire me. I thank him for his unstinting generosity and kindness, for the fairness of his criticism and for the encouragement he has always given me.

I would like also to thank my parents for giving me the confidence to embark upon this work and for their unfailing and multi-faceted support and helpfulness. And finally, in fond recognition of his loyal support and great forbearance, I would like to dedicate this thesis to my husband, Chris.
LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

Repeated references to Tournier's works will be by abbreviated title and page number. Full details of publication will be found in the Bibliography.

Le Coq de Bruyère CB
Canada Journal de Voyage CJV
Les Clés et les Serrures CS
Espace E
Gilles et Jeanne GJ
Gaspard, Melchior et Balthazar GMB
La Goutte d'Or GO
L'Intuition Intellectuelle dans la Philosophie de Platon II
Petites Proses PP
Les Météores M
Le Médianoche Amoureux MA
Le Roi des Aulnes RA
Sept Contes SC
Le Tabor et le Sinaï TS
Vendredi ou les limbes du Pacifique V
Le Vagabond Immobile VI
Vendredi ou la vie sauvage VS
Vues de Dos VD
Le Vent Paraclet VP
Le Vol du Vampire VV
PART ONE

THE PURSUIT OF THE ABSOLUTE
INTRODUCTION

'La recherche dura interminablement, hantée par l'idée que peut-être elle était vaine, sans issue, guidée par un propos absurde.'  (VP 180)

In July 1949 Michel Tournier learned that he had failed to be 'admissible' for the concours d'agrégation in philosophy at the Sorbonne. As a devoted student of philosophy returning from nearly four years of postgraduate study at Tübingen University, his self-regard had been high: 'je me jugeais carrément le meilleur de ma génération' (VP 163), and he had envisaged nothing less than brilliant success. The shock of rejection was enormous; the prospect of an academic career in philosophy, which he had long regarded as his 'seule et véritable vocation' (VP 162), was bitterly relinquished.

However, the surrender was only temporary. After a decade of radio-journalism and translating German texts into French (see VP 164-5), the disappointed student was transformed into a professional writer and returned with renewed impetus to his former vocation. Tournier's new ambition was to rehabilitate his prior discipline within the context of his new profession:

Il ne fallait pas renoncer aux armes admirables que mes maîtres métaphysiciens avait mises entre mes mains. Je prétendais bien sûr devenir un vrai romancier, écrire des histoires qui aurait l'odeur du feu du bois, des champignons d'automne ou du poil mouillé des bêtes, mais
Marriages of philosophy and fiction are not, of course, without precedent. Rousseau, Kafka, Hesse, Valéry and Sartre, for example, have used literary fiction as a means to express philosophical theses. However, it would be misleading to add Tournier to their number without some qualification; for Tournier has firmly refused to regard his literary works as such a vehicle and on numerous occasions he has decried the propensity of certain writers to inject a message, whether it be political, social or philosophical, into their fiction (3). The reader may indeed find a message therein, "mais il importe que ce soit le lecteur et non l’écrivain qui l’y ait mise" (VW 14).

Thus, Tournier acknowledges the reader who claims to have discovered Spinoza’s epistemology concealed beneath the leafy fronds of Robinson’s desert island in Vendredi, but he is adamant that he did not hide it there intentionally (VP 235). How, then, is this to be reconciled with Tournier’s equal insistence that ‘je n’ai jamais rien publié qui ne découle secrètement et indirectement de Platon, d’Aristote, de Spinoza, de Leibniz et de quelques autres’ (VW 382) ? Evidently the somewhat vague term ‘secrètement’ (employed also in Tournier’s statement of literary intent cited above)
is intended to distinguish his project from less subtle marriages where the join between philosophy and literature remains visible.

To a certain extent, 'secrètement' entails a partial abdication of authorial authority for Tournier. On at least two occasions he has used the image of the fruit-bearing tree to illustrate this point. In the preface to Manfred Fischer’s study of *Le Roi des Aulnes* (4), Tournier likens his writing to an oak tree, its roots buried deep in the soil of metaphysics, while high above in the dense foliage of narrative fiction, the philosophy he has assimilated appears, acorn-like, as a discrete and natural fruit of this metaphysical nourishment. This disingenuous disclaimer metaphorically invokes a naïve and straightforward idea of the intertextual relationship between the writer-as-reader and the writer-as-author. It implies that having read/fed on Spinoza, for example, Tournier can no more prevent the presence of this philosopher in his writing than a richly fed tree can prevent itself from bearing fruit. However, Tournier returns to the image of the fruit tree in order to emphasize the qualitative aspect of this process of assimilation. In the preface to Malraux’s *La Tête d’Obsidienne* he writes:

Mais tandis que les œuvres médiocres nous transmettent la rumeur de la société dont elles émanent, la véritable création ne lui ressemble pas plus que la prune au prunier. (VV 363) (5)

The mere transposition of philosophical theory or doctrine into the costume of fiction would evidently result in the
impoverishment of both parties. In the Tournierian construct, the novel is saved from mediocrity by the complete transformation of the source material into a creation which cannot and would not deny its paternity but which also asserts its own original identity. The benign images of the fruiting oak and plum trees suggest that Tournier (if not his critics) envisages his relationship with his philosophic (and possibly, his literary) precursors as less than antagonistic (6).

A second response to the term 'secrètement' in this context may be added to the above. In his preface to Sartre's Les Mots Tournier refers to an article he had written in 1946 which had been deeply influenced by Sartre’s L'Étre et le Néant:

Trente ans plus tard, je ne ris trop de cette première publication [...] Si j'ai attendu ensuite vingt ans pour me manifester à nouveau [...] n'est-ce pas que j'avais tout dit d'un seul coup en ces quelques pages ? Mon système compact [...] c'est peut-être encore la base cachée sur laquelle j'édifie mes petites histoires. (W 299-300)

This article, which is fully discussed in the following chapter, is relevant in the present context for the reference to it as the secret substructure concealed within Tournier's writing. An understanding of this article, which Tournier, perhaps in order to protect his 'secret', neither names nor dates and describes as 'égaré définitivement' (7), would allow the reader partially, at least, to discover the nature of the hidden relationship between Tournier's writing and its
philosophical sources.

In *Le Vent Paraclet* Tournier cites the names of many philosophers whom he regards as having had a major influence upon his philosophical and (by extension) his subsequent literary development. As a student, he wrote his maîtrise on Plato’s ontology (8) and followed this with four years’ residence at Tübingen university in order to master the works of Fichte, Schelling, Hegel, Husserl and Heidegger (VP 89). His student years in Paris were, he recalls, dominated by the philosophical systems of Plato, Aristotle, Thomas Aquinas, Descartes, Malebranche, Spinoza, Leibniz, Berkeley, Kant, Fichte, Schelling, Hegel and Sartre (VP 157-8). In addition to these, the names of Rousseau, Bergson, Nietzsche and Valéry (9) figure as prominent influences. This is a daunting list, and Tournier’s claim to represent these philosophers in his own literature (albeit ‘secrètement et indirectement’ [VV 382] quoted above) should not be regarded as an attempt to create a vehicle for a mass of individually identifiable philosophic models. Critics who have, however, understood this to be the case, have not unnaturally responded to this with some scepticism. Colin Davis writes:

The very proliferation of names and philosophies throws doubt upon the seriousness of his declared project. Tournier admits nothing by claiming too much. (10)

It is important to understand what Tournier’s ‘declared project’ is before either accepting or dismissing it. In *Le Vent Paraclet*, Tournier’s stated ambition is as follows:
He then illustrates this aim with a number of examples, which
Davis isolates as his statement of intent:

J'avais l'ambition de fournir à mon lecteur épris d'amours et d'aventures l'équivalent littéraire de ces sublimes inventions métaphysiques que sont le cogito de Descartes, les trois genres de connaissance de Spinoza, l'harmonie préétablie de Leibniz, le schématisme transcendental de Kant, la réduction phénoménologique de Husserl, pour ne citer que quelques modèles majeurs. (VP 179)

Yet taken in context with the initial statement of intent quoted above, an altogether different project emerges: that is not merely to present the fictional equivalent of an uncertain number of Western philosophies but to realize, through the medium of fiction, an individual vision of the destiny of the absolute within the long course of Western philosophy. The nature of this 'absolute' and its 'destiny' are not made explicit within this context, and it is, perhaps, this lack of immediate accessibility which has diverted critics from the full import of this statement.

It is the purpose of the present study to respond to Tournier's declaration of intent in the understanding that it is not made with the intention of deceiving himself or his readers, but in order to offer an intimation of the 'recherche de l'absolu' which, it will be shown, is disclosed in the dynamic interaction of his texts, (both fiction and commentary) both with themselves and with their external source texts.
The initial objective of the thesis will be to justify this positive response to Tournier's declaration. The first chapter will seek to demonstrate that although the philosophical ingredients in Tournier's writing are drawn from diverse sources they inform one central theme: the writer's consistent preoccupation with the absolute and its destiny. It will also be argued that this concern may be observed in his earliest known writings, namely the maîtrise submitted in 1946 and 'L'Impersonnalisme', an article published in the same year, and that it persists throughout his subsequent work. These two early pieces, in particular the published article, are held to be of significance to the present study, partly because they have so far escaped critical attention, but mostly because their content is of enormous help in analysing the Tournierian concept of the absolute. It is, in fact, 'L'Impersonnalisme' that Tournier describes as 'la base cachée sur laquelle j’édifie mes petites histoires' (VV 300, quoted above).

The second chapter analyses the Tournierian absolute. It is prefaced by a discussion of the approach taken by the present study to Tournier's own attempts at self-analysis or self-commentary (which have frequently provoked either hostility or discouragement on the part of his critics). The analysis that follows is based on the method proposed in this preface and seeks to explore the relation between Tournier's philosophical precedents and idiocratic participation; it is
in this interaction that the identity of the Tournierian absolute is shown to be revealed.

The next section of the thesis is divided into five chapters, each of which is concerned with an aspect of the literary exegesis of the search for and disclosure of the absolute in Tournier's writing. The wide range of motifs and themes which are thereby encompassed (landscape, language, laughter, myth and art) indicate the fundamental importance of the 'recherche de l'absolu' in Tournier's work.

The third section of the thesis will attempt to place Tournier's philosophical motivation as a writer within a wider perspective. This is achieved by comparing Tournier's writing with a (necessarily) selective group of writers, who have similarly sought to explore their philosophies within the framework of literary fiction. Each writer is represented (for reasons of economy) by a single text: Rousseau (Emile), Valéry (Monsieur Teste) and Sartre (La Nausée).

NOTES

1. Tournier's 'maîtres métaphysiciens' included Maurice de Gandillac at the Lycée Pasteur in Neuilly (see VV 379-83) and Gaston Bachelard at the Sorbonne (see VP 152-4). The phrase is probably intended, however, to include the long list of Western philosophers whom he studied at these institutes.

2. See also Tournier's 'obituary' to himself: 'Après des longues études de philosophie, il est venu assez tard au roman qu'il a toujours conçu comme une affabulation d'apparence aussi conventionelle que possible, recouvrant
une infrastructure métaphysique invisible, mais douée d'un rayonnement actif' (CS 193)

3. See VV 14 and VV 375 for definitive statements on this subject.


5. In this particular reference, Tournier is speaking of painting, but it may be applied with equal justification to the work of art in general. C.f. also Tournier’s description of Denis de Rougemont’s influence upon his writing: ‘[il] a fécondé mon humus philosophique et littéraire’ (VV 389)

6. I raise the alternative question of Tournier’s antagonism to the parent text in Chapter One.

7. This article, entitled ‘L’Impersonnalisme’, appeared in the last issue of the literary review, Espace, in July 1946.

8. ‘L’Intuition Intellectuelle dans la philosophie de Platon. Diplôme d’Etudes Supérieures de Philosophie déposé à la faculté des lettres par Michel Tournier le 11 mai 1946’. During my interview with him, Tournier, having vehemently denied knowledge of the whereabouts of his copy, and denigrating its content, finally produced it and reluctantly agreed to let me have a photocopy of it. I am very grateful to him for this kind gesture.

9. It is the sheer quantity of references to the following philosophers which suggest Tournier’s personal indebtedness to their works, rather than any direct statement of obligation. Amongst the many references to Rousseau, see especially VV 189, ‘Mais il faut revenir à Rousseau. Il faut toujours revenir à Jean-Jacques.’ For Bergson, see VP 186, 196-7, 276, 286, and VV 161, 212. For Nietzsche, see VP 199, VV 29-30, 193, 232, 270, 292, and VI 91. The references to Valéry are too numerous to list here, but see in particular, VP 230-232 and VV 237.

10. Michel Tournier Philosophy and Fiction p.6

11. It is surprising that, although Davis quotes extensively from this passage and the paragraph preceding it, he omits this explicit statement of intent.
CHAPTER ONE
THEORETICAL EVIDENCE

'L'absolu est toujours là [...]'
(VV 29)

1. INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this chapter will be to demonstrate that
Tournier's principal philosophical inquiry concerns the
absolute and its destiny. Tournier's non-fiction will be
principally examined at this stage; the literary development
of his inquiry will be discussed in Part Two of this thesis.

Although this chapter will address the philosophical
arguments contained in Le Vent Paraclet, the Canadian diary
and Le Vol du Vampire, particular consideration will be
given in the first instance to the two 1946 essays in
philosophy (1) as these represent not only Tournier's
earliest surviving, but also his purest attempts to define
his philosophical beliefs and criticisms. The term 'purest'
is used here, because at this time Tournier counted himself
as a philosopher, writing for a philosophically orientated
audience, rather than, as later, a novelist attempting to
conceal a philosophical substructure for the benefit of a
less philosophically educated readership.

That these two essays, although written when Tournier
was only twenty two, should be taken seriously, is in no
doubt; of the later of the two, Tournier writes:

Si j'ai attendu ensuite vingt ans pour me manifester à
nouveau [...] n'est-ce pas que j'avais tout dit d'un
seul coup en ces quelques pages ? [...] c'est peut-être
It is to the earlier of these essays, however, that we shall give our first consideration.

2. 'L'INTUITION INTELLECTUELLE DANS LA PHILOSOPHIE DE PLATON'

This dissertation was submitted under the title

'L'Intuition Intellectuelle dans la philosophie de Platon'

and accepted in June 1946 (3).

The title alone indicates Tournier's nascent interest in the reconciliation of opposites; in this case the intellectual and intuitive modes of apprehension, for while
the second term speaks of knowledge acquired through the faculty of reason, the first appeals to knowledge acquired immediately, that is to say without the mediation of the rational processes. Yet by juxtaposing the two terms, Tournier suggests the validity of their union as an independent mode of apprehension. In fact, Tournier is not the first to coin this expression; Schelling had introduced it briefly into the philosophical vocabulary in the late eighteenth century in order to describe the transcendent union of the objective and the subjective modes of apprehension, by which operation the Idealist Absolute (4) is revealed. This indeed is a precursor form of Tournier's use of the expression, which is substantiated by his acknowledgement that 1946 also marked the period in which he felt the powerful attraction of the German Idealists, Fichte, Schelling and Hegel, and their successors, Husserl and Heidegger (5).

Tournier's maîtrise aims to demonstrate that Plato's philosophical writings reflect a gradual ascent towards 'la vraie philosophie' which is defined as the dialectical synthesis of the intellectual and intuitive processes:

La vraie philosophie sera celle qui unira la certitude métaphysique de la premiere méthode (intuition) avec le caractère intellectuel de la seconde (pensée rationnelle), en un mot qui consistera dans une intuition intellectuelle. (II 22) (6)

The desire to unite inversely related concepts and the valorisation of such an operation that may be discerned in
this passage prefigure a major concern in Tournier’s later work as a novelist, in which inversion functions to similar effect, challenging opposites and ultimately effacing difference (7).

The thesis that the absolute emerges when difference is transcended, is familiar to both Occidental and Oriental philosophy (8) and Tournier’s study draws on this tradition. The passage quoted above continues:

D’une part, il [Platon] va exploiter l’ensemble des expériences qui nous mettent en contact avec l’absolu, qu’il s’agisse des intuitions éthiques, érotiques ou mystiques. D’autre part il va multiplier les tentatives pour s’éléver méthodiquement, par les démarches de l’intelligence, vers ce même point. (II 22)

Two points are to be made here. Firstly, it is evident that it is Tournier (as much as Plato) who is motivated by the concept of ‘the absolute’ and the ways in which it may be perceived. His interpretation of Plato’s work depends upon that motivation and his thesis proceeds by an analysis of a selection of Plato’s works in chronological sequence in which each text is considered as the logical successor to the last in a progression towards an apprehension of the absolute that is ultimately neither rational nor intuitive but a synthesis of the two. Thus, Tournier identifies love as the agent of apprehension in The Symposium, mysticism in Phaedo and ethical intuition in Meno. The transition is made from the intuitive to the intellectual mode, according to Tournier, in The Republic, where extrapolation functions to
the same effect. The thesis concludes with an examination of Plato's *Parmenides* and *The Sophist* in which Tournier discovers the synthesis - or effacement of difference - between the two modes of apprehension.

Secondly, it should be noted that there is no word in the Classical Greek vocabulary which translates directly as 'the absolute'. The Platonic 'One' (τὸ ἕν) is certainly absolute in that it designates the supreme principle of ontological reality, but it is a semantic anachronism to translate it as 'l'absolu', as this term, (like Intellectual Intuition) was not introduced into the philosophical vocabulary until late in the eighteenth century by the German Idealists (9). Nevertheless, it remains Tournier's decision to describe the ultimate goal of Plato's philosophical enquiries as 'l'absolu', qualifying this term as : 'l'hypothèse métaphysique de toutes choses. Cela veut dire qu'il sera lui-même sans hypothèse, n'ayant besoin d'aucun fondement explicatif.' (II 43) (10).

The maîtrise reveals a fascination with the Platonic concept of participation. This is identified as the process in which the One/Absolute participates in the world of Ideal forms, and the world of forms participates in the 'real' (apprehensible) world, and so on down the ontological scale. This is why so much of Tournier's attention is focussed on *Parmenides*, 'sa deuxième partie notamment, merveille de subtilité ontologique' (VP 89), for in the eight hypotheses
which form the second part of Plato's dialogue, Tournier recognizes 'un réseau de participation entre l'Un et le Multiple, les idées et les choses' (II 64), the climax to which he perceives in the fourth hypothesis, 'dont toute la subtilité et tout le paradoxe est dans cette relation à l'absolu' (II 67). Indeed, the fourth hypothesis is of central importance to Plato's ontology. In his study of Parmenides, much admired by Tournier (11), Jean Wahl writes:

Le principe dialectique de l'Être est ici réalisé pour la première fois [...] Si l'Un est, il est par raison du fait de l'existence potentiel du non-Un. (12)

Tournier's study tackles this dialectic of participation with rigorous passion. Almost mesmerised by the dialectic of being and non-being, reality and appearance, the One and the plural, Tournier limns 'la grandiose ontologie que Platon nous offre' (II 67) with a rhythm and a vocabulary which suggest a general inclination to a literary style and which specifically prefigure Robinson's meditations in Vendredi:

Entre cette réalité apparente et cette irréalité réelle la participation moribonde prête à toutes les contradictions, ressemblance et dissemblance, mouvement et immobilité, naissance, mort. Mais on peut descendre encore plus bas dans l'infini. [...] à cet extrême niveau de la gamme ontologique [...] l'être de l'apparence s'évanouit dans le non-être, et la co-existence des déterminations contraires se résoud dans l'absence de toute détermination. (II 67) (13)

The instrument which discloses the dialectic of Being is itself a dialectic: Intellectual Intuition. In Le Vent Paraclet, Tournier recalls the 'soudaine révélation' he experienced when his teacher at the Sorbonne, Gaston
Bachelard, opened his eyes to the penetrative power of 'le "grand couteau de la dialectique"' (VP 152); evidently he was determined to put this instrument to the test in his own study.

The concluding section, which examines Plato's *The Sophist* understands this work to be a development of the sixth hypothesis in the second part of *Parmenides*, 'le lieu où s'exercera l'intuition intellectuelle' (II 70). This hypothesis asks what happens if the One is not, and responds that its existence is still implied; the negative affirmation implies a positive contradiction. Moreover, a relationship between Being and Nothingness is contained in this implicit dialogue; Plato refuses to give way to the idea of a non-being beyond thought - it must of necessity participate in being and thus be available to the mind (14). For Tournier this refusal results in the recognition that neither ratiocination nor intuition alone will resolve the ontological problem; only by the mutual effacement of difference will this be achieved. This method would enable a perception of the participating One/absolute that is neither immanent (for that would rely too heavily on intuition alone), nor transcendent (too reliant upon the faculty of intellect), but a dialectical synthesis of the two:

La transcendance niait l'intuition par défaut de participation; la participation universelle que posait l'immanence rendait impossible l'intuition par excès. C'est la correction de cet excès par ce défaut, et de ce défaut par cet excès, ou distinction, qui constitue
l'intuition intellectuelle. (II 78)
This harmonious dialectic of immanence and transcendence
which Tournier enthusiastically discerns in Parmenides and
The Sophist will be seen to lie at the heart of his later
reflective work on the nature of the absolute and to
determine to a large extent its literary application.

3. 'L'IMPERSONNALISME'
In June 1946, just after completing his maîtrise on Plato,
Tournier's first publication appeared, entitled
'L'Impersonnalisme', in the last issue of the bi-monthly
literary and philosophical review, Espace. This article was
published in conjunction with a number of other essays,
short stories, poems and woodcuts by a group of like-minded
students, organized by Alain Clément and Gilles Deleuze
(15). Tournier recalls that the review was 'tout entier
dirigé contre la notion de vie intérieure et [qui] devait
s'ouvrir sur la photographie d'une cuvette de w.-c. légendée
par cette citation : un paysage est un état d'âme' (VP 156).

For the purposes of the review they chose Tournier to
be their chief philosophical spokesman. For Tournier, after
the somewhat rigorous dictates of writing for a university
examination, this presented an ideal opportunity to give
free, if not ample, expression to his most passionately held
philosophical beliefs and preoccupations:

Un article ? En vérité il s'agissait d'un système du
monde, assez complet au demeurant, comprenant ontologie,
The common impetus which united this group of friends and encouraged Tournier to fulfil this ambitious programme is recalled in _Le Vent Paraclet_. Firstly, there was an almost worshipful respect for Sartre (16), but they were also motivated by what Tournier calls 'cette rage de creuser [...] cette fièvre mentale, ce délire d'absolu' (VP 156) 'Nous étions ivres d'absolu et de puissance cérébrale' (VP 158). Indeed, the tone of Tournier's article is passionate and scornful in his lionisation of the absolute and dismissal of subjective idealism. The theme of the review is summarised, with a suggestion of the urgency of its tone, in _Le Vent Paraclet:_

(...) le monde réel n'est doué que d'une cohérence relative - tout le scientisme faire de ce relatif un absolu - en vérité troué de lacunes, semé de contradictions, hérissé d'absurdités. Il est donc possible, _il dépend de notre seule force cérébrale_ de concevoir des ensembles d'un degré de réalité plus élevé: ce sont les systèmes philosophiques. (VP 157)

In his maîtrise, Tournier had carefully reconstructed his vision of Plato's system as a demonstration of how the Platonic 'force cérébrale' had illuminated and granted access to the absolute. In _Espace_ he had the opportunity to create a new system, his own 'porte à l'absolu'.

However, Tournier could not hide his commitment to Sartre. _L'Étre et le Néant_ which had appeared three years earlier, 'tel un météorite' (VP 159), had made a weighty
impression:

L'oeuvre était massive, hirsute, débordante d'une force irrésistible, pleine de subtilités exquises, encyclopédique, superbement technique, traversée de bout en bout par une intuition d'une simplicité diamantine. (VP 159)

The influence of Sartre permeates the essay; Ferdinand Alquié, reviewing the article in *La Gazette des Lettres* (17) commented upon this and noted what he took to be a poor, though enthusiastic, assimilation of the complexity of the Sartrean argument:

S'inspirant de l'ontologie de Sartre, il (Tournier) y néglige la dépendance réciproque de l'en-soi et du pour-soi, et ne retenant que le primat de l'en-soi sur le pour-soi, il fait de la conscience une aventure du Monde.

Il est du reste clair que les rédacteurs d'*Espace* sont de nouveaux convertis à l'objet. Leur premier maître fut Sartre lui-même; ils ont conservé une partie de son vocabulaire, ils ont appris de lui que le sujet est néant. Mais oubliant que, pour Sartre, ce néant est tout, et constitue le sens du Monde ils croient pouvoir le supprimer. (18)

Certainly the presence of Sartre in the article is undeniable, but, with hindsight, Alquié's criticism may, although technically correct, be misplaced. All Tournier's subsequent writing has proved to be a re-writing of an anterior text or texts, be it Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe* in *Vendredi*, the Gospels in *Gaspard, Melchior et Balthazar*, Goethe's 'Erlkönig' in *Le Roi des Aulnes* or, most recently, Hugo's poem 'L'Aigle du Casque' in 'Angus' (19); a re-writing that misreads the earlier text, in the Bloomian sense (20), and imposes a strong, creative palimpsest that asserts its own individual right to existence. Filial debt
is acknowledged, but every effort is made to prevent it from dominating the new creation. It may be argued that the relationship between 'L’Impersonnalisme' and L’Etre et le Néant is analogous with the relation between his later fictions and their respective anterior texts. It should be noted in this context that Tournier and his group were as challenging as they were committed to Sartre in 1946, reckoning that with L’Existentialisme est un Humanisme he had deserted the cerebral rigour of L’Etre et le Néant for 'bandes dessinées' (21) and the subject-orientated code of humanism which they detested (22). The article may be seen as the expression of this reaction, the oedipal nature of which is unmistakeable:

Il faut prendre cette réaction à l’égard de Sartre pour ce qu’elle était: une sorte de liquidation du père par des adolescents attardés auxquels pesait la conscience de tout lui devoir. (VP 161)

The benign image of the fruiting tree as a metaphor for the literary fruition of assimilated philosophical nourishment, described above, (see the Introduction) no longer seems so appropriate. Tournier’s response to Sartre is consciously aggressive and appropriative. ‘L’Impersonnalisme’ is situated with not only a retrospective stance towards l’Etre et le Néant but also with a prospective relation to Vendredi, Tournier’s first novel, published twenty-one years later. The philosophical content of the novel and the metaphors employed to illuminate the
argument derive directly from this article. In as much as
'L'Impersonnalisme' is an antagonistic/affectionate response
to L'Être et le Néant, Vendredi is undoubtedly a palimpsest
of 'L'Impersonnalisme' (23). The following analysis of the
article will attempt to place it within this dually
orientated perspective.

'L'Impersonnalisme' opens with a denunciation of
Subjective Idealism which, Tournier demonstrates, presents
the world as the object of consciousness. This system
privileges the subject which is identified with
consciousness; the world is thus held to be the ontological
dependent of the subject, and, by logical extension of this
argument, consciousness is utterly dependent upon the object
which reassures it of its own ontological validity (24).
Tournier takes this philosophy as his starting point:

[...] on se demande puisqu'il n'y a pas d'objet sans
conscience ni de conscience sans objet, comment et par
quelles abstractions on a pu distinguer les deux
terres, par quel miracle on a su que la conscience d'un
objet n'est pas cet objet purement et simplement. (E
49-50)

This opening attack is strongly reminiscent of the
introduction to L'Être et le Néant in which Sartre
challenges the phenomenological debate by questioning the
primacy of an ontology that consists solely of
consciousness; Tournier follows Sartre closely in his
subsequent refusal to accept either the primacy of the
subject or its synonymy with consciousness or the
symbiotic relationship between subject and object; instead,
(in the Tournierian construct) the object is identified with consciousness. Thus released from its dependency on the subject it acquires 'la dignité ontologique de la chose-en-soi' (E 53). The metaphor which Tournier uses to illustrate this concept is identical to that deployed by Robinson in *Vendredi*. In both texts, the image of the subject as 'une chandelle projetant un faisceau lumineux sur les choses' is rejected and substituted with the image of 'des objets phosphorescents par eux-mêmes, sans rien d'extérieur qui les éclaire.' (V 97, cf E 51)

This elimination of the ontologically superior subject is essential to any inquiry into the nature of the Tournierian absolute:

Puisqu'il n'y a pas de sujet qui les soutienne à l'existence, les choses se suffisent à elles-mêmes, elles sont en-soi. Le monde n'est pour personne, avec lui coïncide la notion d'absolu et on peut justement parler d'une 'solitude totale du connu' (E 52-53)(25)

This idea is repeated in *Vendredi*, (with greater elegance,) as Robinson perceives 'à ce stade naïf [...] une solitude heureuse du connu, une virginité des choses qui possèdent tout en elles-mêmes.' (V 97).

All that remains of the subject, now stripped of consciousness and made redundant by an ontologically self-sufficient world, is its 'aspect extérieur [...] comme sa coquille' (E 53). Two worlds are thus implied existing side by side; on the one hand there is the absolute 'world-in-itself', while on the other hand there is the alienated
world of the hollow subject, which, 'pour lui donner un nom nous [...] appellerons autrui et nous dirons de lui qu'il ne conditionne le monde mais qu'il le peuple, qu'il est un sujet contingent et historique.' (E 53)

The influence of *L'Être et le Néant*, evident from the opening attack on subjective idealism (26) has become far more direct with the appropriation of the Sartrean term, *l'en-soi* (27) and the ontological division of the two worlds; and, like Sartre, Tournier will seek to discover the nature of the 'mystérieuse dépendance' (E 54) that subsists between them. However, it is equally apparent that there has been some subversion of the parent text; Tournier's *en-soi* approximates to the Sartrean model in that it represents unconditioned, absolute Being, but Tournier is diverted from the direction of Sartre’s argument by his valorisation of this pristine world of things-in-themselves. Whereas Sartre goes on to develop his massive analysis of the *pour-soi* in terms of the ontology of its consciousness, Tournier’s *autrui* is reduced to the status of 'une hallucination qui vient parfois au monde' (E 52), or even 'un excrément épistémologique' (E 66).

The denigration of the subject, (and the consequent kinship of ontology and scatology [c.f. VP 265]) is illustrated in *Vendredi*. Robinson’s complete isolation leads to the disintegration of his sense of subjective self and this enables him to enjoy brief moments of what Sartre would
term 'objectité' (28) in which his consciousness is totally identified with the object:

> Alors Robinson est Speranza. Il n'a plus conscience de lui-même qu'à travers les frondaisons des myrtes où le soleil darde une poignée de flèches; il ne se connaît que dans l'écume de la vague glissant sur le sable blond. (V 98)

But these moments are too short-lived - for his subjective self fights to reassert itself:

> Et tout à coup un déclic se produit. Le sujet s'arrache à l'objet en le dépouillant d'une partie de sa couleur et de son poids [...] La lumière devient œil [...] L'odeur devient narine [...] La musique du vent [...] ce n'était plus qu'un ébranlement du tympan. (V 98) (29)

Ultimately, Robinson concludes, his subjective self (his self as autrui) is nothing more than 'l'excrément personnel de Speranza' (V 100).

This negation of the subject approximates to Sartre's néant, 'je [suis] précisément négation immédiate de l'objet et rien que cela' (30); however, Tournier diverges sharply from Sartre in his identification of consciousness with the object which occurs in his description of Robinson's melting oneness with Speranza. The fusion of subject and object, or rather, loss of subjective status in favour of 'objectness' is similar to Rousseau's pantheistic intuitions which Sartre invokes in order to deny their very possibility:

> Il [Rousseau] nous déclare alors qu'il se 'fondait' avec l'univers, que le monde seul se trouvait soudain présent, comme présence absolue et totalité inconditionnée. Et certes, nous pouvons comprendre cette présence totale et déserte du monde, son pur 'être-là', certes nous admettons fort bien qu'à ce moment privilégié, il n'y ait rien eu d'autre que le monde.
Mais cela ne signifie point, comme Rousseau veut l'admettre, qu'il y ait fusion de la conscience avec le monde. Cette fusion signifierait la solidification du pour-soi en en-soi et du coup, la disparition du monde et de l'en-soi comme présence (31)

It is impossible in the Sartrean construct for the en-soi and pour-soi to coincide (32), but it must be remembered, Tournier has deliberately avoided appropriating the Sartrean term pour-soi. Tournier's own autrui enjoys a relationship with the world-in-itself (as will be shown in the next chapter) that owes more to Plato's Parmenides and Hegelian dialectic than to Sartre's L'Etre et le Néant.

The secret relationship between the absolute world and the world of autrui is elucidated by the introduction of a third term into Tournier's construct: the 'cogito cartésien', which is used to describe the concept of selfhood and, somewhat confusingly, also referred to as 'autrui' in that it is inevitably alienated from the world-in-itself (E 55).

It is in what Tournier terms 'le drame cartésien' that a dialectic of participation and alienation emerges, in which the absolute finds its principle of harmony and stability, and autrui its raison d'être.

Four movements are identified in the relationship between the absolute world and the contingent world of autrui. These are derived from a dismantling of the famous dictum of Descartes, 'cogito ergo sum', a process which challenges the very foundations of Cartesian
philosophy.

In the first movement, there is the simple presence of the world without autrui. There are steps, says Tournier, but no-one to walk up or down them; hunger but no-one to feel hungry. (E 58)

In the second movement, consciousness emerges into the world and, 'à peine dégagé de ses limbes' (E 59) says 'je pense' for it is impossible to disassociate 'je' from 'je pense'. Now, Tournier argues, 'penser, c'est toujours penser quelque chose, et quel objet pourrait avoir une pensée en général sinon le monde ? En explicitant nous dirons donc: 'Je pense le monde' (E 59) (33). At this point consciousness is still attached to the world-in-itself by 'un cordon ombilical ontologique' (E 59) as the subject has yet to assert its ontological independence.

In the third movement, consciousness affirms 'je suis'. Whereas in the previous movement, 'je pense' had implied 'je pense le monde', 'je suis' stands by itself, in what Sartre would term ek-stasis (34), no longer dependent upon the world for its being:

Cette phase marque la rupture du cordon ombilical qui reliait le sujet au monde, l’évanouissement de ce dernier, la suspension du sujet dans une solitude totale, où il acquiert son autonomie et sa liberté. (E 59)

Autrui has emerged; the steps and the hunger are now mere objects of his consciousness; without his consciousness they do not exist. This is made brutally clear to Robinson,
when, after many years, the crew of the Whitebird comes to his island. Having effaced his subjective self for so long (and having effectively lived out the second phase of the 'drame cartésien') he is brought face to face with the implications of the subject's desire to assert its being:

Chacun de ces hommes était un monde possible [...] Et chacun de ces mondes possibles proclamait naïvement sa réalité. [...] Il (Robinson) mêlait en outre l'aspiration à être de ces mondes possibles et l'image d'une Speranza vouée à disparaître que chacun d'eux enveloppait, et il lui semblait qu'en octroyant à ces hommes la dignité qu'ils revendiquaient, il vouait du même coup Speranza à l'anéantissement. (V 238-9)

Returning to the dismantling of the Cartesian cogito, the fourth and final movement reveals the rupture of the two worlds to be transcended by a dialectic of participation and alienation in which the necessity of the cogito, despite and because of the contingency of autrui emerges:

[...] penser, c'est penser le monde, mais d'autre part, toute chose est une chose dans le monde. Il vient donc: je suis une chose dans le monde qui pense le monde. Et le cogito apparaît à son terme dialectique comme la venue au monde d'une pensée du monde, comme l'acte par lequel le monde s'exprime. (E 59)

Thus two worlds are seen to exist in diametrical opposition, yet each dialectically dependent upon the other; although the 'umbilical cord' which once bound them together has been severed, like mother and child, they are not alienated from each other by the initial rupture. The presence of autrui in the world is not to be regarded as 'un ver dans un fruit' (E 65), but as an essential component in the ontology of
both the absolute world 'où je suis' and '(le monde) que je pense, dont je suis la pensée et par suite que je suis' (E 60). Furthermore, autrui gives the world its temporal distinction, for the absolute world precedes the 'thought-of' world of autrui; from this Tournier extrapolates: 'le sujet n'est pas le contemporain de l'objet, il est l'objet passé' (E 61)(35). Without autrui the world would be timeless and tenseless, like Speranza, fixed in 'un présent perpétuel, sans passé ni avenir' (V 246). Robinson is necessary to Speranza, not as the coloniser of the third stage, nor even as the 'subjectless' Robinson of the second, but as the dialectic participant of the fourth stage in which he emerges as the necessary offspring of the world which gives the absolute world its coherence, its means of expression and, consequently, its 'paix intérieure' (E 66).

In Le Médianoche Amoureux Tournier fleetingly introduces the character Lagos whose sand sculptures and dances along the shoreline give a voice and a coherence to the landscape which appears to illustrate this fourth moment in the destiny of the absolute:

La grève balbutiait à la recherche d'un langage, comme l'avait bien compris Lagos. (MA 41)

Nevertheless, in 'L'Impersonnalisme', Tournier lingers nostalgically over the necessary loss of the absolute of the first phase:

En effet, [le cogito] ne peut manquer de paraître une maladie du monde, et le je-pense, un il y a dégénéré. N'est-ce pas au terme de notre description la
victoire du temps sur l'Éternel présent, la dégradation de l'absolu en relatif, la dissolution d'une dogmatique par l'infiltration d'un doute, et ne faut-il pas regretter la divine immuabilité des choses dans leur toute-solitude? (P 64-5)

In the same spirit, Robinson, even during the most actively rational and subjective phase of his life in enforced solitude concedes that '(il) n'est infiniment riche que lorsqu'il coïncide avec Speranza' (V 70). Indeed, many of Tournier's characters from his later fiction exhibit a similar nostalgia, expressive of a desire to recover a lost unity: Tiffauges pursues his original, mythical self to the densely atmospheric enclave of Kaltenborn, Balthazar regrets the passing of the Golden Age of Greek civilization, Paul Surin and Gilles de Rais both long to be reunited in the absolute plenitude of a lost partnership; Idriss pursues his photograph in an attempt to redress the personal fragmentation that it has wrought and Oudalle and Nadège mourn the loss of the language which united them as a couple.

However, to remain locked in nostalgic retrospection is to block creative thought, and clearly this impasse is unacceptable for Tournier. His position is that of joyful acceptance of the fourth phase, the dialectic of Being, in which his activity as a writer and philosopher finds its ultimate resolution:

Nous voyons que le cogito se définit comme le retour du monde à l'harmonie rationelle, par l'éjaculation d'une erreur, l'Autrui, qui n'est à tout prendre qu'un excrément épistemologique, et l'histoire de la pensée
I believe that a careful distinction must be established at this point between what may be termed the 'false' or, better still, the 'primary absolute' of the first movement which is the object of nostalgic regret and the 'true Tournierian absolute' which occurs in the fourth movement as the dynamically creative dialectic between consciousness and the world it inhabits. Future references to the Tournierian absolute will refer to the dialectical absolute unless the 'primary absolute' is specified.

'L'Impersonnalisme' is exactly as Tournier describes it in *Le Vol du Vampire*: a dense, miniaturised system 'comprenant ontologie, gnoséologie et épistémologie, morale, logique et esthétique' (Vv 299). It is hardly surprising that its seventeen pages which challenge the six hundred of *L'Être et le Néant*, a David to Sartre's Goliath, provoked Alquié's patronising criticisms.

In the final pages of the Introduction to *L'Être et le Néant* Sartre raises a series of questions concerning the relation of the *en-soi* to the *pour-soi* and their relation to Being in general. He responds to these at length in the subsequent pages; Tournier's much slighter work raises the same questions (although as demonstrated above, he uses a slightly different terminology) which he attempts to answer through the theory of dialectical participation described.
above. Alquié’s criticisms appeared in 1946, twenty one years before Tournier’s first novel was published. He was not to know that the Tournierian exegesis of this theory would be partly realised in this work and continued throughout the writer’s subsequent publications. Indeed, Tournier’s present writing continues to address the questions posed in this initial, initiatory text.

* * *

Tournier spent the four years which followed the cathartic explosion of ‘L’Impersonnalisme’ in Germany, studying philosophy at Tübingen University. He returned to the Sorbonne in 1949, convinced that he was ‘carrément [...] la meilleure de ma génération’ (V 163), only to be declared ‘non-admissible’ by the jury of the agrégation. Tournier the philosopher remained silent until the publication of Vendredi in 1967 which was immediately recognised as a ‘philosophical novel’ (36). Tournier identified this response as a failure on his part to integrate the philosophical content sufficiently and was prompted to re-write the novel, ostensibly for a younger readership, but with the chief aim of creating a work which would retain its philosophical impact without appearing to be a vehicle for a philosophical construct. (37)

The works that followed Vendredi fall into two groups: fiction and commentary. The novels, short stories and contes
which comprise his fiction continue to be infused with the philosophy of 'L'Impersonnalisme', with varying degrees of explicitness; Tournier's continuing philosophical speculations of an explicit nature are reserved for his commentaries on his own work or that of other writers, photographers and artists. The implicit continuation of the philosophical theme in his fiction will be examined in the second part of this thesis; for the present we shall remain with the commentaries.

4. THE CANADIAN JOURNAL DE VOYAGE AND LE VENT PARACLET

The Canadian Journal de Voyage of 1972 (38) appeared some twenty-six years after the article in Espace. In it, Tournier records a conversation with his host, Jean-Luc Mercié, on surrealist art and literature in which the suggestion is made that surrealist writers may have discovered an idiosyncratic approach to the absolute in automatic writing. This provokes a response from Tournier which recalls the passion, vigour and scorn evidenced in 'L'Impersonnalisme':

Et puis, pour moi, nourri de philosophie classique, la recherche de l'absolu passe nécessairement par Platon, Spinoza, Heidegger et quelques autres. Toute autre voie vers l'absolu est hérétique, abérante, méprisable. Les écrivains surrealistes - avec leur écriture automatique, leurs explorations oniriques, et autres tables tournantes - sont à mes yeux ce que sont aux yeux d'un médecin de la Faculté - [...] des rebouteux qui soignent une plaie avec un emplâtre de bouse de vache. (CJV 58-9)

A few days after this conversation, Tournier received a request from the weekly news review, Le Point, to write an
article on Kandinsky. The article is reproduced exactly in the subsequent pages of the diary (39) and appears to be motivated by the notion of the 'recherche de l'absolu', still fresh in his mind perhaps, after his recent reaffirmation of his commitment to the spirit of 'L'Impersonnalisme'. The article centres on an anecdote told by Kandinsky where the artist happened to see one of his own paintings, inadvertently hung upside-down. Kandinsky did not recognise it at first, but was struck by its beauty, freshness of colour, 'le chant de ses équilibres [et] une sorte de "rayon intérieur" '(CJV 123). Then realising it to be one of his own, he inverted it, found the magic had gone, re-inverted it, but the 'other picture' had gone forever. Tournier comments: 'C'est que la vision inversée avait déchiré le voile gris qui ternit et oblitère à nos yeux la jeunesse des choses et des êtres' (CJV 124). In Tournier's eyes, Kandinsky has clearly had a vision of the absolute, which is echoed by Robinson's glimpses of 'l'autre île', 'plus fraîche, plus chaude, plus fraternelle [...] que lui masquait ordinairement la médiocrité de ses préoccupations.' (V 94). Like the 'other island', Kandinsky's 'other painting' is always there, but cloaked by a 'rideau d'images'. 'Dès lors', writes Tournier, 'il est facile de définir la révolution de Kandinsky: il a levé le rideau d'images et peint les choses en soi.' (CJV 125).

The philosophical concerns of 'L'Impersonnalisme' are
evidently very much alive in these words which confirm Tournier’s continued commitment to the pursuit of the absolute and his indebtedness to Western philosophy in this endeavour. Furthermore, the adumbration of an aesthetic may be discerned here, based on the non-referentiality to the world of appearances.

In the light of the foregoing analysis, many of the anecdotes concerning his childhood, which Tournier recounts in the first chapter of *Le Vent Paraclet*, may be seen to disclose an adumbration of his later philosophical preoccupation and the courses that he will follow in its pursuit (40).

The episode of the waterfall at the Chalet Flora is recalled as an early intuition of the mystic’s rapport with the universe. The roar of the waterfall outside the chalet quickly becomes ‘white noise’ to its inmates, so that Tournier, newly arrived, is alone amongst the other children to be conscious of the incessant noise:

> Je venais de toucher du doigt ce que doit être la condition ordinaire de certains mystiques qui seuls parmi les autres entendent les voix angéliques ou perçoivent la présence de quelque chose, de Quelqu’un ... (VP 22)

The roar of the waterfall may be likened to the absolute world that pre-exists the thinking subject, and is lost to this latter who re-creates the world in his own coherent image. Although the absolute is always ‘at hand’ (41) in Tournier’s construct, it requires an extraordinary condition
for it to be perceived. In this case, it is the
unconditioned vision - or hearing - of the novus homo or
mystic, which approximates to pre-subjective consciousness
of the second phase of the 'drame cartésien' that permits
this perception.

A second example suggests another route to the
absolute. In Tournier's description of the comic battles
between the red clown and the white clown at the circus, the
opposition of the two worlds, the absolute and the
subjective, may be discerned. Tournier identifies the white
clown with 'le monde mesuré, verbal et immaculé' (VP 37)
which the red clown constantly seeks to undermine, replacing
this artificially ordered world with chaos, laughter and a
non-verbal, physically transmitted language of grimaces and
acrobatics. There is an undoubted similarity between the
subversive antics of the red clown and the disturbing
presence of the absolute world, which exists, chaotic and
incoherent side by side with the constructed world of the
subject.

In the description which follows later of the 'comique
cosmique' (VP 198-204), Tournier expands on the subversive
role of the absolute world; like the red clown the absolute
is always 'embusqué partout, minant tout ce qui se dit, tout
ce qui se fait, frappant toute chose existante de dérision'
(VP 198)(42). This is a significant development of the
argument in Espace. In the earlier work, Tournier insists on
the positive and creative influence of the absolute in the world of autrui; the great landmarks of Western philosophy are seen as the disqualified subject's 'réponse à un besoin intérieur du monde en quête d'une cohérence de plus en plus exquise' (II 66). In Le Vent Paraclet, however, its subversive role is emphasised; for the absolute is not ontologically eliminated by the subjective view, it is simply obscured, as though by a 'voile gris' (VP 297), which when torn or lifted, exposes the artificiality of the subjective construct. The instruments which Tournier identifies as capable of penetrating the 'veil' are myth, art, 'le comique cosmique', language and certain landscapes; each of these 'portes à l'absolu' will be examined in separate chapters in the second part of this thesis.

Unconditioned sensory response and subversive humour are joined by a third kind of infantile intuition of the absolute. Tournier recalls his predilection as a child for a certain kind of toy, 'ces petites sphères de celluloïd à demi emplies d'eau où flottent deux canards' (VP 31) and 'ces sortes de globes ou presse-papiers à l'intérieur desquels on peut par une secousse déchaîner une tempête de neige autour d'une tour Eiffel ou sur un minuscule mont Saint-Michel' (VP 32). Looking back, Tournier interprets this as an early sign of affinity for the Leibnizian monad (45), absolute in the sense that each monad is a hermetically closed, self-governing world-in-itself, which
does not conform to any theory of subject and object, or cause and effect, but is engaged in a synchronised relationship described in Leibniz’ concept of 'pre-established harmony' (46). This concept figures an infinite number of these self-contained worlds, (no two of which, like individual human consciousness, are ever alike,) existing side by side, never touching, never having an affective rapport with each other but operating as synchronised performers, whose synchronicity is generated by the most different monad, God. Tournier illustrates this theory with another memory of his pre-literate days: as a child he enjoyed comparing maps of France each of which were presented with a different size and scale; ‘moins les cartes se ressemblaient, plus la confrontation avait de charme, [...] Or ce jeu figurait assez précisément la fameuse harmonie préétablie de Leibniz, car les deux cartes géographiques se ressemblaient non par suite d’une influence directe de l’une sur l’autre, mais en vertu d’un modèle commun formidable et formidablement inaccessible, la France réelle.’ (VP 32-3)

The notion of these worlds existing side by side without subjective or causal influence on each other is clearly instrumental in the Tournierien vision of the co-existence of the absolute and world of autrui. The singular affinity of Leibniz’s vision to that of his own struck Tournier immediately on his first reading of the
Monadologie, in which 'je me suis trouvé immédiatement de plain-pied, accueilli, presque fêté dans mes convictions et mes habitudes de penser.' (VP 29) It is quite possible that Tournier limns the Leibnizian theory in the episode of the roller-skating little boys in Le Roi des Aulnes:

Ils décrivent de rapides arabesques, sautent plusieurs volées de marches d'un seul bond. Je leur demande de se prendre la main et de tournoyer au pied du haut-relief géant qui figure Terpsychoire et une nymphe dansant dans un décor arcadien. Et je photographie le double couple -petit couple chair, grand couple de pierre - s’ignorant et cependant si bien accordés. Puis j’apprends aux enfants qui est Terpsychoire: c’est une Grâce [...] (RA 171) (47)

Significantly, the image of gracefulness and the dance of children inhabits Tournier’s description of Leibniz’s Monadology:

Son système [...] rappelle ces gracieuses églises souabes ou autrichiennes [...] où des guirlandes d’angelots joufflus et fessus entourent en riant des saints et des saintes aux visages rayonnants de bonté intelligente et aux corps flexibles, contournées et dansants, comme emportés vers le ciel par le vent de l’esprit. (VP 29)

It should also be noted that the intuitions of the absolute described in these recollections are the perceptions of a child, and that the child has a special relationship with the absolute in Tournier’s writing. In particular, Tournier associates the subversive influence of the absolute world with the child’s intuitive and joyful identification with the symbols of subversion of adult society, the red clown, for example. Similarly, argues Tournier, adults in revolt against society may identify themselves with children, by
their dress for example, as in the French Revolution:

On ne saurait méditer les voies qui vont faire [...] de ces trois pièces du vêtement enfantin l'uniforme révolutionnaire des sans-culotte : pantalon, carmagnole et bonnet phrygien. L'enfant est-il un être à ce point subversif qu'on cherche instinctivement à se rapprocher de lui quand on se propose de culbuter l'ordre établi? (WV 172) (48)

Le Vent Paraclet further develops the argument presented in Espace by stressing the role of society as enforcer of the subjective view. ‘L’Impersonnalisme’ emphasised the inevitability and necessity in the generation of autrui; and this is repeated in the later work in more accessible terms as ‘l’activité spontanée, aliénante et scientifique de notre esprit’ (VP 298). However, in this text, Tournier suppresses the philosophical justification of this statement, presumably again in order to favour accessibility, and qualifies it with a social explanation:

Car nous sommes dressés à tisser constamment un réseau relationnel où nous sommes pris avec les choses et les gens qui nous entourent. (VP 298).

Those who are excluded from society, for whatever reason, are thus seen in Tournier’s writing to be closer to the absolute than those who make up (in both senses of the word) the structure and fabric of society. Into this category of social outcasts fall children, mythic characters, and artists. This explains the statement, made above, that the child’s perception, the myth and the work of art are all instruments with which the ‘voile gris’ may be penetrated.

The absolute world is then fleetingly revealed to the
percipient which throws the constructed world into a
radically new perspective:

Il sait tout à coup que rien n’a aucune importance. Il
est la proie de l’angoisse mais se sent délivré par cela
même de toute peur. (VP 199)

For those adherents of 'l’ordre établi' however, the
absolute may never be glimpsed:

Ils se veulent dupes de la cohérence, de la fermeté, de
la consistance dont la société pare le réel. Ils sont
souvent hommes de science, de religion ou de politique
[...] Ils sont en vérité presque tous les hommes.
Lorsque les lattes disjointes de la passerelle où
chemine l’humanité s’entrouvent sur le vide sans fond,
la plupart des hommes ne voient rien [...] (VP 199)

The two worlds identified in Espace are paralleled by
the identification of two categories of people in Le Vent
Paraclet: those who are blinded by the relativising
influence of society, and those who either reject or are
rejected by social custom and praxis and who are thus
brought closer to the absolute.

While there is a clear reciprocity in the descriptions
of the absolute given in 'L’Impersonnalisme' and Le Vent
Paraclet they vary greatly in tone and presentation; the
polemic in Espace is written with a technical vocabulary,
and centres around the dialectic of being in the chose-en-
soi and autrui. The later work undoubtedly vulgarises the
theme of the polemic by emphasising the social - as opposed
to the ontological - differentiation of the two worlds, and
its diction is, appropriately, accessible to a more general
readership. This in itself reflects Tournier’s vision of an
absolute that is at hand for everyone, indeed that is in everyone and everything.

The Tournierian absolute is deliberately and consistently written in the lower case, in order to reinforce the point that it is not the Absolute available only to a privileged intellectual minority, or the Absolute of a particular philosophical system. The only instances in Tournier’s writing where the higher case is used occur when he is referring to specific Absolutes, such as the Absolute of Léon Bloy (VP 198) or Thomas Mann (VV 290). When the capital letter is used, (admittedly this happens less in French than in English), its purpose generally is to elevate and isolate the subject and proclaim it as an individual entity. When applied to philosophical terms, such as Realism or Idealism, the word takes on the appearance of a formally recognisable individual concept. Were Tournier to refer to ‘l’Absolu’ in his writing, it would appear that he was referring to a known concept. However, by insisting on the lower case, Tournier dedramatises and democratizes the term, just as he admires Cocteau for his ‘dédramatisation du génie’ (VP 295). This indeed is one of the most significant points which Tournier wishes to make concerning the absolute in Le Vent Paraclet:

Il faut aller plus loin que cette dédramatisation du génie que souhaitait Cocteau. Il faut aller jusqu’à une atomisation de l’absolu. Il faut faire droit à la revendication de chaque être, de chaque chose qui crie - d’une voix souvent imperceptible - pour être reconnu comme absolu. (VP 298)
In 'L’Impersonnalisme', Tournier had emphasised the alienation of the subject from the object in identifying the latter with consciousness; 'en coupant le lien de dépendance qui suspendait l’objet au sujet nous avons fait évoluer celui-ci vers la notion d’autrui' (E 53); in Le Vent Paraclet however, where the complexity of the dialectic is avoided, he simply indicates that severing of the subject-object relationship is also the start of the process in which the alienated subject is brought back to the world of the absolute,

[...] nous sommes dressés à tisser un réseau relationnel où [...] chaque objet, chaque homme se trouve nié en lui-même pour renvoyer à d’autres objets, à d’autres hommes, à des fonctions, à des modes d’emploi, à des valeurs extrinsèques dont les étalons se situent ailleurs, très loin, nulle part [...] Pour retrouver l’absolu, il n’est que de couper ces liens (VP 298)

The metamorphosis of the argument in the 1946 essay is not just a matter of vulgarisation, of turning the recondite into the vernacular, it represents the humanisation of the theory. In 1946, Tournier and his group had been revolted by Sartre’s affirmation that 'l’existentialisme est un humanisme' (VP 160). 'Ainsi notre maître ramassait dans la poubelle où nous l’avions enfouie cette ganache écoulée, puant la sueur et la vie intérieure' (VP 160). Ferdinand Alquié, recognising this repugnance in 'L’Impersonnalisme', rebuked them for it:

On sait comment finissent ces aventures: les passions y reprennent l’homme. Peu importe à l’affectivité d’avoir
été d’abord discréditée sous le nom de vie intérieure: elle demeure, et se prend tôt ou tard maîtresse de ceux qui, négligeant la réflexion, ne reservent leur attention qu’à l’objet et oublient que la subjectivité, conçue comme liberté et comme raison, est ce qui fait de nous des hommes. (49)

‘L’Impersonnalisme’ establishes the rapport between autrui and the world in the dialectic of Being, but, as Alquie rightly points out, at the expense of ‘ce qui fait de nous des hommes’; all Tournier’s attention is given to the absolute world’s assimilation of the degraded subject. Le Vent Paraclet redresses this early anti-humanism. Tournier’s appeal for the ‘atomisation’ of the absolute is an appeal for the recognition of the presence of the absolute in the subjective world. Like Cocteau’s ‘génie’, it is ‘une poussière scintillante pulvérisée sur tous les hommes. C’est la chose la plus naturelle, la plus quotidienne. [Il] est là, dès lors que quelqu’un existe, agit, marche, sourit, parle d’une façon inimitable, unique, évoquant l’infini que contient tout acte créateur. Alors il ne dépend de nous de le voir, et, l’ayant vu, de célébrer son existence.’ (VP 296-7) (50). It is in order to reply to this injunction that Tournier writes and is still writing today.

5. LE VOL DU VAMPIRE

Le Vol du Vampire (1981) is a collection of essays or, as Tournier describes them, ‘notes de lecture’ which relate to the works and/or lives of forty-two writers from the author of the Tristan legend to Maurice Genevoix. These are
prefaced by an essay in which Tournier examines his understanding of the role of the writer with regard both to his individual readers and to the society or community within which he operates (51). However, despite the apparent diversity of the source material, a unifying theme may be discerned throughout these essays which connects with the idea, set forth in Le Vent Paraclet, of the artists' commitment to celebrate the dialectical presence of the absolute in the everyday world.

The prefatory essay re-introduces the idea, adumbrated in Le Vent Paraclet, of the socially subversive role of the artist. In the earlier work, Tournier paraphrases the Bergsonian view of society, with which he concurs (52):

Selon Henri Bergson, la société secrète naturellement une organisation, des structures, un ordre qui lui assurent une stabilité croissante... (VP 196)

In Le Vol du Vampire, Tournier marks the desire for conformity that this kind of society requires in order to function:

Nous subissons tous la pression du corps social qui nous impose comme autant de stéréotypes nos conduites, nos opinions et jusqu'à notre aspect extérieur. (VV 23)

As Tournier indicates in Le Vent Paraclet, the order and conformity to the 'réseau relationnel' imposed by society suppress the world of the absolute (53), and teach forgetfulness. Nevertheless, however strongly it is denied, the dialectic of Being, as described in 'L'Impersonnalisme',
confirms the continued presence of the absolute in every thing and each individual.

It is useful to consider this argument as a 'mirror text' (54) to be held up to Le Vol du Vampire as the philosophical justification for the appeal of the subversive is absent in the later text, in which social subversion is paralleled with genius, and compliance with mere talent.

[...] un écrivain de talent dépouvu de génie s'imbibe comme une éponge de tout ce qui passe à sa portée. Il comprend tout, il imite tout - souvent en mieux -, il met en forme les idées, les sentiments et les rêves que la société lui à livrés à l'état brut [...] Cet écrivain [...] aura été le jouet doré d'une certaine société, son esclave favori, mais jamais son maître. Nous subissons tous la pression du corps social [...] Le propre des créateurs est de résister à cette sujétion pour remonter le courant et mettre en circulation leurs propres modèles. (VV 22-3) By juxtaposing the earlier text with this one, it may be adduced that the artist of genius appeals to the absolute supressed in the individual by the structures of society. He thus gains the solidarity of his audience in the same way that the red clown engages the solidarity of the child.

However, a medium is required in order that the artist may articulate his connection with the subversive world of the absolute. In literature, Tournier suggests, the model for this is provided by myth (55).

The mythical status of Tristan is evoked in the first of these 'notes de lecture' and operates as a powerful example in the context of this argument. The mythic character is defined in this essay by his non-conformity,
whether voluntary or fatal, to the social prescriptions of
his community be they ethical, sexual, linguistic, sartorial
eetc.:

La passion adultère de Tristan et Isolde, le pacte avec
le diable de Faust, le désir ardent et destructeur de
Don Juan, la farouche solitude de Robinson, le rêve
extravagant de Don Quichotte, autant de façons de dire
non à la société, de briser l’ordre social [...] Ainsi
la fonction des grands figures mythologiques n’est
surement pas de nous soumettre aux ‘raisons d’État’ que
l’éducation, le pouvoir, la police dressent contre
l’individu, mais tout au contraire de nous fournir des
armes contre elles. Le mythe n’est pas un rappel à
l’ordre, mais bien plutôt un rappel au désordre. (VV
31-2) (56)

In the light of the foregoing reflections, the
relationship between myth and the absolute in Tournier’s
writing may now be determined. Society, as we have said,
engenders a relative view of the world in the Tournierian
construct; it pulls down a ‘voile gris’ about itself and is
thus able to shut out the anarchic presence of the absolute.
The mythic character however, by virtue of the fact that he
is an ‘outsider’, existing (57) on the margins of society,
places him on the other side of this veil and thus closer,
if only fleetingly, to the absolute world that inhabits all
being. This fragile link with the absolute suggests why
Tournier believes that myth is so cherished in the
individual:

Un grand mythe, c’est d’abord une image vivante que nous
berçons et nourrissons en nous, qui nous éclaire et nous
réchauffe [...] Ainsi Tristan. (VV 25)

It is not possible to examine all forty-two writers in
the light of the argument presented above; however, as no sense of a 'monomania' is immediately recognisable in the essays some further justification should be given.

The number of writers and/or their characters contained in this collection who, according to Tournier, have distinguished themselves by their will to say "non" à la société and possibly, though not necessarily, "oui" à la vie (58) is not inconsiderable. Gide, 'attiré par un avenir absolu et radieux' (VV 226), is particularly noted in this respect, and mention should also be given to Colette (59), Isabelle Eberhart (60) and Alphonse Boudard (61). Other characters have penetrated the 'voile gris' by methods which have afforded them an ex-orbitant perspective; a vision that lies outside the orbit of social conditioning (62).

Perrault’s Barbe-Bleue, for example, functions similarly to Tournier’s notion of myth: 'Perrault nous vise [...] au-dessous de la ceinture, et fait appel en nous à des processus psychologiques affectifs, archétypiques, aussi puissants qu’irrationnels' (VV 38). Similarly, Henri de Campion is discussed in the light of his fondness for his baby daughter, an affection found extraordinary by his contemporaries. His seemingly anachronistic behaviour is held up by Tournier as the basis for an hypothesis which recalls his vision of the immanent presence of the absolute:

Ce serait qu’à tout moment et en toute société toutes les idées et tous les sentiments sont là, présents sous une forme au moins embryonnaire, vécus par un nombre plus ou moins grand d’individus. Mais il y a
This hypothesis is borne out in a later essay in which Tournier describes the 'rencontre intemporelle' between Jeanne Guyon and Françoise Mallet-Joris (63). In the work of the twentieth century woman, Tournier identifies a sympathetic understanding of a shared 'liberté intérieure' with her seventeenth century predecessor. In this he recognises the possibility of 'une grande amitié mystique' (VV 357) between two women divided by more than three hundred years.

Similarly, Tournier reads Didier Martin's *Un Garçon en l'Air* as an 'ex-orbitant' work. The central character, Raphaël, has the ability to fly, but his flights remain invisible to all but those few who share his gift. For Tournier, Martin's novel illustrates 'ce phénomène si capital de la cécité volontaire et parfaitement obtenue devant une réalité trop dérangeante [...]’ (VV 375). Martin's writing functions as a creative response to and celebration of the world of the primary absolute.

Pearl Buck's *La Mère* is also examined from the point of view of its 'ex-orbitance'. Set in pre-revolutionary China, Tournier places the novel within the genre of 'Exotic fiction', but unlike other examples of this genre, such as *Paul et Virginie* or *Robinson Crusoe*, which are related from the perspective of the astonished or admiring Westerner, *La
Mère, although written by an American, is told, according to Tournier, without the relativising influence of the western perspective. Tournier's preoccupation with the story of this Chinese family is contained in the question he poses himself,

Quel est le résultat de cet exotisme absolu, je veux dire sans lien de référence avec l'Occident?

(VV 254)

The result, he decides, is that the characters are not seen as picturesque and strange in their habits and lives, but 'sous [...] des traits qui sont 'nôtres' sans la moindre réserve, mais qui pourtant vont totalement à l'encontre de l'image de la femme la plus couramment admise dans les pays occidentaux' (VV 254). Once again, the absolute may be observed at work, appealing to the 'fonds commun' ((64) of humanity, effacing difference in the course of its dialectic emergence in the world. It is as though Pearl Buck has enjoyed moments of self-effacement such as those experienced by Tournier's Robinson and has been inhabited by the object in itself:

Pearl Buck, s'effaçant devant sa Chine paysanne et traditionelle laisse les faits les plus humbles parler d'eux-mêmes. Et, par un miracle dont elle possède le secret, voici qu'elle exprime, comme leur simple vérité, les choses les plus folles et les plus admirables.

(VV 260)

Naïm Kattan's dislocation from Baghdad to Paris presents Tournier with the opportunity to meditate upon the literary consequences of the ex-orbitant perspective. In 'L'Itinéraire de Naïm Kattan' he considers the effect on the language of
the writer who has been uprooted from his native country and forced to think and speak in another tongue. Tournier admits that it will be an undoubtedly destructive experience for some, but for writers like Kattan - or Koestler - it may happily result in 'la limpidité sèche et cristalline d'une langue désincarnée, sans substance, collant à la pensée'. (WV 361) If, as the theory of 'L'Impersonnalisme' affirms, thought is to be identified with its object, the result - and Kattan's writing - must inevitably approach the Tournierian vision of a language of the absolute (65).

The few writers who have been briefly discussed so far are representative of the unifying theme which underlies this collection of essays and prefaces. In the life and/or work of each of the writers investigated by Tournier, the dualism of society and the individual, culture and nature, the relative and the absolute is brought forth. And with this, the dialectic of creation is gradually exposed, not only in Tournier's response to his chosen texts but in the interaction of the essays with each other. It is no accident that the commentaries on Goethe and Novalis are placed side by side. For despite the fact that these writers are contemporaries and compatriots they are revealed to be representative of the diametrically opposed constituents of a dialectic: Goethe's work is appraised in the light of his affirmation that 'ce que la culture a gagné sur la nature ne doit pas être abandonné' (WV 84), whereas Novalis is
registered by Tournier for his 'aspirations à l'Absolu, à l'Infini' (VV 290).

The literary exegesis of these opposite inclinations is identified in their respective novels, Wilhelm Meister and Heinrich von Ofterdingen, for, writes Tournier, 'tandis que Wilhelm se sacrifie aux exigences de la société bourgeoise, Henri apprend à participer à un ordre cosmique supérieur' (VV 69).

Tournier's preoccupation with this dualism is evident in his response to Emma Bovary, whom he represents as caught on the double hook of her society and her longing for the infinite ('une âme ardente, mystique, éprise d’infini et de grandeur étouffée par une société mesquine et stupide' [VV 159]).

While some of the characters discussed by Tournier, such as Wilhelm and Henri disclose the dialectic only in conjunction with one another, and others, such as Emma Bovary, are thwarted in their realisation of it by society, there are those for whom the absolute is revealed in joyful plenitude. Emile, Tarzan and Gavroche: happy manifestations to Tournier of an easy co-efficiency of opposites which include society and the individual, childhood and adulthood, temporality and the eternal present.

Yet it is André Gide, whose writing suggests to Tournier an invitation to 'essayer sur lui un trousseau de clefs binaires [...] temperées par ce qu’il faut de scepticisme et
d'esprit ludique' (VV 213) who, arguably, sits highest in Tournier's estimation of writers whose work is characterised by the realisation of the dialectic of creation. Gide's work responds to the binary keys - 'un instrument d'analyse précieux et efficace' (VV 212) precisely because it is constructed upon this dialectic. Certainty is replaced by irony - how else, asks Tournier, could the author of La Porte Étroite be the author of L'Immoraliste ? (66). For Tournier, Gide is not in pursuit of the false absolute of certainty but the dynamic absolute of creation: 'toute l'oeuvre de Gide est une célébration de la lumière à l'encontre de tous les faux prophètes aux yeux crevés' (VV 238).

* * *

In this chapter we have witnessed the transformation of a youthful philosophical concern into a mature literary aesthetic as well as its critical application to the works of other writers.

However, some further attention must be given in the first instance to the role of the critic who is faced with Tournier's own desire to explain himself, expressed in the many self-commentaries and interviews which have been published. For thus far we have almost exclusively examined Tournier at his most explicit; in the following chapter the nature and role of the absolute will be discussed in relation to its disclosure in the implicit relationship between
Tournier’s own texts and those of his philosophical precursors.

NOTES


2. See VP 89

3. See also F. Merllié, Michel Tournier, p.228 for a biographical account of Tournier’s university career.

4. See Copleston (Vol. VII) p.130-1 for a lucid discussion of Schelling’s ‘Programme for a System of Philosophy’ (1796) in which Schelling introduces the notion of ‘intellectual intuition’ to describe the dual mechanism by which the Absolute is apprehended simultaneously as absolute subject (in intuition) and as absolute object (in rational thought). See also Chapter 2 (p. 119) of the present study for a detailed account of Schelling’s influence upon the Tournierian absolute.

5. ‘[…] c’était désormais vers la philosophie allemande - Fichte, Schelling, Hegel, Husserl et Heidegger - que ma soif de savoir, de comprendre et de construire me poussait’ (VP 89).

6. I have added the words in brackets for greater clarity.

7. Examples of this may be found in the benign and malign inversions of the Bon Géant / Ogre in Le Roi des Aulnes, the saint / fiend in Gilles et Jeanne, image / likeness in Gaspard, Melchior et Balthazar and sédantarisme / nomadisme (amongst many others), in Les Météores. This subject is treated at much greater length in Chapter 7 of this thesis.

8. See Nakamura pp.91-124, ‘The concept of the absolute’ and pp.135-8, ‘The final goal’.

10. This qualification is given in the context of an analysis of Plato's 'line' and is applied to the fourth section of it, described as 'le Bien [...] qui est Un et absolu.' (II 43)

11. Jean Wahl, *Etude sur le Parménide de Platon*, described by Tournier as 'une étude magistrale' (VP 307n.)


13. C.f. *Vendredi ou les limbes du Pacifique* pp.98-100


15. The contents, listed under the title of 'de l'âge de Raison à l'âge Ingrat' comprise 'Feux de Position II' by Robert Crégut; 'L'Injure et l'Ivresse' by Jacques Laurent; 'Les Haillons de la Mémoire' by Adrien Majesté; 'Poèmes' by Roger Prévost; 'La Vie Intérieure Mystifiée' by Alain Clément; 'La Visite' by Jacques Guicharnot and 'Du Christ à la Bourgeoisie' by Gilles Deleuze. Photographs by J.H. Van der Vlugt and woodcuts by Robert Ipoustéguy and Jean Leduc are also incorporated.

16. See VP 159-62, in which Sartre is described as 'le père'. In 1979, Tournier reaffirmed this respectful admiration: 'Quant à Sartre, il reste pour moi l'homme vivant le plus important de la planète.' (VV 301)

17. 'La Vie Intérieure et l'Esprit' in *La Gazette des Lettres* 20.7.46


21. 'Petits Saint-Just de l'esprit, nous classions les productions de l'esprit en deux catégories que nous séparions d'un coup d'épée : les systèmes philosophiques et les bandes dessinées. Tout ce qui n'était pas système - ou études consacrées à un système - était bande dessinée, et dans cette catégorie méprisable nous jetions pèlerin Shakespeare et Ponson de Terrail, Balzac et Saint-Jean Perse.' (VP 159)

22. 'Ainsi notre maître ramassait dans la poubelle où nous avions enfouie cette ganache écoulée, puant la sueur et la
vie intérieure, l'Humanisme, et il l'accolait comme également sienne à cette absurde notion d'existentialisme. Et tout le monde d'applaudir.'

(VP 160-1)

23. This 'chain' of palimpsests is continued with the publication of Vendredi ou la Vie Sauvage, in which Tournier renders the philosophical content with more discreetly.

24. The active relationship between consciousness and its object is termed intentionality in the phenomenological lexicon. I have avoided using it in this chapter because it is alien to Tournier’s vocabulary which may indicate a further attempt at distancing 'L'Impersonnalisme' from the phenomenological construct of its parent text, L'Étre et le Néant. Furthermore, although intentionality describes at least three possible relationships between consciousness and its object, (i.e. 1: a psychological relationship between a mind and an existing object, [e.g. Brentano]; 2: a transcendental consciousness which creates itself in creating its object [e.g. Husserl]; 3: an ontological relationship in which the object is brought into being by the mind [e.g. Fink]) no single aspect describes the model relationship proposed by Tournier, in which consciousness and the object are held to be one and the same.

25. Ferdinand Alquié recognises the fundamental contradiction of this expression and offers the following correction: 'Il y a peut-être une solitude de la pensée, mais c'est alors que la pensée ne connaît rien. Connaître, c'est s'échapper à la solitude, et le fait qu'il y a une connaissance est déjà la preuve que toute solitude est pensable peut être surmontée.' Opus cit., see note 17.

26. L'Étre et le Néant opens with ironic applause for Husserlian phenomenology which has 'relisé un progrès considérable en réduisant l'existant à la série des apparitions qui le manifestent' (p. 11). Sartre's challenge to the phenomenologists' elimination of the noumenon or 'thing-in-itself' which follows, indicates that the noumenon is not so easily disposed of.

27. Sartre's term precisely, is 'l'être-en-soi' which itself is derived from Heidegger's ding-an-sich which in turn derives from Hegel's an-sich which itself strongly echoes the Kantian noumenon. Tournier's term is thus weighted with a deliberately chosen heritage.

28. The term 'objectité' is employed here to describe the state of 'objectness'. It is intended to correspond to
Sartre's neologism, 'objectité', as deployed in L'Etre et le Néant.

29. C.f. 'L'Impersonnalisme', p.55: 'On dira par exemple que l'oeil est l'idée de la lumière, l'oreille l'idée du son [...]'

30. L'Etre et le Néant p.226

31. Ibid. See also Davis, Michel Tournier Philosophy and Fiction pp.16-17 for an analysis of Sartre's influence on Tournier's Vendredi.

32. It should be noted, however, that the pour-soi unremittingly aspires to this status.

33. The second phase of the 'drame cartésien' is represented by Robinson's apprehensions of the 'autre île' in the first (red ink) log-book, and realised in his ultimate assimilation by Speranza in the closing pages of Vendredi.

34. I use this term in the Sartrean sense which derives from its etymology: 'standing out from'; Tournier prefers to use 'ex-sist' - to sit outside, c.f. M 247, but the debt to Sartre is evident.

35. Sartre draws a similar, though still subject-orientated conclusion from the Cartesian cogito: 'Je pense donc j'étais' (L'Etre et le Néant p.163)


37. See Tournier's interview with Jean-Marie Magnan in La Quinzaine Littéraire, 'Vers la Concision et la Limpidité'.

38. This was not published however, until 1977 under the title: Canada Journal de Voyage (Ottowa, Les Editions de la Presse).

39. Of course, it is most likely that Tournier wrote the article published in Le Point and inserted this into the diary during the preparation of the latter for publication.

40. I have not included the several articles and interviews which Tournier published in the interval between the Canadian diary and Le Vent Paraclet, nor subsequent ones, as the principal commentaries discussed in this chapter resume for the most part the content of these diverse publications.
41. I use the term 'at hand' with Heidegger's term, Vorhandenheit, in mind, in the sense that the object world is ever present and that it is taken up and into the existential world and is thus a vital constituent of being.

42. See Chapter 5 of the present study for an analysis of the absolute and 'le rire blanc' in Tournier's writing.

43. For significant references to the 'voile' see VP 82, 270, 297, CVJ 124 and PP 66.

44. See VP 297.

45. See Leibniz, Monadology, passim.

46. See Bertrand Russell, History of Western Philosophy pp. 65-65 for a well illustrated account of both the monad and pre-established harmony.

47. I am grateful to Michael Worton for drawing to my attention the potential for metaphorical interpretation of this scene in Le Roi des Aulnes in his article, 'Myth Reference in Le Roi des Aulnes', Stanford French Review, 1982.

48. On the subject of children in Tournier's writing, see Marc Fumarolli, 'Michel Tournier et l'esprit d'enfance', in Commentaire, 1980.

49. Alquié, opus cit.

50. 'Car si le rire blanc signale la fonction subversive et destructrice de l'oeuvre littéraire, il en est une autre, toute positive celle-ci, qui est de célébration.' (VP 204). C.f. WV 249: 'La littérature répond à deux fonctions solidaires [...] Une fonction critique, subversive, contestataire qui trouve sa meilleure arme dans l'humour. Et une fonction d'éloge. Dissolution et célébration.'

51. WV 9-24.

52. C.f. VP 197: 'Cette analyse bergsonienne du comique est sans doute ce qui a été proposé de meilleur sur le sujet, et il serait bien difficile d'y apporter des corrections notables [...] Le rire de Bergson est un rire de société dont les meilleurs exemples se trouvent dans les comédies de moeurs ou les spectacles de cirque.' (See also note 60.)
53. See VP 298.

54. The role of the text as mirror is explained in the next chapter, under the heading, 'le jeu spéculaire'.

55. C.f. VP 188: 'Le passage de la métaphysique au roman devait m'être fourni par le mythe.'

56. Similarly, in the red clown, the child finds 'un modèle de lutte contre la société policée des adultes' VP 38.

57. See note 35.

58. See VV 249-250 where this dichotomy is expressed thus: 'Les deux plus grands écrivains du XXe siècle - Marcel Proust et Louis-Ferdinand Céline - mettent le meilleur de leur vocation dans une description nauséeuse de la société qui les entoure. Aussi éloignés qu'ils soient l'un de l'autre, ils se rejoignent dans une égale haine de la vie [...] Il y en a d'autres, et il serait facile de caractériser Paul Valéry et Jean-Paul Sartre par le talent qu'ils mettent à dire non à la vie. [...] Mais il y a l'autre famille. Celle des gourmands, des gros coeurs, des émerveillés de l'existence. Et il y a Colette. Et avant elle, André Gide, et après elle Jean Giono […]'

59. VV 250-1 (See note 58 above).

60. VV 205-211.


62. Tournier's use of the term 'ex-orbitance' is similar to his use of the term 'ex-sist' (note 35); see VP 301: ' [...] une immobilité exorbitant qui est celle de l’absolu.'

63. VV 354-7

64. The 'fonds commun de l’être' is a term employed by Tournier which expresses the absolute in all being although obscured by the subjective view imposed on being by society. See VP 283: ' […] un fonds commun d’autant plus obscur à nos yeux que toute notre civilisation occidentale lui tourne le dos afin de se consacrer à des solutions techniques.' See also VV 278-80 and 308.

65. See Chapter 4 of this thesis, 'Language and the absolute'.

66. See Chapter 8 of the present study, the section entitled
'The ironic absolute' for a detailed analysis of the relationship between irony and the dialectical emergence of the absolute.
CHAPTER TWO

PART I. SPECULARITY AND SPECULATION: THE ABSOLUTE AND THE 'JEU SPECULAIRE'

'Il faut [...] ne pas croire qu'expliciter soit expliquer'

(II 12)

1. INTRODUCTION

It was noted in the preceding chapter that Tournier’s conception of the absolute is, by his own affirmation, indebted to (though not contained by) a study of western philosophy that ranges from Classical to twentieth century:

Et puis, pour moi, nourri de philosophie classique, la recherche de l'absolu passe nécessairement par Platon, Spinoza, Heidegger et quelques autres (CJV 58).

Rather than being explicitly informative, this statement raises a number of questions; first, in what measure is the Tournierian perception a derivative of, or a departure from, specific theories of the absolute? second, is there any suggestion of a pattern in this particular trinity of philosophers? third, who are the nebulous 'quelques autres'? A partial response to these questions is provided in 'L'Impersonnalisme', in which (as demonstrated in the preceding chapter) the Tournierian absolute may be discerned as both derivative and deviant of the Sartrean en-soi, matched with an ontology influenced by Plato’s Parmenides and a dialectical necessity that owes much to Hegel.

This chapter will address the questions raised above in greater detail, concentrating on the method with
which Tournier translates his desire for explicitness in the philosophical discourse of 'L'Impersonnalisme' into a desire for implicitness in his later literary discourse. It will be argued that this later impulse constantly subverts Tournier's much maligned efforts to explain himself to his readers (1).

The first task of the present chapter must therefore be to propose a method which will demonstrate that the allegedly preceptive constraints of the writer may be more constructively identified as a bidding to join in a creative partnership between text and reader: an invitation to participate in a 'jeu spéculaire'.

2. THE DIDACTIC IMPULSE

To start with, the precise nature of the problem surrounding the author's pedagogic inclinations should be examined, for a strong didactic impulse may be identified throughout Tournier's writing, both fiction and commentary; it should not be forgotten that Tournier's first ambition was to become an agrégé in order to teach philosophy. When making his decision to become a writer instead, it is clear that the pedagogic stimulus has not been entirely suppressed:

J'avais l'intention de fournir à mon lecteur épris d'amours et d'aventures l'égéval litteraire de ces sublimes inventions métaphysiques que sont le cogito de Descartes, les trois genres de connaissance de Spinoza,, l'harmonie pré-étabié de Leibniz, le schématisme transcendantal de Kant, la réduction phénoménologique de Husserl, pour ne citer que quelques modèles majeurs. (VP 179)
Furthermore, Tournier engages in an abundance of preparatory research before writing (2) which is then transmitted to the text; in the context of fiction, however, erudition appears to be transformed into imagination (3). The result is that the reader becomes the (perhaps unwitting) recipient of a quantity of meticulously researched anthropological, historical or scientific information. To read *Le Roi des Aulnes* is (on one level) to acquire a recondite corpus of information about the Napolas and their inmates or the more bizarre aspects of Göring's passion for hunting (4); *La Goutte d'Or* informs the reader with details of Berber culture (5); 'La Jeune Fille et la Mort' gives a medically factual account of the muscular displacements occasioned by laughter (6); and 'Pyrotechnie ou la Commémoration' explains how fireworks are made (7). However, this didactic impulse in Tournier's fiction is, for the most part, so closely integrated with the text as to be completely unobtrusive; researched information and factual detail are subverted / complemented by mythic archetypes and the discourse of fiction in a mutually self-reinforcing opposition (8).

In Tournier's commentaries however, the desire to explain or instruct appears to be less unobtrusive. This is particularly evident in *Le Vent Paraclet*. Roger Shattuck, for example, describes Tournier as 'un incorrigible pédagogue [...] qui [...] tombe parfois dans un excès de didactisme' (9), while Joseph Garreau asks: 'Quel auteur depuis
Montherlant a été aussi désireux de s’expliquer sur le sens de ses propres œuvres ?’ (10), and a despairing Jacques Lovichi concludes: ‘Non, décidément, je ne trouve rien à ajouter à (sur) Michel Tournier [...] Je ne [...] pardonnerai jamais les deux-cent-quatre-vingt-treize pages de l’admirable Vent Paraclet.’ (11).

Disapprobation of this nature stems from the fairly contemporary notion that the reader should be accorded sufficient space and freedom in which to speculate, if not to privilege his reading with a value equal to that of the printed word before him. The writer who imposes his authority too strongly is held to be repressive, blocking the reader’s spontaneous co-operation with the text. Roland Barthes describes the problem in ‘Ecrire la lecture’:

[...] l’auteur est considéré comme le propriétaire éternel de son œuvre, et nous autres, comme des simples usufruitiers; cette économie implique évidemment un thème d’autorité: l’auteur pense-t-on, a des droits sur le lecteur, et il le contraint à un certain sens de l’œuvre, et ce sens est naturellement le bon, le vrai sens. (12)

Perhaps Tournier had not anticipated the reaction to Le Vent Paraclet, typified by Shattuck and Garreau; in Le Vol du Vampire, which followed Le Vent Paraclet four years later, Tournier disparages the notion of the ‘auteur-propriétaire’, and reveals a revised approach to the reader / writer relationship, which is now envisaged as a creative partnership:

Un livre n’a pas un auteur, mais un nombre indéfini d’auteurs. Car à celui qui l’a écrit s’ajoutent de plein
Colin Davis insists that this is a hypocrisy as Tournier has 'lambasted' readers who have detected a pederastic obsession in Le Roi des Aulnes or who have privileged a historical reading of this novel (13). However, Davis's reaction does not take into account the fact that Tournier is not only author, but reader of his own work, and that in this latter capacity Tournier's freedom to produce his own creative reading should, by his own definition, be as unfettered (and as unprivileged) as that of any other reader.

Nevertheless, the freedom of Tournier's readers to 'co-create' is likely to encounter or yet be absorbed by another, less obvious expression of his pedagogic impulse, which will here be termed 'specular didacticism', because of its mirror-like modus operandum.

3. THE 'JEU SPECULAIRE' (14)

Tournier's works reveal a seemingly obsessive preoccupation with certain words, themes, phrases and anecdotes which are reflected from text to text as though by a chain of mirrors - mirrors which may invert, distort or flash the merest wink of recognition, but which may be seen to form an apparently hermetic chain of self-referentiality. Speculation on the part of the reader appears to be blocked because these 'mirror-texts' invariably serve as question and answer, thus exhibiting a remarkable degree of didactic self-
Three types of specular pedagogy may be identified in Tournier’s writing, which will be examined and illustrated under the following headings: 1. Extra-textuality, which occurs whenever Tournier makes explicit the reasoning behind a text or selected parts of a text, either in his commentaries or in interviews; that is to say, outside the text in question. 2. Intratextuality, in which textual ambiguities or inadequacies are reconciled by reference to other ‘mirror-texts’ that may occur either in the same work or elsewhere in Tournier’s fiction. 3. Inter-textuality, in which similar textual ‘incompleteness’ is complemented by reference to texts of other writers (15). It should be noted that these categories frequently overlap, as the examples which follow will demonstrate.

Names are almost invariably endowed with a specific symbolic function in Tournier’s writing, which by one method or another, he can rarely forbear to disclose. By taking four examples, Neljapaëv, Tiffauges, Véronique and Thabor, the increasing degree of complexity (or specularity) with which their meaning is revealed may be evinced.

(i) Extra-textual reference.

The reader who wonders why Tournier chooses to call the Estonian cabin-boy in Vendredi Jaan Neljapaëv will discover that the author has stated on numerous occasions that he did so because Neljapaëv is Estonian for Thursday (16). With this
extra-textual information it may be seen that Robinson’s decision to ‘rename’ the boy ‘Jeudi’ is both intuitively and humorously tautological. Baptism is replaced by translation in which the symbolic functions of the word (solarity, divinity, festival, child-released), latent in its etymology, are evoked:

Désormais, lui dit Robinson, tu t’appelleras Jeudi. C’est le jour de Jupiter, dieu du Ciel. C’est aussi le dimanche des enfants. (V 254)

(ii) Intra-textuality

In the second version of Vendredi (17), Jaan is renamed ‘Dimanche’ by Robinson; an elliptical version of (and reference to) Tournier’s earlier text and extra-textual explanation in which the association between Neljapaëv and Jeudi and then Jeudi and Dimanche is made. In the second Vendredi, the link between Neljapaëv and ‘Dimanche’ is completely obscure (even or especially if one speaks Estonian!); the relationship only makes sense when both the extra-textual reference and the earlier version of Vendredi are held up, mirror-like to the later text. Meaning then emerges from the chain of reflections which move from the extra- to the intra-textual and back again (18)

Whereas the name ‘Dimanche’ depends for plenitude of meaning upon an extra-textual commentary, the name of the central character of Le Roi des Aulnes is governed and elucidated entirely by intra-textual reference, these
references occurring both in *Le Roi des Aulnes* and *Gilles et Jeanne*. In the former, the doctor at Kaltenborn suggests that the name 'Tiffauges' could have its origin in the German *Tiefauge, 'oeil profond'* (RA 406), which may easily be altered to *Triefauge, 'oeil malade, larmoyant'* (RA 407). As the eye, sunken and defective, is particularly associated with the mythic ogre (19), Blättchen's lesson provides the etymological link between Tiffauges' name and and his mythic ancestry. It is also possible to discern in the double etymology suggested by Blättchen, a correspondence to the benign and malign versions of the ogre, exhibited in Tiffauges' history.

A further intra-textual link between Tiffauges' name and his mythic heritage is provided in a later work by Tournier, *Gilles et Jeanne*. In this 'récit', Tournier reveals that amongst the several châteaux and domaines of Gilles de Rais, the Chateau de Tiffauges appeared as the location for his most gruesomely ogrish atrocities. The association Tiffauges-Ogre made in the earlier novel, is thus reinforced, in the prospective reflection of this theme in the later text. However, the intratextual exegesis of Tiffauges' name is both subverted and strengthened by the 'intrusion' of German etymology in *Le Roi des Aulnes* and by history in *Gilles et Jeanne*; the hermetic intra-textual chain of reference is ruptured, for history and etymology point to an external reality that, although constantly invoked, must lie beyond
the boundaries of (Tournier’s) writing (20).

(iii) Inter-textuality

In this third example, meaning is disclosed in plenitude by the alignment of a number of ‘mirror-texts’ which occur not only within the body of Tournier’s writing, but externally, in the work of other writers. A very simple example of this is the allusion to Saint Veronica in the short story, ‘Les Suaires de Véronique’. In Tournier’s work, Véronique is a photographer who repeatedly photographs her lover, Hector, and ultimately prints his image on a series of shrouds. Her name acquires a certain significance if it is seen as a reflection of Veronica, who in the Apocrypha is said to have wiped the face of the crucified Christ and imprinted his image on a cloth through her act of kindness (21).

A more complex example where inter-textual reference may be combined with intra-textual reference in order to elicit plenitude of meaning may be found in the name Thabor.

The significance of St Christopher in Le Roi des Aulnes, as the representation of the benign inversion of the mythic ogre, is reflected in the name of Tiffauges’ school: le Collège S. Christophe. Given this understanding, Tournier’s readers might be tempted to speculate upon the significance of Alexandre’s school being named le Collège Thabor in Les Météores. Indeed, such speculation is both provoked and partially answered intra-textually, by Alexandre himself:
Le Thabor ! nom mystérieux, environné d’un prestige magique [...] nom sacré où il y a de l’or et du tabernacle ! [...] Il contient des promesses d’extases et de transfiguration (M 41-2)

The reference to transfiguration points beyond Tournier’s writing to the biblical texts of Mathew, Mark and Luke, who describe the Transfiguration of Christ as taking place on ‘a mountain apart’ which tradition ascribes to Mount Tabor (22). However, the correspondance between the Transfigured Christ and the character or role of Alexandre remains obscure within the context of Les Météores; it is only when the biblical reference is reflected prospectively in later texts that the Tournierian interpretation of the Transfiguration emerges. In Le Vent Paraclet, for example, Mount Tabor is described as a symbol of the triumph of ‘la chair aimée et célébrée’ (VP 65) over the more moribund symbol of the crucifix: ‘une charogne clouée sur deux poutres’ (VP 65). This interpretation is developed at greater length in Le Vagabond Immobile:

Mais c’est surtout la célébration de la beauté physique de Jésus qui tombe admirablement le 6 août. Ce jour-là, Jésus, accompagné de Pierre, Jacques et Jean, gravit le mont Thabor, et là soudain il se révèle à eux dans toute sa divine splendeur [...] Or cette fête de la Transfiguration [...] c’est la grande fête de la chair réhabilitée, arrachée aux ténèbres paléotestamentaires des vêtements et rendue à l’innocence adamique de l’air et du soleil. (VI 109)

In the light of these reflections, the significance of the name of Alexandre’s school becomes clear, for it is at the college Thabor that Alexandre, under the tutelage of Thomas Koussek, learns to reject the image of the tortured
body of Christ and becomes profoundly seduced by the physical and sensually attractive image of Jesus as ‘Le Christ Roi, l’athlète de Dieu, débordant de force et de sève’ (M 44) (23).

However, the purpose of the examples given above is not to dismiss Tournier as ‘un incorrigible pédagogue’ who must explain everything to his readers, for in each example, an increasing amount of intervention and co-operation is required on the part of the reader for them to function as explanations at all. In the first example, Tournier simply states that Neljapaëv is Estonian for Thursday; he does not explain the significance of his choice. In the second and third examples it is necessary to identify the ‘mirror-texts’ and recognize their didactic potential before they can be applied to the initial text in question. Thus, at least, it may be said that the mirror-text relationship is neither hermetic, nor self-sufficient; creative intervention on the part of the reader is necessary in order for its didactic potential to be realized. Between the texts there is an empty space, a silence which the critical reader responds to. In effect, as Pierre Machery writes, it is not the words but the silences between them which engage the reader:

Ce que l’oeuvre ne dit pas, peut-être ne le cache-t-elle pas [...] simplement, cela lui manque [...] Par une parole, le silence devient le centre principal de l’expression, son point d’extrême visibilité. La parole finit par ne plus rien dire : c’est le silence qu’on interroge, puisque c’est lui qui parle. (24)

The ‘jeu spéculaire’ is thus not to be considered as an
elaborate riddle, which, if the rules are properly observed, will yield the answer, the author’s secret intention. Rather it is to be seen the fulfilment of a potential that exists in a constant state of want, requiring the reader’s creative contribution (speculation and interpretation) for its integrity to be realized.

Two metaphors deployed in Tournier’s writing illustrate this relationship. In Les Météores, Paul Surin describes the nature of dialogue in terms of an iceberg; the explicit discourse appearing ‘above water level’, while the implicit, silent discourse of shared identity occurs unseen, below the surface:

Tout dialogue comporte une part d’explicite — les mots et phrases échangées, compréhensibles à tous — et une part d’implicite propre aux seuls interlocuteurs, voire au groupe restreint auquel ils appartiennent [...] Le dialogue partagé sans cesse entre explicite et implicite [...] est semblable à un iceberg flottant dont la ligne de flottaison varierait d’un couple d’interlocuteurs à un autre, et au cours du même dialogue. (M 182)

Tournier’s writing resembles this iceberg; the explicit occupies but a fraction of the dialogue between text and reader. The substantial body of the dialogue takes place beneath the surface of the text.

The metaphor of the vampire, on the other hand (deployed in Le Vol du Vampire), where the text is disclosed as both vampire and victim, describes the symbiotic dependence of text and reader exactly:

Un livre écrit, mais non lu, n’existe pas pleinement.
C'est une virtualité, un être exsangue, vide, malheureux [...] L'écrivain le sait, et lorsqu'il publie un livre, il lâche dans la foule anonyme des hommes et des femmes une nuée de oiseaux de papier, des vampires secs, assoiffés de sang. A peine un livre s'est-il abattu sur un lecteur qu'il se gonfle de sa chaleur et de ses rêves. [...] Ainsi toute création appelle-t-elle à la créativité des lecteurs [...] Mais cela implique bien entendu que l'écrivain respecte la liberté de création de son lecteur. (VV 10-11) (25)

In this mutually self-reinforcing, creative dialogue between text and reader, the emergence of a dialectical necessity may be discerned, which strongly echoes the dialectical relationship of the absolute world and the world of autrui described in 'L'Impersonnalisme'. The unread book resembles the absolute world in that it also exists in a 'solitude totale' devoid of coherence and utterly dependent upon the surging intrusion of the reader / autrui to infuse it with coherence, expressivity and life.

It is now possible to propose a method with which the Tournierian absolute may be analysed, which takes into account both didactic specularity and creative speculation. That method, or tool, to borrow Tournier's phrase, is 'le grand couteau de la dialectique' (VP 152) (26). Tournier describes how he himself learned from Bachelard to apply this 'instrument aperatif' to his own reading:

Du coup, la littérature et la poésie, la science elle-même devenaient des citrouilles pleines de choses subtiles et drôles que le grand couteau de la dialectique pouvait éventrer d'un seul coup, alors que ceux qui ignoraient le maniement de cet instrument devait se contenter de palper leur surface lisse ou pustuleuse. (VP 152)

The evidence suggests that Tournier's own writing will
respond to the same tool.

* * *

4. THE SUBVERSION OF THE EXPLICIT

The necessity of the dialectic should not be overlooked, even when Tournier is at his most explicit in his descriptions of the absolute; it is useful to remember Tournier's own response to the apparent explicitness of the Socratic method of argument: 'Il faut [...] ne pas croire qu'expliciter soit expliquer' (II 12).

This may be seen in the three main expressions of explicit determination of the absolute which appear in Tournier's literary discourse (27). These are: (i) Qualified references to 'l'absolu'; (ii) Self-imposed question and answer; (iii) The lexicon.

The first category represents an unobtrusive, 'micro-scale' form of didacticism. Instances of this occur when Tournier employs the term 'absolu', either as a noun or adjective, and follows it immediately with a series of qualifying terms. The operation may be overtly introduced by phrases such as 'je veux dire', as for example in the preface to Pearl Buck's La Mère: 'Quel est le résultat de cet exotisme absolu, je veux dire sans lien de référence avec l'Occident?' (VV 254).

Alternatively, the qualification may be more covertly
instructive, as for example, when Tournier writes of 'une vérité absolue, inconditionnelle' (VP 46) or 'une impression [...] absolue, sans référence à un autre' (VI 67) or 'absolu, sans modèle' (GO 56). Elsewhere, the operation may be reversed, and the term 'absolu' is deployed as the final, summary qualification for a string of precursory terms, as for example, in 'un amour total, inconditionnel, absolu' (VV 157) and 'c'est par et pour elle-même, absolument' (VV 307) (28).

The effect of these word groups is to create a climate of meaning around a particular word, which, if left unsupported or unqualified, might have been left open to ambiguous interpretation. It ensures that any alternative preconceptions of the term that the reader may have brought to his reading of the text are quickly and unobtrusively eliminated and the author's concept established in the reader's mind.

It is, however, legitimate to ask how positively helpful these defining phrases are. For, with one exception, the absolute is described in these examples (29) in negative terms; it is 'sans référence', 'inconditionnel', 'sans modèle'. Tournier apparently finds it easier to say what the absolute is not, rather than to describe it in positive terms. Indeed, this use of negatives indicates a concept that lies outside the range of human experience, or at least, outside the language of human experience; the absolute is
effectively presented as unknowable.

The second category of explicit pedagogy identified above is that of self-imposed question and answer. In the closing pages of *Le Vent Paraclet*, Tournier appears to address directly the problem of defining the absolute. To the self-imposed question, 'Qu’est-ce que l’absolu ?' (VP 298), he replies:

C'est étymologiquement ce qui n'a pas de rapport, pas de relation. Terme négatif par conséquent qui bloque simplement l'activité spontanée, aliénante et scientifique de notre esprit. Car nous sommes dressés à tisser un réseau relationnel où nous sommes pris avec les choses et les gens qui nous entourent. Chaque objet, chaque homme se trouve nié en lui-même pour renvoyer à d'autres objets, à d'autres hommes, à des fonctions, à des modes d'emploi, à des valeurs dont les étalons se situent ailleurs, très loin, nulle part. Notre regard ricoche sans cesse de point en point, ne pouvant s'arrêter sur rien, ne voyant finalement plus rien.

Pour retrouver l'absolu, il n’est que de couper ces liens.

(VP 298)

There is an immediate and obvious consistency between the opening lines of this passage and the didactic word groupings of the previous category. For just as Tournier avoids saying explicitly what the absolute is in these instances, here also he prefers to concentrate on saying what it is not. Having proposed a description of the absolute, Tournier in fact proceeds to give an eloquent description of the inescapably relative cast of the human mind. The absolute, by inference from this description, is understood to be that which is not contained within the field of human perception. In truth, no more in the way of positive
information has been explicitly offered than in the examples of qualified references to things that are 'absolu' in the first category.

However, the text discloses a much more informative content if the **jeu spéculaire** is allowed to develop.

The final reference to the availability of the absolute to those who possess the capacity to 'couper les liens' of the 'réseau relationnel' which society has woven about them, mirrors the text of 'L’Impersonnalisme', where Tournier describes the release of the object from the ontologically contingent control of the subject which coincides with the release of the absolute:

Ainsi, du principe qu’il n’y a pas de conscience sans objet, ni d’objet sans conscience, nous avons tiré, par l’identification de la conscience et de son objet, une restauration de ce dernier qui n’apparaît plus comme le produit d’une activité subjective, mais qui acquiert la dignité ontologique de la chose-en-soi. Nous avons vu également qu’en coupant le lien de dépendance qui suspendait l’objet au sujet, nous avons fait évoluer celui-ci vers la notion d’autrui. (E 53)

But although the description of the absolute in *Le Vent Paraclet* quite clearly points to the argument of 'L’Impersonnalisme', the later text has infinitely simplified the complex philosophical argument of the earlier work. Consequently, what at first sight may have appeared to be a hopelessly inadequate or simple description, may be demonstrated to disclose a much weightier and comprehensive philosophical heritage, 'comprenant ontologie, gnoséologie et épistémologie, morale, logique et esthétique' (VV 299) (30).
Thus it is possible to construct 'une philosophie de disette, une sagesse de subsistance, un *vade-mecum* de va-nu-pieds' (*VP* 296), exemplified by the simple and miniaturised definition of the absolute in *Le Vent Paraclet*. However, in creative partnership with the reader, Tournier cannot, as would a vagabond philosopher, turn his back on the 'vastes et tièdes dortoirs des grandes familles spirituelles' (*VP* 295) (31); the company of the reader ensures that Tournier's philosophic ancestors remain, Anchises-like, wherever he goes.

The aesthetic of the absolute is also revealed (intra-textually) in *Le Vent Paraclet*. Taking the 'dé dramatisation du génie' as his starting point, Tournier replaces 'génie' with 'beauté' and finally, 'beauté' with 'l'absolu':

Oui, tout le monde a du génie, lequel n'est pas un énorme et solitaire diamant, mais une poussière scintillante pulvérisée sur tous les hommes. (*VP* 296)

La beauté est la chose du monde la plus répandue, mais notre regard asservi aux besoins quotidiens ne la voit pas. Il faut l'intervention autoritaire du peintre, du sculpteur, de l'architecte pour déchirer le voile gris que notre fatigue jette sur le monde (*VP* 297)

Il faut aller plus loin dans cette dédramatisation du génie que souhaitait Cocteau. Il faut aller jusqu'à uneatomisation de l'absolu. (*VP* 298)

This is why Tournier so warmly applauds Kandinsky and Boubat for example, for both of them have, in his opinion, 'levé le rideau d'images' (*CJV* 125) and portrayed the absolute world of the thing-in-itself in all its pristine beauty.

Lastly, Tournier's use of the personal lexicon should be
considered. Tournier has published two lexicons which are designed to assist the reader's understanding of his idiosyncratic or etymological use of words, his neologisms and his preference for a rich and arcane vocabulary. The first lexicon has a specific application to an early edition of Le Roi des Aulnes (32); the second however, published under the title 'Les Mots sous les Mots' (33), may be applied to the entire body of Tournier's writing. The third entry represents Tournier's most recent explicit attempt to define the absolute:

Absolu. Un concept qui pour exprimer le comble de la positivité emprunte une tournure négative. Ab-solutum : qui n'a pas de rapport, non-relatif. Or tout ce que nous sommes, tout ce que nous connaissons est tellement relie-à, c'est-à-dire relatif que le contraire devient pour nous inexprimable. À la limite, il faudrait, comme certains écrivains religieux qui se refusent à écrire le mot Dieu, laisser un blanc à la place d'absolu.

(N.B. Infini appelle une réflexion comparable)

Again, a marked consistency with his earlier 'explanations' may be discerned; there is the same insistence upon the negative construct, the limitations of human perception and the support of etymology. The negative determination is so strongly emphasised that Tournier appears to be almost parodying his apparent inability to describe it in his affirmation that the absolute is perhaps best expressed by the ultimate negative expression : a blank space.

It might be argued at this point that in every example given so far, Tournier is deliberately attempting to subvert his own didactic tendency: he offers what appears to be
explicit descriptions of a concept, which ultimately emerges as inaccessible to the human mind. The danger here though, is to confuse conception with perception. To say that something is unknowable, or conceivable only in terms of what it is not, is not to deny its existence or the perception of its possibility. This is the foundation upon which many theological arguments concerning the existence of God are built; similarly, positive affirmation via negative determination operates as the basis of dialectical philosophy.

The stress upon linguistic inadequacy is indeed necessary to the dialectic construct. Language cannot cope with the simultaneous expression of opposites (34). However, this does not necessarily entail a capitulation to silence. For in Tournier's initial affirmation that the absolute is 'un concept qui pour exprimer le comble de la positivité emprunte une tournure négative [...] où à la limite il faudrait [...] laisser un blanc', he constructs the basis of the dialectic: the ultimate expression of positive reality (35) is set in opposition to the blank, the ultimate expression of nothingness. The dialectic is realised in partnership with the creative reader who may then conceive the absolute in the eloquent silence of the self-reflecting dialectic.

This dialectical progression from negativity to positivity may thus be seen even in the most minor examples
of the didactic impulse quoted above in the first category of qualified references; and what appeared initially as a tediously explicit form of pedagogy, is revealed to be self-subverting. The text only discloses positive information when aligned with the creative intervention of a dialectical reading.

It is important to note, however, that this textual subversion of explicitness outlined above is a function of Tournier's literary discourse; this is distinct from the philosophical discourse of the maîtrise and 'L'Impersonnalisme', in which the dialectic of the absolute is explicitly described. In short, the literary discourse operates as a manifestation as opposed to a description of the dialectic.

* * *

To answer the questions posed at the beginning of this chapter concerning the philosophical allegiances and deviations of the Tournierian absolute and the particular prominence of Plato, Spinoza, Heidegger and the 'quelques autres' in this construct, it may now be seen to be necessary to engage in the 'jeu spéculaire'. The Tournierian absolute emerges in the speculative dialogue between Tournier and his philosophical progenitors, and between Tournier and his reader.
NOTES

Part I

1. See the criticisms of Shattuck, Garreau and Lovichi, cited above (pp. 70-1) of the present study). See also Davis, Michel Tournier, Philosophy and Fiction, pp. 16-8.

2. When I met Tournier, he was preparing to write a novel based on the martyrdom of Saint Sebastian as a companion piece to Gilles et Jeanne. He showed me at least five books he was studying on the technique of archery; he also explained that he was even taking archery lessons in order to better understand the fate of the martyr and the (physical) sensations of his executors.

3. C.f. VV 12 :
'Les enfants des écoles avec lesquels je vais parfois dialoguer me posent souvent la question la plus fondamentale que soulève le roman : qu'y a-t-il de vrai dans vos histoires ? Je sais bien que je me condamne à leurs yeux si je réponds : rien, j'ai tout inventé. Mais je me condamne également en répondant à l'inverse : tout, dans les moindres détails mes histoires sont empruntées à l'histoire, à la chronique ou aux faits divers.'

4. See RA 373-581 : 'L'Ogre de Kaltenborn'— information about life in the Napalas taken from the transcripts of the Nuremburg trials. See RA 332-334 for details of Göring's 'coprologie'.

5. See especially GO 14, 38-9, 31-36, 69.

6. CB 200

7. MA 87-9

8. On this subject, see M. Worton : 'Myth-reference in Le Roi des Aulnes'.

9. SUD, 1986 no. 61, p. 148


11. SUD, 1980 Hors Série, p. 140

12. Essais Critiques IV 'le Bruissement de la Langue' p. 34


14. This term is derived from Tournier's description in 'L'Impersonnalisme' of a 'jeu du miroir' (E 51), in which
subject and object are engaged in a mutually self-reflecting partnership. Meaning or ontological reality emerges from this infinite reflective process.

I have avoided the question of a narcissistic interpretation of this device as I feel such an interpretation would be better suited to a psychoanalytic approach to Tournier’s writing. (See for example, Françoise Merllie, Michel Tournier, pp.139-157). My thinking in the analysis of the 'jeu spéculaire' has been stimulated by Michael Worton’s article, 'Ecrire et Ré-écrire : Le Projet de Tournier’ (SUD No.61, 1986), in particular where Worton writes that ‘Vendredi est un miroir de Robinson Crusoe, mais a l’encontre du dicton de Stendhal, il est un miroir qui se veut déformant afin de permettre une réinterprétation qui ferait de l’étiologie un jeu intertextuel’ (p.58). In the conclusion to this article, Worton writes: ‘Au lecteur donc d’interpréter ou plutôt de spéculer, de s’efforcer de combler les lacunes.’ It is in reply to this injunction that the present chapter has been written.

15. I use this term in a more limited sense than may be generally understood by modern critical theory, (see Norton and Still, eds., Intertextuality, theory and practice). The definition given will be adhered to throughout this thesis. Where the term is to be understood in its more complex, critical context, the hyphen will be omitted.

16. Ronald Hayman says (The Literary Review, January 1984, p.41) that Tournier ‘kept the meaning of Neljapaëv secret for 16 years.’ This is not the case, as Tournier had been explaining his ‘joke’ from his earliest interviews onwards.

17. Vendredi ou la vie sauvage.

18. C.f. the first paragraph of note 14. Tournier’s decision to rename the boy ‘Dimanche’ in the later version serves well as an illustration of his often repeated desire to conceal the theoretical sources of his writing more effectively in his re-written works.

19. C.f. VP 117 :‘On songe à Orion, le chasseur géant et aveugle. Au cyclope de l’Odyssée qui n’avait qu’un oeil, lequel fut crevé par Ulysse. Au guerrier gigantesque des Flandres, Colin le Maillard, qui se battait avec un maillet; privé de vue par une blessure, il fallut qu’un valet d’armes guidât désormais ses coups [...]’

21. Tournier's Véronique is, of course, a malign inversion of her saintly namesake. In this example, the 'jeu spéculaire' corresponds to the image of the mirror which deforms as it reflects, described in Le Roi des Aulnes: 'Satan, maître du monde, aidé par ses cohorts de gouvernants, magistrats, prélats, généraux et policiers présente un miroir à la face de Dieu. Et par son opération, la droite devient gauche, la gauche devient droite, le bien est appelé mal et le mal est appelé bien.' (RA 123) This passage may be seen to function intra-textually with 'Les Suaires de Véronique', provided the inter-textual link with the Apocrypha has been established.

22. None of the Evangelists specifies Mount T(h)abor. See: Matthew, 17, 1-8; Mark 9, 2-8; Luke 9, 28-36.

23. See also Arlette Bouloumié, Michel Tournier, Le Roman Mythologique, p. 49, for an interpretation of the symbolic function of the name Tabor.

24. Pour une théorie de production litteraire, p.106. Although I have read with great interest Machery's chapter entitled 'Implicite et Explicite' (opus cit.), I prefer to use these terms strictly following my own definitions, as set out in this chapter.

25. Tournier echoes Sartre's stated commitment to the creative liberty of the reader in Qu'est-ce que la littérature? (passim) See also Davis, opus cit., pp.121-2. On the vampire metaphor see M.Worton, 'Use and abuse of metaphor in Le Vol du Vampire'.

26. From Plato to Marx, the term 'dialectics' has undergone a substantial transformation. In the methodology proposed here, it is understood to be the dynamic, infinite process in which ontological truth or reality emerges from the mutual exchange of self-reflecting opposites which are neither synthesized (Plato), nor transcended (Hegel). In this description, which may be seen as a more elaborate version of the 'jeu spéculaire' (see note 14), I follow Tournier's own interpretation of the role of the dialectic which may be seen in his response to the tortured and bandaged, photographic self-portraits of Dieter Appelt: 'Le corps humain blessé, soigné, tué et mis en linceul, grand thème qui remue en chacun de nous des vestiges métaphysiques et des ivresses sadomasochistes. Il s'agit d'une dialectique assez pèverse qui alterne cruauté et caresse, mis à mort et glorification. Le pansement prend
la relève du drape classique, plus intime, plus équivoque, puisqu’il habille non pas la nudité, mais la plaie. Paul Valéry disait: "La vérité est nue, mais sous le nu il y a l’écorché", entendant par là qu’une réalité profonde attend et récompense l’art qui sait être implacable’. (CS 79) (My italics)

27. By Tournier’s ‘literary discourse’ the entire range of his writing, both fiction and non-fiction following his renascence as a writer in 1967 is understood; by contrast, Tournier’s ‘philosophical discourse’ refers to his writing prior to this renascence, most notably, ‘L’Intuition Intellectuelle dans la philosophie de Platon’ and ‘L’Impersonnalisme’. Although the philosophical discourse requires a less actively creative participation on the part of the reader than the later literary discourse, the co-creativity of the reader is still required for meaning to emerge.

28. This progression from negative determination to positive affirmation is illustrated in this last example, in which Tournier describes the manifestation of the Sartrean en-soi in La Nausée (an inter-textual constituent of the Tournierien construct): ‘Cette nature sans les hommes ne peut être vue, ressentie, construite par un observateur humain. C’est un objet sans sujet, un connu sans connaissant [...] c’est par et pour elle-même, absolument’ (WV 307)

29. See preceding note.

30. This is Tournier’s own description of ‘L’Impersonnalisme’; its validity is examined in the second part of this chapter.

31. This may suggest a reason for the sometimes ambiguous attitude of Tournier towards his readers; he would like to be seen as ‘un philosophe de disette’, but cannot deny the right of the reader to participate in the ‘jeu spéculaire’ in which his texts appear to be laden with references to numerous major philosophies which create a burden heavier than he would wish to carry.


33. In Le Débat, janvier 1985. no.33 pp. 94-109. I can see no reason to suppose that the title is intended as either a deliberate aggression or homage to Starobinski’s Les Mots Sous Les Mots.

34. See p.198, Chapter 4 of the present study in
which the Upanishadic revelation as Atman ( = 'No, no') is discussed in the light of the possibility of a linguistic expression of the absolute.

35. The term 'positivité' in its philosophical sense has a distinct meaning, which is intended, I believe, in Tournier's definition of the absolute. Philosophically, it is held as that which is real in that it has an actual rather than a supposed or ideal existence. Tournier's use of this term, (by intertextual reference to the discourse of philosophy) thus sets him apart from Idealist philosophy - which is most often, if not exclusively, identified as the philosophy of the Absolute and aligns his own concept with the philosophy and ontology of Logical Materialism. C.f. VP 179: 'Je prétextais bien sûr devenir un vrai romancier [...] mais ces histoires devraient être secrètement mues par les ressorts de l'ontologie et de la logique matérielle.'

N.B. The 'positivité' of Logical Materialism should not be confused with Positivism, to which it is absolutely opposed.

PART II. ALLEGIANCES AND DEVIATIONS OF THE TOURNIERIAN ABSOLUTE

'La métaphysique [...] apparaît chez tous les hommes et à tous les instants. Elle est la forme fondamentale de la pensée en générale. Poser quelque chose, soit comme existence, soit comme vérité, c'est selon moi, faire de la métaphysique' (Michel Tournier, Colloque à Cerisy-la-Salle, August 1990)

1. DEFINITIONS

It is paradoxical that there is no single definition of what is absolute which is, or has been, accepted by philosophers or scholars from other related disciplines, such as mathematics or theology. Perhaps this diverse range of thinkers in itself may account to a certain extent for this paradox; for whatever is held to be absolute can only be
regarded as such from a position of relativity - that is to say, from the subjective standpoint of the individual and the culture or discipline within which he or she operates. Knowledge of the absolute would imply a God-like omniscience. However, if this is taken as a starting point, the very possibility of describing the absolute is abolished before any investigations may proceed. Indeed, denial of the absolute on these grounds is characteristic of much of the thought given to the subject by twentieth century philosophers. Only research in the field of quantum physics gives pause to consider the admissibility of an absolute world, available to subjective conception, despite being alienated from subjective perception (1).

Tournier's affirmation of the absolute as 'le comble de la positivité' is indeed anomalous in relation to the confirmed relativism of modern philosophy and western thinking in general; his dismissal of physics - he does not even distinguish between Newtonian and post-Einsteinian physics - is unjustified as it is there that he would (to his great surprise) find some of his closest philosophical kin (2).

Whereas relativism is reasonably easy to define because it accommodates and is accommodated by the limits of human perception, the term 'absolute' or 'the A/absolute' is fraught with ambiguity and paradox, even in its etymology, which reveals an intrinsic relativity. Ab-se-luo, the Latin
root, means 'to untie oneself from', but, the prefix, ab, implies a relation: a relation between a detached or independent state and a previous attached, dependent condition.

Moreover, a division in the meaning of the term has arisen, perhaps due to the somewhat indeterminate etymology. André Lalande specifies the problem:

Absolu vient d'ab-solvere, dans ses deux sens bien distincts: délier, dégager, affranchir d'une part, et de l'autre, achever, rendre parfait. Absolutus a toujours eu ce premier sens; mais le premier a été renforcé chez les philosophes modernes par le souvenir de solvere. (3)

Thus, for example, there should be no attempt to identify the absolutus of Nicolas da Cusa (1401 - 1464) with the Absolut of Hegel (1770 - 1831); when da Cusa writes that 'Deus Absolutus est', he uses the term in the sense of complete or finished perfection. Hegel, on the other hand, contributes to the modern, philosophical interpretation of the word when, during the lectures at Jena, he posits the Absolute as Spirit (Das Absolut ist der Geist), that is to say, as an independent, self-creating and self-governing entity (4).

Tournier employs the term strictly in what Lalande identifies as its first and more modern sense which has the support of etymology, as a detached autonomy, 'Ab-solutum: qui n'a pas de lien, sans rapport, non-relatif' ('Les Mots sous les Mots', quoted above). In Le Vent Paraclet, Tournier relates the etymology of the absolute metaphorically to the
The dialectic of dependence and autonomy expressed in the etymology is, as indicated above, central to Tournier's conception of the absolute.

The problem of the meaning of the term 'absolute' is further compounded by the fact that although the term was only introduced into the philosophical vocabulary in its modern sense at the end of the eighteenth century by Schelling and Hegel, concepts of that which, in an etymological sense, is absolute had existed long before. F.J. Findlay cites the 'Air of Axomenes which differentiates itself into everything by a single act of rarification or condensation' and 'the Atoms and Void of Leucippus which generate the most varied things through their chance differences and meanings' as instances of pre-Socratic attempts to conceive an absolute (6). Both these examples may be considered as early forerunners of the Aristotelian notion of 'Substance', which significantly contributes to Spinoza's concept of the divinity. The 'One' of Plato's Parmenides, the Leibnizian 'Monad', even the existential 'Dasein', similarly represent the desire of philosophy to pursue the ultimate principle of reality.

It is not, however, the intention of this chapter to chronicle the history of the range of items held to be
absolute (7), as this would be to record the history of metaphysics (!). Findlay, for example, reveals the futility of this means of discovery. He describes the absolute as 'the limits of explanation' (8) which pictures an ever expanding human knowledge which, as it expands, rejects as inadequate ideas previously held to be absolute, so that 'much of the past history of philosophy could fitly be described as the setting up and knocking down of one absolute after another' (9). Findlay's approach is not only antithetical to Tournier's disregard for Subjective Idealism, stated in 'L'Impersonnalisme' and Le Vent Paraclet, it also effectively destroys the concept of the absolute, unless one believes in a 'final' absolute, the ultimate goal of a teleological progression towards absolute knowledge.

The intention here is rather to establish the conceptual pattern which emerges from the history of the absolute so that the Tournierian absolute may be set in a conceptual (as opposed to a historical) perspective.

An admirably succinct, yet comprehensive conceptual overview of the history of the absolute has been made by Charles Karelis:

Amongst the most widely endorsed [range of objects held to be absolute] have been the set of objects, the set of subjective sensory impressions, the set of minds, the set of abstract universals, the divinity and various conjunctions of the foregoing; and some philosophers have argued that nothing is absolute in and by itself, on the grounds that equally different accounts of the whole can be constructed using different assumptions about what is absolute. (10)
In the analysis which follows of the five categories (and supplementary comments) which Karelis proposes, the allegiances and deviations of the Tournierian absolute may be elucidated.

2. THE SET OF PHYSICAL OBJECTS

The human mind is capable of representing the physical world in a number of ways. Standing in diametrical opposition to each other are the two principle perspectives in this matter: the objective and the subjective view, each of which generates its own absolute. This first category addresses the case for the objective view, while the second category looks at the subjective alternative. The debate between the two modes of apprehension marks the exact point at which the Philosophy of Mind overlaps Ontology, or the philosophy of Being. Bosanquet illustrates the debate with characteristic lucidity:

This is nothing more than the amplification or development through consciousness of the fundamental fact which consists in two existants being together in space. My mind is here, in my body; the table is there [...] What is here the line between my mind and its object? How much belongs to my mind and how much to the table? (11)

The brief analysis of 'L'Impersonnalisme' in the preceding chapter suggests that Tournier's perception of the absolute will best be accommodated in the objective view; indeed, the opening pages of the article contain a manifesto on behalf of the object, as the following sarcastic (and quite breathless) denunciation of the subjective view, makes
Or, si j'interroge mon expérience, je n'y trouve pas trace de ce qu'on appelle la conscience, car je ne puis l'opposer pour la saisir à ce qui le nie. Je n'ai jamais rencontré l'inconscient ni l'inconnaissable et je ne crois pas que je doive les rencontrer un jour parce qu'ils cesseraient alors d'être inconscient et inconnaissable, c'est-à-dire d'être. On me dit bien, pour m'aider, que la conscience n'est pas une chose qu'on rencontre dans l'expérience parmi d'autres choses qui ne seraient pas elle, mais une lueur diffuse qui accompagne toute expérience, que la conscience n'est pas quelque chose mais que toute conscience est de quelque chose et que c'est dans ce 'de' que repose tout le problème de la connaissance. Mais cette 'lueur diffuse' qui n'existe jamais sans quelque contenu ne se distingue de ce dernier que s'il est parfois donné sans elle. Or nous venons de dire que l'inconscient ne saurait apparaître sans contradiction dans l'expérience.

Par suite on se demande, puisqu'il n'y a pas d'objet sans conscience, ni de conscience sans objet, comment et par quelles abstractions on a pu distinguer les deux termes, par quel miracle on a su que la conscience d'un objet n'est pas cet objet purement et simplement. Toutefois qu'on y prenne garde. Il n'est pas sans conséquent d'identifier un objet avec la conscience que j'en ai, parce qu'on abolit du même coup la notion de conscience en supprimant le de de 'conscience de quelque chose', la conscience se résorbant dans son objet, et c'est l'existence même de du sujet-connaissant qui est mis en question. Si la conscience est son objet, [...] si on restitue à l'objet ce qui dans le sujet était la condition de son existence, que reste-t-il de la notion de sujet et [...] qu'advient-il au monde de cette récupération ? Puisqu'il n'y a pas de sujet qui les soutiennent à l'existence, les choses se suffisent à elles-mêmes, elles sont en soi. Le monde n'est pour personne, [et] avec lui coïncide la notion d'absolu [...] (E 49-50 & 52-53)

Tournier's philosophy may be considered to reflect the primary condition in the argument that the world is possessed of both primary and secondary qualities; a precept which has occupied philosophers ever since Democritus observed that 'colours, sweetness and bitterness exist by convention.
In reality, there are atoms and the void.’ (12) Democritus merely adumbrates the subjective and objective divide; Locke takes the argument one step further. The primary qualities of an object, he argues, are those that exist independently of sensory response. These might include motion, shape or volume. Secondary qualities however, are entirely dependent upon sensory reaction to the object, and would thus include qualities such as colour, taste or smell (13). It is clear that primary qualities predicate the absolute, whereas secondary qualities predicate the relative.

This division however, raises an apparent problem of separability. It is possible to look at a cat and say that is both solid and black, thereby ascribing both a primary and a secondary quality to it. But it is impossible to separate our perception of the cat’s solidity from its blackness. An object must have shape or volume before it can refract light and therefore be seen as coloured. This leads to the subjectivist’s conclusion that objective reality is perceived in subjective, sensory response, that the absolute is to be apprehended in the relative. Yet there is a way out of this seemingly irreducible paradox. Colin McGinn recognises that the problem lies in a confusion of perception with conception. Primary qualities as independent existants may only be conceived, whereas secondary qualities alone may be perceived. As McGinn says, one cannot explain in sensory terms what red is to someone who has been blind since birth,
whereas it would be possible to give an adequate description of the concept of volume or motion. He concludes:

The objective view does not have the relativity of the subjective view, but it purchases this absoluteness at the cost of removing itself from the perceptual standpoint. (14)

This is not, however, an argument for the separability of the objective from the subjective; the 'common-sense view', to which McGinn subscribes, reveals their mutual necessity:

[...] there can be no question of selecting one kind of view and abandoning the other: to abandon the subjective view is to abandon the possibility of experience of the world; to abandon the objective view is to abandon the idea of an observer independent of unitary reality. (15)

But what McGinn considers to be common-sense is rejected by Tournier's argument as merely the unwillingness of the subject to relinquish its ontological superiority over the object. Neither would Tournier accept the distinction between conception and perception; both these terms imply the activity of the thinking subject. Tournier's absolute object reverses the conventional subject-object hierarchy described by McGinn, and, 'la conscience d'un objet se résorbant dans l'objet', reduces the subject to the status of an 'excrément épistémologique'. Thus for Tournier, primary and secondary qualities are merely a construct of subjective consciousness: whether they are conceived or perceived as independent existents is irrelevant to the absolute. Differences of perception or conception in autrui simply reflect the normally defective reconstruction of the absolute world that
takes place in Tournier's analysis of the third movement of the 'cogito cartésien' (16).

The eradication of the subjective view has not been attempted with more conviction than by Descartes and Kant, and so it is not surprising that Tournier has given serious attention to both these philosophers in his writing.

Descartes is renowned for his supreme faith in the universality and power of human reason and his commitment to the idea that a purely ratiocinative view of the universe is available to the thoroughly disciplined rational mind. According to Colin McGinn, the Method and the Meditations (17) together constitute one of the most single-minded attempts ever to eliminate the subjective view in order to arrive at a purely objective vision of the world (18), or at what Williams terms 'the absolute standpoint' (19).

This attempt is founded upon the Cogito, which Descartes takes as an infallibly objective starting-point. Thereupon he proceeds to construct a philosophy, de novo, which aims at presenting a pure, unadulterated vision of what is objectively present in the world (20).

Tournier's objection, as we saw in the preceding chapter, is that Descartes, for all his desire for objectivity, constructs his philosophy from the subjective position of autrui (21). The cogito, that Descartes supposes to effect an Archimedean point of leverage which enables the
subjective eye / I to raise itself into an absolutely objective position, disregards one of the most basic attributes of the human condition: the impossibility of consciousness to look at itself from an outside, objective vantage point (22).

Tournier's dismantling of the cogito in four movements (23) marks the fundamental distinction between the Cartesian objectivity and the Tournierian concept of objectité. To summarise the lengthier analysis of Tournier's argument presented in the last chapter, objectity consists in the pre-existence of the world (first movement) before the emergence of subjective consciousness (second movement); this latter in acquiring its subjectivity alienates itself from the world-in-itself (third movement), but is ultimately readmitted in the dialectical participation of the absolute, yet incoherent world-in-itself with its necessarily rational offspring, autrui (fourth movement).

The elimination of the subjective view is approached very differently by Kant in *The Critique of Pure Reason*, in which he introduces the idea of the 'noumenon', the conceptual precursor to Heidegger's *an-sich* and Sartre's *en-soi*.

Kant's first article of faith is his belief that certain propositions (such as the propositions of Euclidian geometry) are true, independently of any subjective awareness of them. From this, he determines the existence of a noumenal world,
autonomous and unconditioned by subjective consciousness. Kant contrasts this noumenal world with the phenomenal world, that is, the world as it appears as an object of consciousness. The criticism of this philosophy is that it is a nonsense to talk about a world unavailable to subjective consciousness. Danto summarises the attack on the concept of the thing-in-itself led by Hegel and Husserl, who argue for the identity of appearances and reality: 'The Ding-an-sich could be amputated from our scheme without the slightest tremor being felt, so there need not be an ulterior reality with which invidiously to contrast appearances' (24).

However, Kant and his closest adherents (25) would argue that the existence of the noumenon is necessary for the world to become an object of our experience. Without noumenal space for example, subjective-sensory perception of space and spatial relationships would be impossible. In Kant's terms, the human mind imposes a 'grid' (the Categories) over the noumenal world which processes the unknowable noumenon into the apprehensible phenomenon. Thus, Euclid's perception that space conforms to a certain set of laws does not mean that noumenal space satisfies these laws; it simply means that Euclid's mind was so constructed as to be able to impose a conceptual grid on his perception of space which translates noumenal space into a universally acceptable formula.

However, Kant can say nothing more of the noumenon than that it is the sine qua non of the phenomenon. Phenomena may
be critically analysed, but 'what things are in themselves, independently of our processing them is something we can never know.' (26)

There are indeed many similarities between the Kantian noumenon and the Tournierian primary absolute. In the article on Kandinsky (reproduced in the Canadian travel diary), Tournier demonstrates both his indebtedness and allegiance to the Kantian model.

He describes the artist's fleeting vision of the beauty of 'la chose en soi, seul véritable sujet du peintre' (CJV 129) as an insight which had 'déchiré le voile gris qui ternit et oblitère à nos yeux la jeunesse des choses et des êtres.' (CJV 124). The references to the 'chose en soi' and the 'voile gris' relate intra-textually to references in 'L'Impersonnalisme' and Le Vent Paraclet respectively. In the first of these, Tournier identifies the absolute with the concept of the thing-in-itself: 'puisqu'il n'y a pas de sujet qui les soutiennent à l'existence, les choses se suffisent à elles-mêmes, elle sont en-soi. Le monde n'est pour personne, avec lui coïncide la notion d'absolu' (E 52-3) (27). In Le Vent Paraclet, the absolute is identified with beauty, a beauty veiled by the subjective view: 'La beauté est la chose du monde la plus répandue, mais notre regard asservi aux besoins quotidiens ne la voit pas. Il faut l'intervention autoritaire du peintre, [...] pour déchirer le voile gris que notre fatigue jette sur le monde.' (VP 296).
Kandinsky's vision of the absolute, interpreted by Tournier, may now be compared with Kant's vision of the noumenon:

On retrouve la distinction de Kant entre les choses en soi - les noumênes - et les apparences extérieures qui les recouvrent - les phénomènes. Tout se passe comme si pendant des siècles de peinture figurative la vision directe des noumênes avait été interdite à l'oeil humain. [...] Des lors, il est facile de définir la révolution de Kandinsky: il a levé le rideau d'images et peint des choses en soi. (CJV 125)

The intra-textual reflection of the absolute in the noumenon (which draws inter-textually upon the Sartrean and Kantian models of being-in-itself) is reinforced by Tournier's notion of the 'grille de déchiffrage'. This corresponds inter-textually to the conceptual grid - the Categories - which Kant describes as the method by which the noumenal is processed into the phenomenal and thus rendered intelligible.

It is exhibited in Tournier's fiction pre-eminently by Tiffauges in Le Roi des Aulnes and by the twins in Les Météores. Tournier describes the 'grille' in the following extra-textual commentaries:

La grille étant à la fois partie principale d'une cage et de certains pièges, et un instrument pour déchiffrer les messages codés, tient une place de choix dans l'esprit d'Abel Tiffauges [...] préoccupé au premier chef par la prédation de la chair fraîche et de la lecture des signes du destin (28)

Mais si l'un des deux (jumeaux) s'enfuit de par le monde, l'espace intergémellaire se distend et s'affine - sans jamais se déchirer - à des dimensions qui peuvent envelopper le ciel et la terre. Alors le monde entier se trouve placé sous une sorte de grille de déchiffrement [...] qui permet une interprétation nouvelle, des villes, des forêts, des mers, des montagnes qui lui sont soumises. (CJV 11)

However, although there is a strong inter-textual relation
between the Kantian categories and the Tournierian 'grille de déchiffrement', and despite Tournier's evident appreciation of Kant's distinction between the noumenal and the phenomenal, the Kantian noumenon and the Tournierian absolute should not be held to be synonymous.

For Kant the noumenon is unknowable to the human mind; the argument of 'L'Impersonnalisme', on the other hand, presents the primary absolute as unknowable to subjective consciousness. But if, alternatively, to follow Tournier, consciousness is absorbed by the object, the concept of 'knowing', which implies a subject-object relationship, becomes irrelevant. Knowing is then replaced by synchronistic intuition in the Tournierian construct, in which the absolute world is no longer hidden, but dialectically present as the world.

One further point of difference must also be noted between Tournier and Kant; Tournier does not recognise abstract mathematical propositions as independent, infallible truths or as a starting point for acknowledging the absolute. For Tournier mathematics belong to the abstract world of autrui, whereas the absolute, 'cette fleur métaphysique' (VP 299) is inextricably embedded in the concrete world:

[...] les mathématiques sont abstraites. Elles constituent même le comble de l'abstraction. [...] le propre de la métaphysique au contraire, c'est toujours de plonger au cœur même du concret [...] La grande joie métaphysique, c'est le sentiment fort et chaleureux que l'élan cérébral vous mène d'un coup à la racine des choses les plus matériellement palpables, odorantes et
rugueuses. Qui n’a jamais senti cela ne sait pas ce qu’est la métaphysique. Au lieu que \( ax^2 + bx + c = 0 \) n’est qu’un amoncellement d’osselets qui doit tout à une convention tacite. (LVP 44-6)

It might be considered at this point that Tournier has followed Heidegger and Sartre in adhering to the idea of the thing-in-itself, yet refusing to submit to the charge of it being without need or sense. In Heidegger’s case, the absolute corresponds to authentic Being (Sein) which is distinguished from factitious existence (seîende). Like Tournier, he cannot however, accept the idea of this absolute as an abstract; as Steiner explains, ‘Heidegger’s ontology is densely immanent. Being is being-in-the-world. There "is" nowhere else. Being and authenticity can only be realized within immanent existence and time. For Heidegger there is no divine sphere of immaculate ideation, no unmoved mover.’(29)

Sein can be apprehended by the careful ‘listener’ who is prepared to ‘think being’ in the presence of an existent. But this kind of ontological thought is ‘pre-subjective, pre-logical, and above all, open to Being. It lets Being be.’(30)

This, and Heidegger’s constant recourse to the support of etymology is echoed by Tournier’s argument in ‘L’Impersonnalisme’ and Le Vent Paraclet. Heidegger’s description of his attempted ‘pre-subjectivity’, in which he experiences the light of authentic being piercing the gloom of the subjective view like light falling in a forest clearing, is forcefully reminiscent of Tournier’s attempts to describe the possible experience of the absolute:
Considérer chaque visage et chaque arbre sans référence à autre chose, comme existant seul au monde [...] Un verre d'eau, rien m'empêche en le buvant de m'y noyer tout entier, de m'absorber dans sa fraîcheur, son goût de roche, le serpent froid qu'il fait descendre en moi, tandis que mes doigts se serrent pour ne pas glisser sur sa surface embuée. La pomme - son poids dans ma main, sa peau vernie, le craquement de sa pulpe sous mes dents, l'acidité qui envahit mon palais - mérite un moment d'attention totale, une éternité attentive et sensuelle. (VP 299)

This method is carried to its ultimate conclusion in *Vendredi* in the description of Robinson's 'absorption' by the object, where 'il n'a conscience de lui-même qu'à travers les frondaisons de myrtes où le soleil darde une poignée de flèches, il ne se connaît que dans l'écume de la vague glissant sur le sable blond.' (V 98)

However, Heidegger would probably reject Tournier's appeal for consciousness to lose itself in the object as irresponsible, and Tournier's conclusion of the dialectical relationship between the absolute and autrui as a forfeiting of the thinker's 'answerability' to the absolute (31).

Tournier departs from Heidegger, despite their common recourse to etymology and the concept of a 'language of Being / the absolute', on the very question of language (32). For Tournier considers Heidegger's later poetical philosophy as a capitulation to opacity, and confesses that he can no longer understand the philosopher who had formerly played such an important role in his own philosophical formation (33).

The influence of Sartre's *L'Etre et le Néant* upon 'L'Impersonnalisme' has already been discussed in the
preceding chapter. Tournier's departure from the Heideggerian model echoes Sartre's own antagonistic indebtedness to the older philosopher, which Tournier describes in *Le Vol du Vampire*:

Il faut mentionner ici l'influence qu'exerça sur Sartre philosophe le métaphysicien allemand Martin Heidegger. *L'Être et le Temps* de Heidegger (1927) est à l'origine de *L'Être et le Néant* de Sartre (1943), et même aussi en partie de la *Nausée*. Car on trouverait dans le traité de Heidegger l'analyse qui donne la clé de la Nausée. De même, nous dit le philosophe allemand, que le néant s'appréhende dans l'angoisse, l'être se saisit dans la nausée. Qu'est-ce en effet que la nausée ? C'est, par delà les fragiles constructions que la société édifie autour de nous, l'émergence terrible et menaçante de l'Être. Tout l'édifice de paroles, vêtements et décors s'effondre devant cette chose impensable et innomable qui réduit à néant nos projets, notre passé, notre présent. (Vv 308)

This passage also functions on an intra-textual level as a record of Tournier's own antagonistic indebtedness to both Sartre and Heidegger. For in the earlier *Le Vent Paraclet*, Tournier describes the emergence of the absolute in precisely the same terms, yet insists that this emergence is accompanied, not by a sense of nausea, but by (an albeit anguished) sense of the 'comique cosmique' :

Mais il y a un comique cosmique : celui qui accompagne l'émergence de l'absolu au milieu du tissu de relativités où nous vivons [...] car nous dissimulons le néant qui nous entoure, mais il perce parfois la toile peinte de notre vie, comme un récif la surface des eaux. A la peur animale des dangers de toute sorte qui nous menacent, l'homme ajoute l'angoisse de l'absolu embusqué partout, minant tout ce qui se dit, tout qui se fait, frappant toute chose existante de dérision. (VP 198)

This divergence from the Sartrean model may be illustrated by a brief comparison of Sartre's Roquentin and Tournier's
Vendredi (34).

Like Heidegger, Sartre believes that human perception of the world is inauthentically partly by language which imposes false narrative structures upon the world. When these structures dissolve - which is the experience of Roquentin - absolute Being asserts itself; the effect is both terrifying and liberating. Roquentin, in moments of release from the bondage of subjective perception, experiences nausea as he crashes into the world of the absolute.

Vendredi, on the other hand, enjoys the immediacy of his existence in the physical world, expressed in his explosive 'rire dévastateur' (V 153). This laughter is symbolically responsible for the collapse of the factitious social and linguistic structures with which Robinson has attempted to subjugate the island. Vendredi's gift is eventually acquired by Robinson; his subjective, subjugating self gives way to a happy dialectic of otherness and identity with the world-in-itself. This may be seen as an approximation of the hypothetical fusion of the en-soi and the pour-soi which remains unacceptable for Sartre, and for Roquentin. Thus Roquentin ultimately seeks his salvation within the structures of language with which he hopes to conquer the chaotic world-in-itself; Vendredi, who, of course, has no such need for recourse to language is followed by Robinson in his rejection of such artificial constructs, witnessed by the abandonment of the log-book.
Objectivism, which Tournier may appear to be supporting at this point, is most frequently rejected because it is perceived to exalt the incoherent and the inanimate at the expense of the human. This conclusion is unattractive to any humanist. As Bosanquet emotively phrases it:

[...] it makes us think that all the the things we live with and care about most, faces, music, voices, light, taste, smell - all these things are, if not illusions, yet in a sort of way on a lower level of truth and reality than things like atoms and gravitation. (35)

Quite clearly this is not the example of Tournier’s valorisation of the object. Although Ferdinand Alquié was right to point out in his critique of 'L’Impersonnalisme' that Tournier was exhibiting a distaste for 'ce qui fait de nous des hommes' (36), no such criticism could be levelled at the revised and humanised philosophy of the absolute in Le Vent Paraclet. For here, the dialectic of participation is intra-textually disclosed with the emphasis on the participation of the absolute in autrui, so that 'chaque visage, chaque arbre, chaque chose qui crie - d’une voix souvent imperceptible' (VP 298) is recognised as absolute and concrete.

Tournier’s intra-textual response to Alquié, having had thirty one years to mature, speaks of the absolute inhabiting 'chaque individu' and argues that it is that presence which makes us human and not the language games which determine the moral, aesthetic and spiritual prescriptions of society.
3. THE SET OF SUBJECTIVE SENSORY IMPRESSIONS
Although a clear affinity has been witnessed between the Tournierien absolute and the absolute described by Karelis as 'the set of objects', (and although some of the objections to this category have been answered), the case against objectivism is attractive and subtle, and it remains to be seen how Tournier responds to its attractions as opposed to its disadvantages.

Subjectivism in its widest sense may appear to be an accessible and rewarding philosophy for having practical experience and common-sense on its side, but its attempted alienation of all metaphysical considerations from the processes of everyday experience and the consequent elimination of the former, has little to recommend it to Tournier (37). His response to the 'common sense' appeal of subjectivism or any philosophy that presents itself as easily accessible, populist or expressible in the vernacular is characteristically uncompromising: as an adolescent he registered an instinctive taste for 'des chapitres de métaphysiques considérés comme particulièrement coriaces' (VP 44); and later on he argues the case for 'le jargon philosophique dont les niais ont grand tort de se plaindre [...] Tout au plus ces mots de tout le monde donnent-ils au lecteur paresseux l'illusion qu'il a compris d'emblée et qu'il peut s'en aller.' (VP 206) (38)

Furthermore, Tournier's hostility to the subjectivist
enterprise can be understood in terms of the absolute which it posits. On prima facie evidence, subjectivism has little to do with the absolute in terms of the *noumenon* or the *ansich*. For the subjective view, under its various denominations of empiricism, positivism and phenomenology is principally concerned with the response of the individual to the perceived world. It is therefore deeply rooted in the relational aspect of the subject and object, and has produced a number of bald statements about the redundancy or senselessness of the absolute. 'Tout est relatif,' wrote Auguste Comte, 'voilà la seule chose absolue' (39).

However, it soon becomes clear that subjectivism generates its own absolute: the will to subjective certainty. This is demonstrated in phenomenology's attempt to systematically refine the inchoate mass of everyday subjective sensory experience. Everett Hall writes that 'it has been frankly admitted by several phenomenalists that a major desideratum on their part in diverging from ordinary accounts of experience in terms of physical things and events has been the attainment of an empirical basis beyond the touch of doubt' (40).

For Husserl, this is accomplished by a process in which all philosophical presuppositions are shut out; the eradication of everything which transcends everyday experience is deemed to give access to a consciousness that is purified of every possible metaphysical consideration. In
particular, Husserl seeks to purge (his) consciousness of two metaphysical ideas: transcendence and existence, neither of which he regards as 'given' in perceptual experience. However, the rigour of this exercise forces Husserl to retain the metaphysical concept of essence in his consciousness; for having banished existence, essence is the necessary remainder for him to have experience of an object (or 'sense-datum' as he would phrase it). The result of this is that the subject is radically devalorised as it confronts the absolute essence of the object. To summarise, Husserl’s project may now be seen as a rehabilitation of the metaphysical in that which is most concrete. Experience of this fundamental union is described as 'essential intuition' (41) where things and thoughts are reunited in ontological plenitude. This is where Heidegger and Sartre draw on Husserl most, and Tournier recognises Sartre’s perception of this metaphysical union in La Nausée: ‘C’est l’intuition profonde du fond authentique des choses’ (VV 308).

Thus, although at the outset, the valorisation of the subject in the phenomenologist’s enterprise is antithetical to Tournier, the conclusion of Husserl’s philosophy and its continuation in Sartre’s writing may be seen to be of significant interest to Tournier’s own project and his definition of metaphysics. (42)

To start with, Husserlian metaphysics offer an inter-textual reference to Tournier’s frequently reiterated
assertion that 'le propre de la métaphysique, c’est toujours de plonger au cœur même du concret' (VP 45) cryptically – or rather, intra-textually – illustrated with allusions to Novalis, ‘l’ange mécanicien qui mêlait si bien les rêveries métaphysiques et son métier d’ingénieur des mines’ (VP 142), to Verne’s Capitaine Nemo, ‘sombre métaphysicien des abysses’ (VP 220), to the deeply dug grave: ‘C’est un bruit métaphysique ! C’est notre fossoyeur qui creuse une tombe’ (VI 11), or to the roots of a tree, likened to one of the ‘grandes familles humaines: les métaphysiciens’ (VI 103).

Metaphysics thus conceived accords intra-textually with Tournier’s concept of the absolute, not only because he refers to the latter as ‘cette fleur métaphysique’ (VP 299), but also because he insists that it represents ‘le comble de la positivité’ (43), that is to say, the ultimate in concrete reality.

Furthermore, the Husserlian ‘intuition originaire’ which describes an original ontological unity of subject and object corresponds directly to Tournier’s description of a similar primary unity in ‘L’Impersonnalisme’ and in the maîtrise, a unity that is also apprehended ‘dans la certitude métaphysique de l’intuition’ (II 22).

It seems extraordinary that Colin Davis should say that Tournier’s ‘[...] use of the word "métaphysique", for example, suggests his indifference to the problem of metaphysics, which, in the wake of the attacks conducted by
Nietzsche and Heidegger, has played a central role in recent continental thinking.' (44)

On the contrary, it is evident from the above analysis that Tournier's philosophy of the absolute has played a significant, if hitherto unrecognised role, in post-Husserlian philosophy, which takes its place alongside the arguments of Heidegger and Sartre (45).

4. THE SET OF MINDS

In this category, the absolute is regarded as the transcendent synthesis of both subject and object, with mind as the agent of this wholly abstract operation.

It coincides with the philosophy of the German Idealists, (Fichte, Schelling and Hegel in particular) active in the late eighteenth-and early nineteenth-century and with twentieth-century Idealism in England and America, (Bradley, Royce, McTaggart et al.)

The German Idealists enjoy the same confidence in the supreme power of reason as Kant before them, but their chief dissatisfaction with the Kantian system lies in the notion of the noumenon. To these philosophers' way of thinking, there is no room for an unknowable, occult entity, supposed to be independent of the mind, for pure Idealism demands that everything be accessible to thought: in essence, reality has to be regarded in its entirety as a product of thought.
However, it is important to make it clear that 'thought' in this context does not refer to individual human thought; that would simply produce a subjective or solipsistic view of the world. 'Thought' in the Idealist vocabulary refers to a transcendent 'supra-individual intelligence' (46), that is to say, an absolute thinking subject.

The question of how the finite, human mind could relate to this infinite, absolute intelligence is the fundamental basis from which German Idealism operates. And, in brief, the general answer to this problem is to regard the human mind as 'the vehicle of absolute thought reflecting upon itself' (47). Reality is then seen to become the spontaneous and inevitable self-unfolding of the absolute in the finite mind (48).

Certainly there is no trace of the abstractive Idealist metaphysics in Tournier's philosophy. However, the very brief summary of the mutual interpenetration of the Infinite Absolute and the finite individual, given above, has a direct bearing on Tournier's conception of the interpenetration of the primary absolute and the world of autrui and may indicate where Tournier's allegiance to German Idealism lies; for thus far the origins of the dialectical progress towards the realisation of the absolute, expressed in 'L'Impersonnalisme', have remained obscure. Furthermore, Fichte's idea that the dialectic is revealed in instinctive intuition, and Schelling's argument for 'intellectual
intuition' may be seen to be of significance to the Tournierian construct.

Fichte's initial philosophical stance is that of the subjectivist: he argues that Being is made being only through consciousness and that the very act of conceiving Being makes it conditioned and dependent, as opposed to absolute. But he abandons this view in favour of a rational, and then finally intuitive apprehension of Being, in which the ontological primacy of Absolute being is posited. The finite mind is able to communicate intuitively with Being, but can never fully apprehend or understand it (49).

Unlike Fichte, Schelling never abandons the intellectual processes in favour of pure intuition, disliking the inference he draws from Fichte that animals and very young children who know only a natural immediacy of feeling are the inheritors of the Absolute. Schelling feels that the restoration of the primary unity of the infinite and the finite should take place on the higher plane of philosophy, arguing that intellecction had created the problem and therefore intellecction must solve it (50).

In this debate, Tournier appears to move from Schelling to Fichte's position. The maîtrise seeks to apply the concept of 'Intuition Intellectuelle' to the works of Plato, observing its fullest realisation in Parmenides and The Sophist (51). In 'L'Impersonnalisme' too, the dependency upon 'puissance cérébrale' (52) in order for the absolute to be
apprehended is in no doubt. But when Tournier resumes the philosophical argument two decades later, the shift from the cerebral to the instinctive, which coincides with the humanisation of his argument, becomes apparent. For in Tournier's renascent writing, the child and the animal are seen to occupy a privileged position of immediate, instinctive proximity to the absolute. At the same time, there is a repeated devalorisation of the rational, the scientific and generally 'adult' view of the world (53).

The proximity of the child /animal to the absolute may be likened to the second movement of the dismantled cogito in 'L'Impersonnalisme', in which consciousness is still 'attaché au monde par un cordon ombilique ontologique', having not yet acquired the independent and alienated status of the subject. In the more humanised argument of Le Vent Paraclet, this intellectual explanation is replaced by the idea that lack of social conditioning and the fact that they have not been ensnared in the 'réseau relationnel' accounts for this closeness to the absolute (54).

However, it is Rousseau rather than Fichte whom Tournier acknowledges explicitly in this respect. (Emile was published in the year that Fichte was born, and can be seen as an influence on the younger philosopher's development). Tournier's citation of Rousseau's 'hymne à la conscience morale' (VP 285) which, he emphasises, constitutes 'une attaque en règle contre la raison spéculative', appropriately
describes Tournier’s own turning away from the rigorously cerebral to the instinctive route to the absolute:

Conscience, conscience ! Instinct divin, immortelle et céleste voix [...] Grâce au ciel, nous voilà delivrés de tout cet effrayant appareil de philosophie : nous pouvons être hommes sans être savants [...] (VP 286)

For Tournier, the derivation of Rousseau’s conclusion might read: ‘nous pouvons être métaphysiciens sans être savants’.

Undoubtedly, this Rousseauesque concept underlies Tournier’s belief that the metaphysical content of his writing is not devalued (but exalted) when written in a language more suitable for children.

The Romantic-Idealist notion of a self-disclosing absolute / divinity, apprehended in intuition of an either instinctive or intellectual character is repudiated by Hegel; Fichte’s intuition repelled his logical mind and Schelling, he felt, becomes obscure in his intellectual attempt to define the Absolute as the ‘vanishing point of opposites’. He describes Schelling’s conclusion as ‘a night in which all cows are black’ (55).

Hegel’s early theological writings are directed towards themes of alienation and the reconstitution of a lost unity. Love, embodied by Christ, becomes the mediator between the Infinite and the finite. His philosophy reflects the same preoccupations in more secular terms: the duty of philosophy is to act as a mediator between the infinite and the finite also, and so to reconstruct the life of the Absolute.
There is a recognisable similarity between Hegel’s project and that of Tournier. Evidence of a preoccupation with the theme of alienation and the recovery of a lost or fallen unity abounds in Tournier’s writing and has been the subject of a number of critical studies (56). Not all Tournier’s exegetes, however, have identified this theme with its inseparable coefficient: the reconstruction of the life of the absolute. Nor has it been seen how closely Tournier tracks Hegel’s method in this endeavour.

It is difficult to condense Hegel’s argument, but, at the risk of over-simplification the salient points may be contrasted with Tournier’s method.

Hegel’s Absolute is Spirit in the Idealist sense, defined above. More specifically, it represents ‘the infinite self-development of totality. It is a dynamic process of becoming the circle which presupposes its end as its purpose and has its end in its beginning. It becomes concrete or actual only by its development and through its end’ (57). It is as hard to simplify this statement as it is hard to understand. This is no accident: Hegel insists that the Absolute is inaccessible to mere understanding; a level of dialectical thinking has to be achieved in which consciousness and self-consciousness are synthesised in an attempt to transcend the subject-object relationship. Hegel’s Absolute is both Omega and Alpha engaged dialectically, dynamically and eternally in a process of becoming.
Ferdinand Alquié noted the influence of the Hegelian dialectic in 'L'Impersonnalisme'. It emerges from Tournier's dismantling and reconstitution of the Cartesian cogito as the dynamic unfolding of the absolute in autrui and autrui in the absolute:

[...] d'une part, penser, c'est penser le monde, mais d'autre part, toute chose est une chose dans le monde. Il vient donc: je suis une chose dans le monde qui pense le monde. Et le cogito apparaît à son terme dialectique, comme la venue au monde d'une pensée du monde, comme l'acte par lequel le monde s'exprime. (E 59)

Not only does the pattern of the dialectic follow the Hegelian model, it demonstrates Hegel's conclusion that the absolute knows itself in the finitude of human thought, so that 'we can speak therefore of the human mind rising to a participation in the self-knowledge of the Absolute' (58). Thus, for both Hegel and Tournier, the principle by which original ontological unity is splintered is also the principle in which unity is restored; the finite is gathered back into the infinite for Hegel, the subject restored to the object for Tournier.

However, Tournier radically parts company from Hegel when the latter insists on glorifying the human mind that is capable of rising above mere comprehension to the lofty heights of dialectical logic in which the Absolute is 'allowed' to unfold itself in the rare mind that accomplishes this feat, that is to say, his own. Tournier, despite his youthful celebration of his own 'puissance cérébrale' (VP 159) never ventures such an immodest conclusion. Even in
'L'Impersonnalisme', written when this belief in his own intellectual prowess was almost at fever pitch, Tournier's dialectical construction is designed to reveal the reciprocity of the relationship between the absolute and autrui, where neither is the privileged participant. Nor does Tournier distinguish between autrui as philosophical initiate or autrui as philosophical alien. Furthermore, as demonstrated above, Tournier's subsequent writing rejects the philosophical initiate and privileges the child, the clown, the artist, the mythic character or the savage as the natural participants in the life of the absolute. For everyone else, it is a struggle, not to acquire the kind of philosophical baggage which Hegel demands, but to lose it, so that progression towards the absolute is effectively, 'un progrès à rebours' (59). This is how Tournier distinguishes between the acquisition of information on the one hand, and, on the other, availability to wisdom, 'sagesse [...] Sophia, sapientia [...] Weisheit' (VP 283) which is knowledge of, that is to say, participation in, the absolute.

Parabolically, (in the sense that in it functions as a parable), Tournier contrasts the philosopher Aristide Coquebin with the child Mélanie Blanchard. While Mélanie is described as a 'metaphysicienne de génie, [qui] demeurait à l'état sauvage et ne se lèverait jamais jusqu'au verbe' (CB 198), Coquebin expresses himself in verbose and philosophically abstract terms. Mélanie, for example, sees
her garden through different coloured panes of glass and is silently enthralled; Coquebin, however, cannot resist the opportunity to abstract a philosophical construct from her behaviour:

Kant ! pensa-t-il. Les formes a priori de la sensibilité ! Elle a découvert à l'âge de dix ans, sans le savoir, ni le vouloir, l'essentiel de la philosophie transcendentale ! (CB 196).

Coquebin's abstract cast of mind places him at the furthest remove from the concrete, metaphysical world of the absolute, and when Melanie dies laughing, he cannot see that her laughter is the inevitable accompaniment of the deepest intuition of the absolute (60), but attempts to apply a Bergsonian interpretation of the theory of laughter.

Hegel did not have the last word on the Idealist Absolute. The end of the nineteenth and beginning of the twentieth century witnessed a major re-evaluation of the Hegelian Absolute by the British and American schools of Idealism. Just as Tournier refuses to accept the valorisation of the highly tuned intellect communing with the Absolute, it was generally thought that Hegel's Absolute 'swamped' the finite individual, whose position they set out to rescue. In Appearance and Reality, F.H. Bradley seems to adopt Schelling's approach in his reassessment of the absolute. Here, Bradley argues that 'immediate experience' adumbrates the the possibility and nature of a pre-reflective, pre-subjective world that exists in the mind
before the acquisition and application of speech and judgement. Subject and object are undifferentiated and there is diversity without numerical plurality (61). However, beyond this, Bradley can say little more, since, as A.J.Ayer points out, 'any limited description, which abstracted only a part of it would be false to its nature' (62). The only thing that Bradley can insist on without falsifying the absolute is that because experience of the relational world of subject and object is full of contradictions, the pre-reflective world must be harmonious in its wholeness.

Tournier envisages a harmonious absolute also, but not in the manner of Bradley. For Tournier, the pre-reflective world of the primary absolute is an undifferentiated, inchoate potential seeking the 'paix intérieure' of rational self-expression through a dialectical participation in autrui:

Nous voyons donc que le cogito se définit comme le retour au monde à l'harmonie rationelle, par l'éjaculation d'une erreur, l'Autrui [...] (E 66)

The difficulties and confusions that arise in Absolute Idealism stem from the crucial tenet that the world of perceptual experience is merely phenomenal and must be contrasted with an infinite reality that contains it. It seems that an initial faith in this infinite reality is required, as well as a faith in the power of the intellect to make any sense of it at all. The alternative is to posit intuition, but then infinite reality cannot be described.
But for those who, like Tournier, see metaphysics as a natural disposition of the mind, the self-unfolding of the Absolute is neither beyond thought nor denies thought; it simply has to be listened to.

5. THE SET OF ABSTRACT UNIVERSALS

The theory of Universals argues that particular objects and their attributes are but instantiations of an abstract entity. The Realist theory (63) stands in direct opposition to the preceding category in that it holds that the absolute is mind-independent, which is to say that a mindless world would not lack universals, only an awareness of them. The ontology generated by this position is complex, as it proposes to relate an ontologically superior abstract realm of essences (which incorporates the possibility of non-being) to the ontologically inferior, concrete world of appearances.

The Heraclitan doctrine holds that the world is in a constant state of flux ('we never enter twice into the same river'), so that things cannot be only be described in terms of what they were or are becoming. Parmenides takes this argument one step further, and concludes that, if this is the case, then nothing in the world can truly be said to be. The only thing that can truly be said to be is Being itself, and thus the concept of the independent universal is raised. Being, which Parmenides terms 'the One', alone is timeless, tenseless and complete; it is the principle of unity in a
world of change and flux. If anything is, then it must have come from Being. That which is not comes from Non-Being. This much is known from the remaining fragments of Parmenides' verses; in Plato's dialogue named after the same philosopher, we see this principle of ontology worked into Plato's later thought on the theory of Forms, adumbrated in the earlier Republic. In Parmenides, the One may be seen as the unifying principle behind the world of perfect forms. Copleston writes:

Plato is clearly working towards the conception of the Absolute, the absolutely perfect and exemplary Pattern of all things, the ultimate ontological principle (64)

This view is supported by Wahl who writes that 'dans le Parménide, ce n’est plus seulement le juste et le beau [...] ce n’est plus seulement l’amour ou la science qui sont mis en question, c’est l’Être même.’ (65)

Nevertheless, the question of what Being is, or how it participates in the world of change is never fully resolved in Parmenides. Instead Plato presents what is, at first sight, a bewildering collection of antimonies, which either raise questions which cannot be solved, or posit an Absolute which lies beyond the powers of human imagination. As Wahl says, ‘ce n’est plus le jeu de quelqu’un qui sait mais de quelqu’un qui ignore.’ (66)

Tournier's maitrise is an attempt to come to terms with Plato's pursuit of ontological truth, which, as was demonstrated in the last chapter, is equated with the
absolute. The 'merveille de subtilité ontologique' (VP 89) which he discerns in the eight hypotheses of the second part of Parmenides is translated into his own concept of the absolute.

The first hypothesis posits the One as Being that is timeless, motionless and spaceless. Yet, as it emerges in the dialogue, although it is perfectly possible to posit this One, it is quite impossible to imagine it. This is a negative start, similar to the negative basis from which Tournier proceeds in his explicit references to the absolute, and so, in the second hypothesis, Plato proposes a One that is, in a positive sense. Now, however, it must be endowed with a spatio-temporal dimension, which abolishes the possibility of it being one in the same place at the same time. The third hypothesis therefore envisages the One as the continual exchange of the first two hypotheses which thus constitutes the unity which encloses contradictory concepts. Wahl infers from this that the One of the third hypothesis exists in 'une sorte de trou dans le temps qu’est l’instant' (67). The ontology of this hypothesis comes very close to the ontology of the Tournierian absolute: the absolute is brought into being in a reciprocal exchange of opposites, a similar, though simpler dialectic than that proposed by the Hegelian model. The temporality generated in this exchange, the eternal moment, is illustrated in the description of Speranza, 'expression géographique de l’absolu' (VP 299):
Speranza vibrait dans un présent perpétuel, sans passé, ni avenir. (V 246)

The remaining hypotheses introduce the notion of the other and absolute non-being and play upon the antinomies of the first three hypotheses to produce an increasingly complex medley of ontological suppositions and questions.

However, just as Tournier is unwilling to engage in a response to the Sartrean 'néant' in 'L'Impersonnalisme', here also, Tournier's ontology of the absolute does not confront the dynamically opposed possibility of absolute nothingness. Perhaps this is because Tournier so wholeheartedly embraces positive metaphysics; to posit a negative, to argue the case for the abstract, would completely undermine and invalidate the absolute he has adopted as his own.

The Platonic concept of *Universalia ante rem* (universals independent of particulars) is challenged by the Aristotelian theory of *Universalia in rebus* (universals in particulars). Aristotle does not consider there to be a dichotomy between Being and existence as Plato does; Being is in being, just as the quality of redness is in something red and not extraneous to it. That is not to say that the universal is grasped through the senses; Aristotle concurs with Plato that it is grasped through the intellect. Thus a child learning that two plus two equals four appreciates this by observing concrete objects. From this experience, the child learns that the sum is necessarily true for any two pairs of objects, and thence
conclude that it is a necessary abstract fact. Thus the universal may be intuited in the particular, the necessary in the matter of fact. Being, for example, is a necessary condition that is learned through existence.

While the Tournierian theory of the absolute appreciates the concrete, object-grounded basis of Aristotle's philosophy, it diverges strongly from the abstract derivations of the thesis. In fact, in Tournier's view, the object world seemingly conspires against the learning subject's desire to see the universal in the particular:

\[ 3 + 6 = 9. \text{ Sans doute, mais à des conditions bien particulières ! A condition par exemple, qu'il ne s'agisse pas de trois matous et de six chattes, car celles-ci mettant bas chacune 4 petits au bout de six semaines, l'équation devient } 3 + 6 = 9 \text{ (chats adultes) + 24 (chatons) = 33. Ou encore s'il s'agit de blocs de glace posés au soleil : } 3 + 6 = 0. \text{ Il serait facile d'accumuler des exemples aboutissant à des résultats toujours différents.} \ (VP 46)

The ontological question is an awkward one in the philosophy of universals, and is largely avoided in the conceptualist and nominalist approach (68). On the other hand, later realists, such as Jaspers have pursued the same question of whether being-in-itself can be instantiated in the world of particulars, but have refused to give it ontological status; rather it may be seen to have an epistemological aspect:

For naïve metaphysicians, seeking direct possession of intrinsic being, being-in-itself comes first; but it can only be populated with conceptions from the objective world [...] - objective being has precedence for all cognition, because objects alone are knowable [...] To analyse existence is to analyse consciousness. (69)
Again, however, it must be concluded that this approach is invalid in Tournier’s construct; the elimination of the subject-object division is the foundation of the ontology of the Tournierian absolute.

6. THE DIVINITY

It will be evident from the foregoing categories, with the possible exception of the second, that the title of ‘God’ could be applied to the various descriptions of the absolute contained therein. God, in the Cartesian construct is equated with the ‘absolute conception’ of reality; German Idealism, it has been noted, tends to confuse the Absolute with the divinity, and neo-Platonists have found much in Plato’s Ideal to compare with the notion of the Christian creator God.

Gustave Mueller makes the distinction between the philosophical absolute and the theological divinity thus:

The Absolute of philosophy is called ‘God’ when it is affirmed in faith and worshipped in a religious perspective. (71)

In a similar vein, Klaus Hartmann writes:

Taken in this way, the Absolute calls on us to live up to its demands, inducing in us a striving to overcome otherness between man and man or between man and the One. (72)

The term ‘religion’ is etymologically dependent upon the notion of being ‘brought back’ to something by a fundamental bond. Mueller explains that ‘all nations [...] are agreed on
relating themselves back to an absolute world-ground [...] this source of existence is responded to in gratitude and awe. 'Religio' literally means "back-tie" ' (73)

In these general terms, the Tournierian absolute, as it is described in *Le Vent Paraclet* as opposed to 'L'Impersonnalisme', may be equated with the divinity. There is an unmistakeable sense of an ethical appeal ('il faut [...] il faut') (74) in Tournier’s thesis, reminiscent of Hartmann’s description of the divine absolute, quoted above; Tournier describes his experience of the absolute in a crowded commuter train at the end of the working day:

> Or mes soucis et ma fatigue ne sont pas moindres, mais moi, dans la masse humaine compacte qui oscille au gré des accélérations et décélérations du train, j'ai découvert un visage ravissant, et mon regard se pose sur lui comme un oiseau dans un arbre de fraîcheur. Dans cette atmosphère close et empuantie, j'ai trouvé cette infime et vivante oasis [...] Il faut aller plus loin que cette dédramatisation que souhaitait Cocteau. Il faut aller jusqu'à une atomisation de l'absolu. Il faut faire droit à la revendication de chaque être, de chaque chose qui crie - d'une voix souvent imperceptible - pour être reconnu comme absolu. (VP 298)

Nevertheless, although Tournier’s appeal may contain a moral imperative, the evidence of his attitude to religion is that it generates its own ‘réseau relationnel’ which blocks rather than beckons the absolute. Amongst those who ‘se veulent dupes de la cohérence, de la fermeté, de la consistance dont la société pare le réel’ (VP 198), Tournier specifically counts ‘[des] hommes [...] de religion’ (VP 198).

Tournier’s admiration is not reserved for the Church, but for the theosophists, whose pursuit of the divinity
places them closer to philosophy than religion. In particular, Saint Anselm, Spinoza and Leibniz have exerted an influence on his own philosophical development.

The Ontological Argument, attributed to St Anselm, may be seen as further evidence of Tournier's insistence that 'le propre de la métaphysique [...] c’est toujours de plonger au coeur même du concret' (VP 45): The argument turns on the idea that the notion of an absolute or perfect Being implies the existence of that being, because it would be neither perfect nor absolute if it lacked existence. Tournier's interpretation of this argument points out the dual operation of material logic and mystical intuition which is thus engendered:

Si je dis que Dieu existe parce que par définition son essence enveloppe son existence [...] En effet j’accomplis l’acte métaphysique par excellence, lequel originellement indivis se scinde à mon contact en une opération de logique matérielle et une intuition mystique. L’opération logique pose l’existence comme l’un des attributs quelconques de l’essence, thèse paradoxale, générateur de polémiques et de recherches d’une extraordinaire fécondité. Mais en même temps j’acquiers une vision directe, immédiate de l’intimité de Dieu [...] (VP 45)

This duality of expression refers intra-textually to the 'Intuition Intellectuelle' which Tournier perceives to lie at the core of the Platonic approach to the absolute (75). It also may be seen to represent the dualism identified in 'L’Impersonnalisme' and Le Vent Paraclet, in which the earlier text exhibits the chiefly intellectual, logical route to, and experience of, the absolute, whereas the later text
reveals the profoundly intuitive experience and expression of
the same.

Spinoza believes that the first principle of philosophy
should be to examine the nature of Divine Being. Thereafter,
the philosopher can work his way down the hierarchical scale
of being, ending with sense-objects. This can be seen in the
way that he sets out the Ethics, in which the first part is
entitled 'Concerning God', and the subsequent parts treat of
man and the world in which he exists. In taking this
approach, Spinoza differs radically from the Scholastics
for although they affirm the existence of God as their
first article of faith, they proceed, following the
Aristotelian model, to 'prove' the divine existence by basing
their observations on man and his relation to sense-objects.

The problem of how man or minds may relate to the
supreme principle of being is answered in Spinoza's first
Definition: if Being is One and whole (which it must be) it
would be illogical to suppose existence occurring outside it.
Beings, or existents must be contained within Being, they are
finite 'modes' of infinite Being. This also answers the
question of how the finite may know the infinite - they know
it intuitively because they are a part of it. However,
intuition of Being is only the last step which the finite
mind is able to take in his ascent towards true knowledge.
Spinoza's epistemology is closely modelled on that of Plato;
he envisages three stages of knowledge by which the finite
mind may rise to knowledge of the absolute (76). The first stage comprises knowledge via sense-perception which is practical, but inadequate for the discovery of truth. The second stage comprises scientific reason which is adequate for the discovery of truth, but it is only in the third stage of intuition that the truths learned in the second stage are learned to be truths about God. There is no mystical leap between the second and third stages; Spinoza takes after Descartes in his reliance upon the faculty of reason and the clear-sightedness of his method. Almost in anticipation of Hegel's dialectic, Spinoza concludes that the absolute manifests itself to the human mind which is able to ratiocinate itself as a part of the absolute, and, in so doing, confirm both its own existence and the existence of God. This is why the philosophical argument is called Ethics; for to act in accordance with reason is to simultaneously to know God and act out God's substance.

Tournier acknowledges without reserve his debt to the Ethics, '[][ ...] à mes yeux [][] le livre le plus important qui existe après les Evangiles' (VP 235) and concurs that 'seule la connaissance du troisième genre livre l'absolu dans une intuition de son essence' (VP 235). But it is above all the ethical impact of Spinoza's argument, discerned also in Plato's precursory epistemology, which appeals to Tournier;

Pourment la sagesse antique s'est portée gaillardement jusqu'aux plus beaux jours de l'Ancien Régime. Pour nous borner à l'exemple le plus grand, Spinoza [...]
identifiait idée claire et distincte à action. [...] Tout naturellement il intitule son grand traité de métaphysique Ethique. Le sage, y lit-on, c'est l'homme vivant sous la conduite de la raison [...] Agir absolument par vertu n'est pas autre chose qu'agir sous la conduite de la raison (VP 285)

The pursuit of the absolute is thus ethically justified by extra-textual reference to Spinoza; its aesthetic justification is confirmed by Leibniz.

It has previously been noted (77) that the non-referentiality of the absolute logically supposes a non-referential aesthetic. Where no subjective comparison may be made, beauty re-emerges as 'la chose du monde la plus répandue' (VP 297).

Leinizian Monadology also works on the principle of isolation, where subject and object, cause and effect, are replaced by a concept of harmoniously synchronised individual entities. No two entities or monads are the same, but the monad which exhibits the most difference from all others is God. God sets the synchronised monads in motion which develops into an intricate pattern which may be described variously as relationships, history or science. Tournier's response to the aesthetic quality of Leibniz's theory is unmistakeable; he compares the Monadology to the co-ordinated Gesamtkunstwerk of 'ces gracieuses églises souabes ou autrichiennes tout en stucatures bleues, blanches et roses' decorated with garlanded putti and angels, which surround the dancing figures of saints. (VP 29)
7. **Nothing is absolute in and by itself, on the grounds that equally different accounts of the whole can be constructed using different assumptions about what is absolute.**

This is the sceptical conclusion which may, however, appear to be the logical one at the end of this examination of the five foregoing categories of the absolute. But it is a conclusion which also posits the triumph of the finite mind over infinite consciousness, and the valorisation of the subject over the world of the object. Kierkegaard identifies the philosopher's task at its highest level as a constant struggle against the finite subject's will to dominate or discard the absolute within himself (78), a philosophical, if not moral, imperative to which Tournier would readily accede.

The question of choice, however, is important to Tournier: a choice that has constantly to be made between capitulation to the inauthentic viewpoint of the subject, reinforced by social conditioning, or acceptance of the 'progrès à rebours' in which the subjective, social perspective is cast off until apprehension acquires the immediacy of intuition, naturally present in the 'sage-sauvage'.

Submission to the absolute is not necessarily a painful or humiliating process however; Tournier contrasts the metaphysicians 'qui-cherchent-en-gémissant' with 'ceux-qui-cherchent-en riant' (79). Into this latter category he places
himself, aligning his philosophy with a Nietzschean 'fröhliche Wissenschaft', wherein submission to the absolute represents a joyful acceptance of the chaos and beauty of life itself. Tournier cites Nietzsche's celebrated phrase: 'Il faut avoir un chaos en soi-même pour accoucher d'une étoile qui danse' (VP 200), thus underlining the creative potential of the participation between the world-in-itself and autrui.

* * *

8. CONCLUSION

The analysis above has attempted to elucidate the philosophical ancestry of Tournier's absolute. As we have seen, the gene pool from which his own creation is drawn is astonishingly rich and varied: Plato's ontology, Spinoza's epistemology and ethics, Sartre's objectité, Kant's noumenon, Hegelian dialectic, Leibnizian harmony, St Anselm's logic, Nietzschean joy and Heideggerian wonder all contribute to its formation.

The metaphor of the gene is appropriate; genes may be either dominant or regressive, some showing more strongly in the offspring than others which are concealed in the structure of the organism; and where genetic determination passes into the psychology of family associations in which antagonism, indebtedness and the desire for self-assertion are exhibited, Tournier's own philosophical genetic make up
and psychological relationships may be discerned.

Indeed, when Tournier singles out Plato, Spinoza and Heidegger as his mentors en route to his own conception of the absolute (‘Dans ma recherche de l’absolu, j’ai passé nécessairement par Platon, Spinoza, Heidegger […]’ (CJV 58) he indicates the increasing dominance of positivity in the genetic structure of his philosophy. For in the respective philosophies of this triarchy a progression may be seen in the location of the absolute in the ‘real’ world of objects, as opposed to the ‘ideal’ world of thought.

The concept of progression (‘j’ai passé par […]’) in the Tournierian construct should not be overlooked; for while Tournier is demonstrably fond of and grateful to his large philosophical family, he is equally determined that his creation should not be regarded as a vast and static synthesis of their genetic input. Indeed, it would be a nonsense to try to propose a synthetic description of the Tournierian absolute from the foregoing analysis. Tournier’s philosophy is the progression of a nomad; his inheritance is, by his own will, reduced to the bare essentials of the vagabond’s bundle: a ‘philosophie de disette’ (VP 296) (80).

Tournier’s restless journey as a nomad-philosopher who alights here and there but never stops for long represents his own method of engaging in the Kierkegaardian struggle against the dominance of the subjective view, the blinding
trap of the 'voile gris', which besets the 'sédentaire':

[...] si on reste chez soi, l'habitude et la paresse couvrent les choses et les gens d'un voile gris, on ne sent plus rien, on ne voit plus rien, on ne pense plus rien. (VP 270)

However, although a synthesis of the nomad's philosophy is both unnecessary and impossible, its literary manifestations left in its passage expand and illuminate the densely distilled philosophical residue. In Tournier's literary discourse, a significant trace of his theory is to be found in certain landscapes, which is the subject of the next chapter.

NOTES
Part II

1. Einstein argues that reality is, of necessity, relative, and utterly dependent upon the subjective view. What classical (Newtonian) physics describes as 'the property of an object' has to be re-evaluated as 'the relationship between object and subjective observer' in the light of Einstein's theory. But far from denying the absolute as contemporary positivists were pleased to do, it raised the possibility, if not the necessity of an absolute world in the minds of many scientists, who perhaps because of conditioning by Newtonian physics, expected to find an opposite of equal force to any given physical proposition. Minkowsky, for example, postulates an absolute world that emerges in the dialectical principle of the mutual interpenetration of absolute space and absolute time and absolute matter and absolute energy. As Jonathan Powers writes, '[...] the least satisfactory feature of The Special Theory of Relativity is its name! It could, with equal justification but rather different implications, be called 'The Theory of the Absolute World' (Philosophy and the New Physics, Ch. 3, The absolute world, p.100). Perhaps the most conclusive 'evidence' of the presence of an absolute world is presented by quantum physicists, such as Bohr and Schrödinger. Bohr postulated that electrons spinning
around the nucleus of an atom moved in orbits and jumped from one orbit to another. They could not stay in their orbits as Rutherford had envisaged, because as they whizzed round they would emit energy into space, and — according to classical physics — give up all their energy and crash into the nucleus every millisecond. As Powers writes, ' [...] given that matter has existed in a stable condition for some thousands of millions of years, the disagreement of theory with observation is rather striking' (opus cit. p.129). Bohr's theory of jumping electrons, emitting a quantum of radiated energy each time they jump, answers Rutherford’s problem satisfactorily. However, experiments to test this theory reveal that the quantum jump is discontinuous, that is to say that a single electron is in two orbits simultaneously: a complete violation of the spatio-temporal continuity which seems an utterly indispensable feature of any object. (Details of these experiments are given in Powers, opus cit., pp.130-8). Schrödinger provides a graphic example of the physical conundrum that Bohr's theory provokes. Schrödinger envisaged a cat, shut in a box with a capsule of poison gas that would be triggered by the release of a particle of radiant energy which happens every time an electron jumps from one orbit to another. The trigger would be connected (somehow) to an electron. Because, in Bohr’s theory the electron is in two orbits at the same time, it is simultaneously releasing and not releasing a quantum of radiation, therefore the trigger would be simultaneously activated and not activated. The macabre conclusion is that the cat is both dead and not-dead at the same time.

The implication of this is that the most fundamental 'building blocks' of the physical world are both present and not present, observable and beyond perception, material and immaterial, positive and negative. It is as though the final conundrum of the last hypothesis in Plato’s Parmenides has found its ultimate resolution in twentieth century physics: 'Then let us say that [...] whether the one is or is not, the one and the others in in relation to themselves and to each other all in every way are and are not and appear and do not appear. "Very true." ' (Plato, Parmenides, p.331)

N.B. The length of this footnote suggests that it should have been incorporated into the main body of the text, but in my estimation it would have unsatisfactorily interrupted the argument, which seeks to elucidate Tournier’s relationship with philosophy rather than with science.

2. The very brief summary of just one aspect of research in the field of quantum physics given in the note above may
be seen to be of some relevance to the Tournierian absolute described in 'L'Impersonnalisme', in terms of 1. the inadequacy of the subjective view as measure of the world, 2. the postulation of an absolute world, identical in every way to the known world, except for the fundamental difference that it is unknowable, 3. the emergence of a dialectical relationship between the known and the unknowable.

Given that some of the most exciting discoveries of physics occurred in Europe during the 1920's, 30's and 40's, when Tournier was growing up and attending university (1943-9), it seems incredible that he should have such a dismissive attitude towards physics. Classical physics, certainly, may be answerable to Tournier's charge of trying to conceal the absolute under a mask of inauthentic, subjective knowledge (VP 157, 199), but Tournier has no excuse for including the quantum physicists of his own academic generation in his general damnation of science and scientists.

3. Lalande, Vocabulaire Technique et Critique de la Philosophie p.7.
5. The island continent, e.g. Australia, is not included as its size negates the pervasive marine influence of the smaller island.
7. This has been adequately summarised under the editorial supervision of J. Ritter in the Historisches Worterbuch der Philosophie and by André Lalande (et al.), opus cit.
8. Findlay, opus cit., p.19
9. Ibid.
10. Karelis, Hegel's Introduction to Aesthetics pp. xiii-xiv. Findlay also sets out five categories of concepts held to be absolute but the distinctions are set out with less clarity and concision than Karelis's itemisation.
12. Barnes, The Pre-Socratic Philosophers p.371. I have given a simplified version; Barnes quotes Plutarch's version of Democritus's celebrated saying: 'By convention (nomoi) is colour and by convention sweet and by convention [every] combination (sunkrisin), [but in reality (ete ei) the
void and atoms]


15. Ibid.

16. See p. 34 of the present study.

17. These are the abbreviated titles of respectively, Discours de la Méthode pour bien conduire sa raison et chercher la vérité dans les sciences and Les Méditations.

18. See McGinn, opus cit., pp.73-109, 'On the ineliminability of the subjective view'.

19. Williams, Descartes, the project of pure enquiry, p.66

20. See note 18.

21. See pp. 33-4 of the present study.

22. See Williams, opus cit., p.67.

23. 'L’Impersonnalisme', pp. 58-9

24. Danto, Sartre, p.54

25. Pre-eminently Liebmann, Lange and Vvedensky.


27. Tournier’s phrase, ‘la notion de l’absolu’ refers in this instance to what I have described as as Tournier’s concept of the primary absolute.


29. Steiner, Heidegger, p.64

30. Steiner, opus cit., p.71

31. Heidegger believes that the relationship of man to the world-in-itself is one of responsibility because of the dialectical answerability of one to the other. See Steiner, opus cit., pp. 89-93

32. See Chapter 4 of this thesis for discussion of the role of absolute languages in Tournier’s writing.
33. Interview with Michael Worton for BBC Radio 3 12.11.1983

34. I compare La Nausée with Vendredi at greater length in Chapter 8 of the present study. See Also Davis, Michel Tournier, Philosophy and Fiction, p.22

35. Bosanquet, opus cit., p.7


37. For Tournier, the metaphysical world is an unalienable part of the everyday, apprehensible world, in that they are bound together in the ontological dialectic of the fourth movement of the 'drame cartésien'.

38. Tournier's own desire as a writer is to be as accessible to as wide and as young a readership as possible, and consequent adoption of an easily intelligible, (if heavily loaded) language, might seem to be at odds with this statement which valorises the technical aspects and vocabulary of philosophical writing. However, it is precisely this philosophically non-technical language which Tournier employs in his fictions. The distinction occurs in that technical language is appropriate to non-fiction and non-technical language to fiction. The 'trick', as Tournier sees it, is to produce a literary discourse which reverberates with the echoes of a philosophical discourse.

39. Comte, Ecrits de Jeunesse, p.71

40. Hall, Philosophical Systems: a categorical analysis, p.104

41. Husserl, Ideas, p.55

42. See note 37.

43. Le Débat, No.33, janvier 1985, p.97

44. Davis, opus cit., p.3

45. This may be stating Tournier's case too strongly, but it cannot be over-emphasized that Tournier's 'recherche de l'absolu' is a metaphysical concern, in which the concept of metaphysics is radically re-evaluated in a non-Idealist context through its dialectical inseparability from the concrete world of autrui. In this sense, Tournier may be justifiably identified with Nietzsche, Heidegger and Sartre, who have not so much conducted 'attacks' on metaphysics as sought to rehabilitate metaphysical
concerns within the conceptual framework of existence rather than essence.

47. Copleston, *opus cit.*, p.21

49. This extremely condensed resumé of Fichte's thought is derived from Fichte's own severely condensed summary of his *Wissenschaftslehre*, (*Die Wissenschaftslehre in ihrem allgemeinen Umriß*), translated by W. Smith in *The Popular Works of Johann Gottlieb Fichte*, pp. 78-93.

50. I am again indebted to Copleston for his lucid commentaries on Schelling's philosophy; in particular where he comments: 'It can hardly be claimed [...] that Schelling makes the relation between the finite and the infinite, between the Absolute in itself and its self-manifestation, crystal clear [...] Schelling wishes to make a distinction between the unchanging Absolute in itself and the world of finite, particular things. But at the same time he wishes to maintain that the Absolute is the all comprehensive reality.' *Opus cit.*, Vol VII, p.108

51. See Chapter 1, p.24 of the present study.

52. See the concluding lines of Tournier's argument (*Espace* p.66), which describe 'l'histoire de la pensée' as 'les démarches successives du monde en quête d'une organisation intérieure, d'une logique toujours plus exquise.'

53. See, for example, *GMB*, 159-74, 'L'âne et le boeuf', where animals are the privileged witnesses of the birth of Christ; *VP* 276 and 286, where Tournier follows Bergson in his belief that 'le mutisme de la bête est plus proche du silence du Dieu que la parole humaine'; *V* 171, where Robinson explains Vendredi's complicity with the animal world; *VP* 38 where children's attraction to the subversive function of the red clown is described; *VP* 157-8 where science is denigrated.

54. It is a child, for example, who shouts out that the emperor is naked.


56. See in particular, A. Bouloumié, *Michel Tournier, Le Roman Mythologique*, C Davis, *opus cit.*, and F. Merllié,
Michel Tournier.


59. See M. Worton, 'Myth-reference in *Le Roi des Aulnes*’ p.310, for the first use of this term to describe an aspect of Tournier’s mythopoeic writing; Worton derives this useful epithet from RA 106, ‘Il est bien caractéristique de notre temps que le progrès se fasse désormais à rebours.’

60. C.f. *VP* 198. See also Chapter 5 of the present study, ‘Laughter and the absolute’.


63. The theory of Universals contains the sister theories of Realism and Conceptualism. Both hold that ultimate reality is located outside the particular, but differ in that Realism holds this to be a mind-independent reality, whereas Conceptualism argues that universals are a function of language, uttered by particulars and seek to elucidate the relationship between language and its objects.

64. Copleston, *opus cit.* Vol I, pp. 176-7


66. Wahl, *opus cit.*, p.74


68. See note 63. Nominalism is an extreme form of conceptualism which maintains that reality is entirely a product of language.


70. Jaspers, *Philosophical Faith and Revelation*, p.75


72. See *Studies in the philosophy of JN Findlay*, (Cohen ed.) p.278
73. Mueller, *opus cit.*, p.45
74. See VP 298
75. See Chapter 1, pp. 24-5 of the present study
76. C.f. VP 235
77. See Chapter 1, p.42 of the present study.
78. See Kierkegaard, *Either/Or*, *passim*.
79. See VP 158-9 and 200, also CJV 127-8.
80. See Davis, *opus cit.*, 'Between Synthesis and Scarcity' for an unsympathetic critique of Tournier's process of distilling his enormous philosophical inheritance.
PART II

THEMATIC AND STRUCTURAL MANIFESTATIONS
CHAPTER THREE

ISLANDS, GARDENS AND TREES : THE LANDSCAPE OF THE ABSOLUTE

'tout est verdoyant, frais, vigoureux, et la main du jardinier ne se montre point; rien ne dement l'idée d'une ile déserte' (Rousseau, Julie ou la Nouvelle Héloïse, p.400)

1. INTRODUCTION

Every garden is an island; detached from the outside world and defined by its boundaries (1), it asserts autonomy and independence, whether natural or artificial, as much as its complicity with its one principle inhabitant, the gardener. Tournier’s complicity with his own quarter-hectare is evident; no visit to the presbytery at Choisel is complete without a guided tour of the garden.

Tournier’s garden is entirely dominated by trees. The last remaining flower, (if one ignores the colourful tubs and window-boxes which are more properly a part of the house than the garden), a rambling rose which covered the cemetery wall, was removed by Tournier himself, not long ago. When Tournier talks about his garden, it is clear that his affection for his trees predominates:

J'ai un jardin qui compte énormément pour moi. Et dès que je m'en vais, je pense à mon jardin avec tristesse parce que j'ai l'impression que je ne peux pas me passer de lui et qu'il ne peut pas se passer de moi, et ce jardin a de très beaux arbres : trois tilleuls, trois pins parasols, trois sapins, un marronnier et d'innombrables arbres moins considérables. Je les regarde, je vis avec eux, ça fait vraiment partie de ma
It could be argued that Tournier shares Le Nôtre's sentiment that 'flowers are for nursery-maids', preferring the more masculine austerity of upright pines or sturdy limes and chestnuts (3). In winter especially, the austere silhouettes of the pines clustered around a single silver birch are evocative of the landscapes of northern Canada and north-eastern Europe, affectionately described in *Le Vent Paraclet* and *Le Roi des Aulnes* (4).

However, although a visit to Tournier's garden may yield some insight into the importance of the tree in Tournier's private landscape, the measured complexity of the Tournierian philosophy of the island-garden and its vegetal autochthon, the tree, as privileged locus of the absolute may better be discerned in his writing. It is the purpose of this chapter to elucidate Tournier's concept of the island-garden in the following ways:

1. As a geographical illustration of the ontology of alienation.
2. As a dialectic of change / immutability
3. As a representation of the creativity - fertility of the dialectic
4. The tree as metaphor for the dialectic of the absolute.

* * *

The closing pages of *Le Vent Paraclet* explicitly address the nature of the relationship between the absolute and the
island-garden (5). However, as demonstrated in the previous chapter, Tournierian explicitness must be read against textual implicitness; a parallel reading of 'L'Impersonnalisme' for the philosophical justification of this association, together with mirror texts from a comprehensive range of Tournier's novels and short stories for a literary exegesis of the relationship, are indispensable in this particular 'jeu spéculaire'.

2. THE ISLAND-GARDEN AND THE ONTOLOGY OF ALIENATION.

When the hero of Rousseau’s La Nouvelle Héloïse enters Julie’s garden, ‘l’Elysée’, for the first time, he immediately exclaims: ‘O Tynian! O Juan Fernandez!’ (6). Saint-Preux refers to the desert islands in South Pacific, off the Chilean coast, described by Captain Anson (whom Rousseau had read), and made famous by Alexander Selkirk’s abandonment there earlier in the eighteenth century (7).

The conceit behind Saint-Preux’s exclamation which draws together the desert island and the enclosed garden is based upon their mutual alienation from society and the apparent absence of cultivation (8) which has nevertheless produced a lush and delightful abundance of flora and fauna, giving the impression of a pre-Adamic Paradise:

[... ] je fus frappé d’une agréable sensation de fraîcheur que d’obscur ombrages, une verdure animée et vive, des fleurs éparses de tous côtés, un gazouillement d’eau courante, et le chant de mille oiseaux portèrent à mon imagination du moins autant qu’à mes sens; mais en même temps je crus voir le lieu le plus sauvage, le plus
solitaire de la nature, et il me semblait d'être le premier mortel qui jamais eût pénétré dans ce désert. (9)

Saint-Preux's reaction evidently reflects Rousseau's forceful preoccupation with the corrupting influence of society upon an inherently good and flourishing natural world (10). The enclosed garden, likened to both the island and the Garden of Eden, represents the positive effects of alienation from the outside, social world.

The association between islands and gardens, however, far precedes Rousseau. In etymological terms, both words are derived by reference to their boundaries. Garden /jardin (as also girth and yard) are derived from the Sanskrit gerdh, meaning a boundary wall (12). Island /île, from the Latin insula, means a detached piece of land or building; detachment implies a boundary also, whether natural or artificial. In this sense, the 'first' garden, Eden, is an island, planted oasis-like in the desert. This is emphasized in 'La Famille Adam', in which Tournier attributes walls to Eden and describes Cain absorbing his mother's memories of the garden which appears to his imagination as a magical island (CB 15).

In Greek myth, the significance of the garden lies also in its insularity and its ability to flourish in the absence of cultivation. The garden of the Hesperides is pictured as an island at the end of the world, untended, yet producing 'the rich golden apples' given by Hera to Zeus, and the
garden of King Midas is said to contain roses that 'grow of themselves, each bearing sixty blossoms and of surpassing fragrance' (13).

The tradition is perpetuated in medieval literature, where enclosed gardens appear as the magical location of romance or spiritual experience. In Chrétien de Troyes's Erec et Enide there is a magic garden, protected by a spell which acts as an enclosure (14). Flowers and fruit grow all the year round, herbs and spices grow in abundance, and birds fill the trees, but there is no gardener. The Edenic garden in Lorris’s Roman de la Rose is surrounded by a 'haut mur bataillie' (15), and the garden described in the introduction to the Third Day of Boccacio's Decameron is similarly a high-walled enclosure filled with a natural abundance of flourishing flora and fauna (16).

Renaissance literature and garden design forgoes the concept of the naturally occurring paradise in favour of artificial construction, but preserves the notion of insularity by creating secret, internal gardens within gardens. Rabelais’s Abbaye de Thélème is typical: 'Jouxte la rivière estoit le beau jardin de plaisance; au milieu d'iceluy, le beau labyrinte' (17). Sir Francis Bacon’s 'ideal garden' is a park of some thirty acres, with a secluded garden at its centre, isolated from its surrounds by 'a stately arched hedge' (18).

It could be argued that Rousseau’s vision of the
isolated, naturally flourishing garden, reminiscent of Eden, looks back to the magical gardens of medieval literature rather than to the early eighteenth century landscapers' reaction to Renaissance formality, which is more frequently accredited to the formation of Rousseau's outlook on nature. Whatever Rousseau's literary or visual sources of inspiration may be, it is clear that his depiction of the island-garden is intended to express the inherent richness and innocence of nature alienated from society. This is not dissimilar to the Tournierian construct, delivered in Le Vent Paraclet, in which society is held to be responsible for the individual's loss of ability to participate in the life of the absolute (19). For Tournier, society corrupts in that it distorts man's ontological relationship with the world, denying the dialectic of Being, (the fourth moment of the 'cogito cartésien', described in 'L'Impersonnalisme'), in order to assert the dominance of the subjective consciousness. By extrapolation from this thesis, the absence of society is sufficient to restore the primary dialectic in which Being asserts itself in the mutual dependence and antagonism of the absolute and autrui. That the disclosure of this dialectic may be apprehended in the alienation of the island-garden is suggested in several of his novels and contes.

In 'Amandine ou les deux jardins', for example, the implicit devaluation of society, represented by Amandine's parents, and the promise of an alternative world, ungoverned,
undifferentiated and chaotic, existing independently of the adult perspective, may be discerned. Amandine enters the enclosed, doorless garden next to her own, by climbing over the wall and discovers a garden that contrasts dramatically with her parents’ manicured plot. The alien garden is wildly overgrown, though flourishing with exotic flora; the cat, who has led her there, is transformed from a domestic pet into ‘un vrai prince dans son royaume’ (CB 45). Amandine, at ten, is too young to have been completely won over to the adult perspective, and the alternative, absolute garden holds an initial fascination, although this is tempered by what might be interpreted as an intuition of the twilight of her childhood: ‘J’ai un peu peur, mais la curiosité me pousse [...] C’est triste et c’est beau comme un coucher de soleil’ (CB 44). Yet at ten, she is already too old to feel at home in the absolute matrix, and flees the garden for the security of the adult world.

Amandine’s glimpse of ‘l’autre jardin’, cut off from the outside world and devoid of the adult perspective, echoes Robinson’s recognition of ‘l’autre île’ as an alternative mode of being, alienated from the social constructs he had tried to re-create:

Il me semblait alors entrevoir pendant un bref instant une autre île caché sous le chantier de construction et l’exploitation agricole dont j’avais couvert Speranza. (V 220).

The most comprehensive account of the ontology of alienation offered by the garden-island is disclosed in Les
Météores, in Shônin’s exposition of the philosophy of the Tea, Zen and Miniature gardens at Nara in Japan (20). The three types of garden represent three stages of alienation from the physical world, simultaneously expressive of the route to participation in the world of the absolute.

The tea garden is physically entered; it is designed to stimulate conversation and suggest an equilibrium between the visitor and his environment. The Zen garden however, may not be entered; it is created to be contemplated from a number of external perspectives. Physically alienated, the spectator must use his imagination to travel through the garden and transform the sterile components into fertile landscape. Imaginative participation of this order initiates the creation of being from opposites: the arid sand becomes a sea, the bare rocks and stunted branches become islands covered with an exotic plant life (21).

The Miniature garden alienates the subjective presence of the spectator most of all. A garden the size of a thumbnail, if it is to be entered, requires the complete abandonment of the subjective will to dominate the object; instead, the object must be allowed to dominate the subject, who is then able to enter another universe:

Le jardin nain, plus il est petit, plus vaste est la partie du monde qu’il embrasse. Ainsi par exemple le personnage de porcelaine, l’animal de céramique, le pagodon de terre cuite qui peuplent le jardin miniature, plus il sont petits, plus grand est leur pouvoir magique de métamorphoser les cailloux et les creux qui les entourent en montagnes rocheuses, pics vertigineux, lacs
et précipices. Ainsi le lettré dans sa modeste demeure, le poète devant son écrivoir, l’ermite dans sa caverne disposent à volonté de tout l’univers. (M 541)

In Shonin’s philosophy, the garden, according to its increasing degree of isolation from the outside world, becomes also increasingly isolated from the subjective world. But at its extreme, in the miniature garden, alienation is replaced by the subject’s ultimate reintegration into the world of the object. The dialectical progression towards this ultimate condition of being is also expressed in Tournier’s treatment of the island-garden; this is the subject of the next category.

3. THE DIALECTIC OF CHANGE AND IMMUTABILITY.

When Tournier states that ‘c’est dans ces lieux privilégiés entre tous, une ile déserte, un jardin clos, que l’absolu, cette fleur métaphysique s’exalte le mieux sous ses deux formes extrêmes’ (VP 299) (22), his argument rests on the spatio-temporal aspect of the absolute.

A true island, writes Tournier, as opposed to a continental mass, is not only surrounded by the sea, but informed by it: ‘la mer ne sait vieillir [...] La vague marine est jeune comme au premier jour du monde’ (VP 300). The ocean is timeless and ageless, and the island shares in the surrounding climate of eternal youth. A desert island, having only one season all the year round, ‘la belle saison’, is particularly immune from the effects of the passing of
time and thus represents the best example of this escape from temporality that the island affords.

This atemporality is available to another form of expression according to Tournier. For in contrast to the timelessness of the infinitely expanded moment, expressed in geographical terms by the ocean and the desert island, there is the possibility of the infinitely contracted moment, which may find expression in the walled garden. The enclosed garden is radically opposed to the desert island in that it follows the cycle of the seasons and is therefore in a constant state of change and transformation. Yet it is change without ageing, for the garden displays the natural process of yearly renewal, the infinite succession of birth, death and rebirth. Within this cycle, time is as artificial and meaningless as that of the desert island; time is reduced to any one of the points within the infinity of its compass. Just as the shipwrecked Crusoé in Vendredi ultimately participates in the atemporality of Speranza, so too the inhabitant of the enclosed garden may experience a similar loss of spatio-temporal 'normality':

Chaque matin d'été [...] devant la fenêtre grande ouverte par laquelle s'engouffrent et déferlent sur moi l'odeur des graminées et le souffle des tilleuls, je comprends soudain que le temps se contracte, que l'espace se limite à ces quelques pieds carrés, clos de pierre, qu'un être - mon jardin justement - s'épanouit dans une immobilité exorbitante qui est celle de l'absolu. (VP 301).

However, although Tournier may be successful in the poetic order with this evocation of the island-garden
sheltered from the temporality of the outside world, its philosophical justification and implications remain obscure, unless seen as a reflection of the argument of 'L'Impersonnalisme'.

In the anterior text, temporality is seen to be a function of the 'drame cartesien' in which the subject detaches itself from the world of the absolute in order to reconstruct the chaos of undifferentiated time and space as a coherently ordered, rational schema. The detached subject (autrui) is thus seen as posterior to the world-in-itself; in Tournier's argument, the very presence of autrui entails the necessity of an authentic past and an erroneous present:

On peut dire donc qu'il [autrui] temporalise l’existence et qu’il est la venue au monde de l’erreur [...] Ce qui était une vérité éternelle et absolue devient [...] le produit contingent d’une subjectivité. (E 62)

Therefore, the exclusion of the subjective perspective of autrui is sufficient to restore the primal authenticity of the absolute world, in which space and time are indeterminate. Yet, as the analysis of 'L'Impersonnalisme' in the preceding chapter has shown, it is not Tournier's project merely to express a nostalgia for the irretrievable world of the absolute, but rather to disclose the dialectic in which alienated autrui is re-integrated within the absolute as the necessary expression of harmony and rationality in an indeterminate and silent world. Thus, although the insularity of
the desert island or enclosed garden represents the first movement of the drame cartésien to perfection, the intrusion and subsequent integration of autrui is essential to the expression of the dialectic and the fulfilment of Tournier’s philosophy. The expression of the ‘drame cartésien’ in geographical terms (23) is precisely the history of Robinson in Vendredi: the island pre-exists Robinson in time and space; Robinson imposes an authoritarian code of behaviour based on the perspective of the colonial European which alienates him from Speranza; Robinson, through the catalysis of Vendredi, is re-integrated with Speranza in a harmonious and necessary dialectic of change and immobility: ‘Chaque matin ...’ (change) ‘... était pour lui un premier commencement, le commencement absolu de l’histoire du monde’ (immobility) (V 246).

Tournier’s frequent references to, and retellings of the creation story reinforce the concept of the island-garden as both symbol and agent of this dialectic (24). In ‘La Famille Adam’, the insular quality of Eden is emphasized; this Eden is bounded by a wall (‘Il ne pouvait s’empêcher de courir comme un lièvre le long du mur du paradis’ [CB 13]), and likened to an island in an arid desert:

Caïn, on peut dire qu’il suça la nostalgie du Paradis terrestre avec le lait de sa mère. Car ces évocations chuchotées édifiaient des îles magiques dans sa tête d’enfant pauvre qui ne connaissaient que la steppe aride et le moutonnement stérile et infini des dunes de sable. (CB 15)

As an island, Eden signals changelessness; everlasting peace
and tranquility are promised to Adam and Eve if they will obey the one simple injunction of Jehovah (not to eat the fruit of the Tree of Knowledge). However, as garden, Eden signifies change, destruction, transformation. It might be thought, from the frequency with which the garden heralds radical change in Tournier's novels, that Adam and Eve's exile is due more to a helpless submission to the influence of the garden than to the malice of the serpent. However, in Tournier's conte, Caïn reconstructs an image of Eden under its dual aspect of island and garden, as a walled garden city, Hénoch, building on his mother's memories of Paradise:

Hénoch était une cité de rêve, ombragé d'eucalyptus. Ce n'était qu'un massif de fleurs où roucoulaient d'une même voix les fontaines et les tourterelles. (CB 17)

Tranquility is restored; the island city is the scene of conciliation between Jéhovah and Caïn and its temple is to be the final resting place of the Creator God. But although Tournier's conte ends at this point, the ensuing conflict and destruction amongst Caïn's descendants, chronicled in Genesis, suggest that the garden city reasserts itself as agent of change and mutability and the perpetual creative dialogue between the garden and island restored.

The garden, both as symbol and narrative agent of change is to be found throughout Tournier's writing: Amandine's discovery of 'l'autre jardin' marks her rupture with childhood and entry into the pre-adolescent world. In Gaspard, Melchior et Balthazar, it is in the Jardin des
Cedres that Taor realises his life has reached a dramatic turning point: a conversion from the 'sucré' to the 'sacré'. (25). In Vendredi, Robinson's 'cactus garden', a botanical collection of specimens from all over the island, is introduced into the narrative at the point where Vendredi is wreaking havoc in the cultivated island (V 157-62). Intended by Robinson to perpetuate the memory of his father's passion for gardening, the cactus garden, draped in fancy clothing by Vendredi, ridicules Robinson's project and heralds the destruction of the colonial rule of Speranza and the emergence of the other island. Similarly, in Le Roi des Aulnes, the episode of the vegetable garden cultivated by the French officer Granet, suggestive of stability and domesticity in the middle of war (RA 232), immediately precedes, indeed signals, the momentous change in Tiffauges' life when he is captured and taken to Germany - which marks the approach of Tiffauges' reunion with his mythic identity. In Gilles et Jeanne, Jeanne's life and subsequently that of Gilles de Rais are irrevocably changed when she receives her calling from God, an event which takes place in her father's garden (GJ 20).

This theme is continued in Les Météores. The second part of this novel is punctuated by Jean and Paul's encounters with a sequence of gardens, which reflect or, on a textual level, operate both the increasing destabilisation of the formerly impervious, self-governing 'cellule gémellaire' and
the simultaneous propulsion towards Paul’s ultimate re-integration with the absolute.

The first of these gardens is Ralph and Deborah’s ‘oasis’ at El-Kantara on the small island of Djerba, off the Tunisian coast. Quite clearly, Tournier’s description of both the couple and their garden is based on his knowledge of the garden at Hammamet, on the Tunisian mainland, built by Violet and Jean Henson (26). The fictional garden matches its actual model in every detail, from the wind-pump, the flora and fauna, to the headstone of the grave of its creator. But whereas the real garden at Hammamet is a metaphorical island, a lush oasis in an arid desert, Tournier creates its fictional counterpart, also surrounded by desert, on a real island, as if to doubly emphasize its insularity. Thus the tension as well as the dialogue between the island and the garden is created; the subsequent identification of Ralph and Déborah with Adam and Eve (M 465) propels the narrative towards an inevitable dialectic of rupture and perpetuation, fixed immutability and dramatic change, which reflects the Biblical story of exile and reconstruction, retold by Tournier in ‘La Famille Adam’ (27).

Indeed, Jean and later Paul arrive at El-Kantara in the wake of a storm to find the garden has been irredeemably devastated; Eden is once again rendered inaccessible to its inhabitants. But this dramatic change is set against the notion of changelessness and permanence. For Déborah, the
devastated garden is unaltered: 'Elle se croyait dans son jardin tel qu’il avait été au plus beau de son épanouissement' (M 470). For Ralph too, the essence of the garden remains unaltered, for its essence is Déborah:

Il se tourna encore avec raideur vers le jardin qu’il embrassa d’un geste vague.
- Je fis une objection. Je revoyais les arbres couchés, les feuilles arrachées et surtout le cœur éolien du jardin abattu, brisé.
- Bien sûr, Ralph. Mais la tempête ?
- La tempête ? Quelle tempête ? (M 479)

Déborah’s death and the destruction of the garden, are merely superficial transformations which refer to the inauthentic spatio-temporality of autrui, to which the incredulous Paul is attuned. In the absolute space-time of the desert island garden, with which Ralph, its lifelong inhabitant is familiar, there exists only the perpetual dialogue of garden and island: transformation without change, sublimation (28).

The second garden encountered is in Iceland at Hveragerðhi, where plants are grown in vast glass houses, heated by volcanic springs. Once again the dialogue between change and permanence is seen to be in operation, for although the climates of Tunisia and Iceland are radically different, they are equally hostile. It is because of the
hidden sources of water and heat respectively that the two gardens support exactly the same exotic flora: 'Les amaryllis et les daturas, les mirabilis et les asclépias, les massifs d'acanthes et de jacarandas, les arbustes portant citrons et mandarines, et même des bananiers et des dattiers, toute cette exotique flore était là, comme à El-Kantara, mais à quelques milles du cercle polaire' (M 510).

The metaphysical expression of the absolute in the garden-island is derived from the association of El-Kantara and Hveragerdhi, where subterranean water and fire respectively generate life. For Paul this represents 'la victoire précaire et fleurie des profondeurs sur la face de la terre' (M 510); for the 'Tournierlogue' however, the subterranean is extra-textually associated with the metaphysical (29); the flourishing flora symbolizes the penetration of the absolute, 'cette fleur métaphysique'' (VP 300) in the alienated world of autrui.

It is through Paul's exploration of the Tea, Zen and miniature gardens of Japan under the tutelage of Shonin, however, that Tournier develops the dialectic of the island-garden most fully; as Shonin indicates, Japan, with its 1,042 islands is singularly well adapted to the concept of the garden as island (M 542).

The tea garden introduces the notion of the garden as the locus of opposites, balanced in perfect equilibrium; concepts of interiority and exteriority, represented in the
West by the house and garden respectively, are subverted by the Japanese garden which is so much a part of the house that 'on ne sait lequel des deux envahit et absorbe l'autre' (M 517). As the visitor walks around the garden, through conversation he recognizes that the body and the spirit - earth and air, Yin and Yang, symbolized by the tortoise and the crane appear each as the subtle, harmonious and necessary co-efficient of the other; human and cosmic space are undifferentiated, the horizontal and the vertical (axes of the ornamental rocks) offer mutual support in their opposition.

The Zen garden pursues the dialectic of the tea-garden with more rigorous austerity. Here, the creative intervention of the visitor is necessary to bring plenitude of expression to the dialectic of the garden. Tournier's concept of the reader-text relationship and the Valérian concept of inspiration, set out in _Le Vol du Vampire_ (30), is mirrored in Shon'in's description of the role of the 'reader':

> Un jardin Zen se lit comme un poème dont seuls quelques hémistiches seraient écrits, et dont il incomberait à la sagacité du lecteur de remplir les blancs. L'auteur d'un jardin Zen sait que la fonction du poète n'est pas de ressentir l'inspiration pour son propre compte, mais de la susciter dans l'âme du lecteur. (M 525-6)

As was seen in the preceding chapter, Tournier conceives the text-reader relationship as a creative dialogue which expresses the dialectic of the absolute / _autrui_ (31). For Tournier, the Zen garden represents precisely the same actualization of the creative alliance of immanence and
alienation, which, if allowed to lapse, entails the annihilation of truth (32). In the dialectic of the Zen garden, operated by the beholder, the dry and the wet interpenetrate: the raked patterns in the arid sand are transformed into the swirling eddies of the sea; the carefully positioned boulders are islands in the stream. The absence of any kind of flora, and the empty, open spaces with their patterns of sand, pebble and rock, present 'un canevas sur lequel le contempleur brodera son paysage personnel'. The Zen garden, like the text, is an invitation to a creative partnership: 'Dans son apparent dénuement, le jardin Zen contient en puissance toutes les saisons, tous les paysages, toutes les nuances de l'âme.' (M 526) In the absence of this partnership, there is nothing but sand and rock.

If the Zen garden represents the dialectical emergence of the Tournierian absolute set forth in 'L'Impersonnalisme', the Miniature garden, to which Shon'in introduces Paul, may be seen as a metaphor for the evolution of the heavy freight of dialectical philosophy into the simple, miniaturised 'philosophie de disette' expressed in Le Vent Paraclet (33).

The miniature garden is introduced into the narrative by Shon'in's evocation of the story of Fei Tchang-fang's admission into a miniature, mineral garden inside a genie's gourd:

A l'intérieur s'épanouissait un jardin de jade. Des grues d'argent s'ébattaient dans un étang de lapis-lazuli entouré d'arbres de corail. Au ciel une perle figurait la lune, un diamant le soleil, une poussière
Fei Tchang-fang enters the cavern and is invited to suck the dripping, milky white stalactites because, says the genie, 'tu n'es qu'un tout petit enfant en regard de l'antiquité du jardin et ce lait te donnera une longue vie' (M 536).

In this tale, the process of interiorisation is paralleled with the loss of adulthood. Intra-textually, this story recalls the 'progrès à rebours' of Robinson in Vendredi: his descent into the womb-like, milky white cavern inside Speranza and his sensation of a return to infancy. But beyond this narrative mirror, further intra- and inter-textual and references proliferate, which combine to figure the Tournierian absolute.

Interiorisation, 'le propre de la métaphysique' (VP 45), is exemplified in Tournier's writing by the activity of the miner or mineralogist who seeks the mineral core of the physical world, just as the metaphysician seeks to 'plonger au coeur même du concret' (VP 45). Tournier refers to Bachelard's reading of Novalis as 'l'un des grands rêveurs de la verticalité' (VV 68), in which (as in the genie's mineral garden), the cosmic is discerned to be a sublimation of the mineral: 'les gemmes sont les étoiles de la terre et les mineurs des "astronomes inverses" ' (VV 68). The gardener too, belongs to the order of verticality; it is not enough to 'ratisser et dessiner' the horizontal surface of the earth, 'car l'homme-jardin par vocation creuse la terre et interroge
The process of interiorisation has not only a spatial but a temporal dimension, illustrated by Shonin’s story and Robinson’s experience. The progression towards infancy takes the Tournierian metaphysician back to the breast, and beyond that, to the womb. The intra-textual reference to ‘L’Impersonnalisme’ may be demonstrated: the ‘drame cartésien’ describes the emergence of autrui with the metaphor of childbirth. During the second movement, autrui is still attached to the absolute by ‘un cordon ombilical ontologique’ (E 59); in the third movement the umbilical cord is severed, and in the final movement, autrui is reintegrated with the absolute, of which it is both the parent and the child. Inter-textually, both Freud and the Gospels are evoked, with the stress on the return to infancy as the initial step to either psychological or spiritual salvation (34).

The conclusion of Shonin’s story parallels Tournierian philosophy in its re-instatement of the object as guarantor of the world,

La possession du monde commence par la concentration du sujet et finit par celle de l’objet (M 536-7).

The miniature garden reflects the absolute both in its refusal of subjective time, ‘une jeunesse éternelle se respire dans ses frondaisons naines’ (M 541), and its refusal of subjective space, ‘plus il est petit, plus vaste est la
partie du monde qu’il embrasse’ (M 541). The dialectic resolution of opposites of the tea-garden and the creative partnership with the spectator of the Zen garden, are contained in the miniature garden, invisible to the subjective consciousness, yet available to ‘le sage devenu gros comme un grain de pavot [qui] se promène avec ravissement dans cet espace vaste comme le ciel et la terre’ (M 542) (35).

Paul’s destiny responds to the destiny of the absolute, disclosed in Shonin’s teaching of Japanese garden philosophy. Crippled and bed-ridden, Paul’s physical mutilation functions in the same way as Robinson’s extreme isolation; it engenders the loss of the subjective self and offers the possibility of participation in the life of the absolute. Like the Japanese sage, Paul’s participation in this dialectic is realised in a garden. Spatio-temporal barriers are broken down; Paul becomes the garden: ‘Je possède désormais branches dans le ciel et racines dans la terre’ (M 615). Temporal and climatic change in the garden is replaced by sublimation: change without alteration, the fulfilment of the promise of the dialectic.

Tournier’s attempted realisation of this concept in his own writing on a stylistic, as opposed to a thematic level should also be considered. Many of his novels and short stories open with an almost obsessively precise location of the narrative in time and space. Les Météores begins at
nineteen minutes past five (p.m.) on 25th September 1937 with an aerial view of the small collection of villages clustered around the baie de l'Arguenon. To give this detailed spatio-temporal picture even more verisimilitude, Tournier includes himself in this bird’s-eye view: aged thirteen, lying on the beach at Saint-Jacut, reading Aristotle. Vendredi opens at the end of the afternoon of 29th September 1759, 'au niveau du 32e parallèle de latitude sud' (V 10), off the Chilean coast. Le Roi des Aulnes: 3rd January 1938, Paris, Place de la Porte-des-Ternes. Yet this deliberate spatio-temporal precision is to be constantly subverted, if not destroyed, by Tournier’s reference to the mythic origins and destiny of his characters, which represent the spatial and temporal incoherence of the absolute. The coherence of the text, however, and the adherence to the traditional narrative form of the novel (and rejection of the experimental Nouveau roman) (36) serve as the exegesis of the necessarily rational expression of the inchoate absolute, perpetually dialoguing with autrui.

4. THE FERTILE GARDEN AND THE CREATIVE DIALECTIC.

Images of violence and destruction surround the cultivated garden in Tournier’s writing. Granet’s potager is in the path of advancing Nazi troops; Déborah’s oasis is destroyed in a storm; Petit Poucet’s little garden is to be replaced with a
high-rise block of flats; Robinson's cultivated ground is lost to Vendredi's 'rire dévastateur'; the gardens at Hveragerdhi are maintained by the subterranean violence of volcanic eruptions; Adam and Eve are expelled from Eden.

In opposition to this description of devastation in the garden, Tournier pictures 'la calme croissance végétale' of the natural world in which man participates rather than dominates. In 'La fugue du Petit Poucet' (37), Logre explains this dichotomy:

Voici donc la malédiction des hommes : ils sont sortis du règne végétal. Ils sont tombés dans le règne animal.

Or, qu'est-ce que le règne animal ? C'est la chasse, l'violence, le meurtre, la peur. Le règne végétal, au contraire, c'est la calme croissance dans une union de la terre et du soleil. (CB 60)

The metaphorical value of this accumulation of violence contrasted with harmony, the animal and the plant worlds may be readily understood with regard to the Tournierian absolute. For it has been demonstrated that the history of the absolute - the 'drame cartésien' - reflects an initial, incoherent objectity obliterated by the will to dominate of the subject, which is ultimately subsumed in a creative dialectic of mutual antagonism and support. The creative power of this dialectic is expressed in the lush fertility of the untended island-garden. For example, the secret 'other garden' in 'Amandine' flourishes with a lush extravagance of wild and exotic flowers; on the other side of the wall 'le jardin bien peigné' boasts, it seems, only clipped lawns and ash-trays (38). Only the cats, Claude and Kamicha move with
ease between the two gardens, between the anarchic world of the object and the carefully cultivated world of the subject; it is perhaps not too fanciful to suggest that this communion between the two worlds accounts for Claude and Kamicha’s successive pro-creativity.

The division of the object world and the subject world is thus typified by the cultivated garden; but even the gardener knows that behind his desire to tame and subdue, an anterior relationship exists:

L’homme forme avec la nature un très vieux couple, indissolublement uni, bien qu’assez orageux. [...] C’est que sa vocation – ce qui le distingue parmi les autres vivants – consiste à adapter la nature à ses besoins au lieu de s’adapter à elle. (PP 204)

But this memory of a former existence when he was more or less at the mercy of nature and the elements is also haunted by ‘une nostalgie immémoriale’ (PP 204). Again however, it must be emphasized that Tournier’s project is not to mourn a past and fallen unity, but to realize the prospective dialectic of the absolute. In the garden, the fertile, self-creating, uncultivated garden, the gardener no longer dominates but becomes the ‘homme-jardin’, or in the case of Déborah / Violet· Henson, ‘femme-jardin’: terms which deny the subject-object hierarchy and speak instead of a creative objectité; contrary to the opinion of Voltaire’s Candide, Tournier’s philosophical conclusion might read: ‘il ne faut pas cultiver son jardin’.
5. THE TREE

The tree figures prominently in the Tournierian landscape, both in his own garden at Choisel and in his writing, in which, for example, Tournier pictures the Garden of Eden as 'un verger divin' (39) or 'une forêt [...] ou plutôt un bois' (CB 59). Replying to a lycéenne in an interview, Tournier affirms that 'dans la vie il n'y a rien de plus important après l'être humain qu'un arbre' (40). This, it might be argued, is because no other organism in Tournier's literary / philosophical construct is able to express the dialectic of the absolute as comprehensively and subtly as the tree.

The tree, as representative of a supra-physical structure has a distinguished history: in the discourse of Christianity, it has emblematized Life, Knowledge and Liberty (41); in the Aeneads (III), Plotinus uses the image of the tree as an immobile principle with multiple flowerings to illustrate the principle of plurality in the One. Descartes describes the epistemological relation of metaphysics to the other sciences in terms of a tree, 'dont les racines sont la métaphysique, le tronc est la physique et les branches qui sortent de ce tronc sont toutes les autres sciences' (42); for Bachelard the tree is identified with the principle by and in which opposites are reconciled (43). The discourse of poetry has also adopted the image of the tree as emblem of liberty (44), of the indissoluble union of the
spiritual and the earthly (45) or of growth towards wisdom (46).

While individual species of trees may be recognised for their symbolic value - the pine for Bachelard, for example, symbolises the verticality of the metaphysical impulse (47) and in Le Roi des Aulnes the Jungmänner celebrate it as the appropriate symbol of Germany 'dru et fort' (RA 488) (48) - Pierre Laurette, in his study of the theme of the tree in Valéry’s writing, argues that the general idea of the tree, incorporating roots as well as trunk and foliage, defies or escapes such symbolic reduction because of the numerous contradictory concepts which it is seen to contain.

L'image de l'arbre donne en effet, une somme de symboles antagonistes et il n'est guère d'image où 'l'excès du signifié sur le signifiant' soit aussi prononcé. (49)

Like both Bachelard and Valéry, Tournier identifies the tree with the scene of reconciled antagonistic forces. In Bachelardian terms, this is operated on an elemental level: 'L'arbre réunit et ordonne les éléments les plus divers' (50). Earth, represented by the roots, is drawn up to the sky where rain, falling to the earth, is taken up by the roots and transpired in the leaves in an eternal cycle. As for the fourth element, fire, this cannot be dissociated from wood: 'l'arbre est le père du feu' (51). The elemental forces of life and death also are united in the tree, as Tournier perceives:

Gaston Bachelard [...] voyait dans la racine une étrange synthèse de la vie et de la mort, parce que, inhumé&
comme un défunt, elle n’en poursuit moins sa puissante et secrète croissance. (VI 101)

The opposition of the roots and the foliage of the tree, suggesting respectively, darkness, death, descent on the one hand, and light, life and airiness on the other is frequently inverted by Valéry, who pursues the image of the inverted, upturned tree, whose branches plunge into the ground and roots stick up in the air. Madame Teste, for example, compares her husband to an inverted tree (52); the part of the tree which signifies the spirit is returned to the origin of its being. Thus, for Valéry, this describes the restoration and growth of Monsieur Teste’s spirit. Similarly, in Vendredi, Robinson discovers the physical enactment of this inversion which prophetically announces the restoration of the elementary unity of the absolute:

En effet ces arbustes avaient tous été déracinés et replantés à l’envers, les branches enfouies dans la terre et les racines dans le ciel. Et ce qui achevait de donner un aspect fantastique à cette plantation monstrueuse, c’est qu’ils paraissaient tous s’être accommodés de ce traitement barbare. (V 163)

The insistence upon inversion signifies that the tree is not simply to be recognised as the meeting point of opposites, but that they are dynamically exchanged: all that is symbolized by the foliage may be exchanged for all the antagonistic concepts implied by the roots – and vice-versa.

Seen in this way, the dynamic opposition and inversion of antagonistic concepts denies straightforward symbolism; it is not a question of the tree as symbol of life and / or
death, body and / or spirit, earth and / or air. Instead, both for Valéry and Tournier, the tree operates as a myth, creative rather than reductive, referring to the common background and impulses of humanity. For Valéry, Laurette argues, the tree is more of a 'mythe privé' than a commonly understood manifestation of an inherent connection with the universe, although it functions to this effect:

L’arbre irradie une force cosmique grâce à laquelle on peut revivre une réalité originelle. (53)

For Tournier, who is unstinting in his acknowledgement of his indebtedness to Valéry, this reflects the evidence of his own philosophy. Tournier’s ‘réalité originelle’ is, of course, the absolute, not in the nostalgic sense of lost origin but in the prospective promise of the fourth movement of the drame cartésien. The dynamic exchange of the values expressed in the roots and branches, via the trunk, echoes the dialectic of the absolute and autrui and their mutual, creative dependency, ‘car il est clair que la ramure ne peut s’étendre, s’élargir, embrasser un morceau de ciel de plus en plus vaste qu’autant que les racines plongent plus profond, se divisent en radicules et radicelles de plus en plus nombreuses pour ancrer plus solide l’édifice.’ (CB 61)

Tournier’s writing, like that of Valéry, dictates that the tree is a restorative myth, mending or effacing the rupture between man and the absolute, re-calling, (summoning up rather than harking back to) the woodland Paradise. In ‘La Fugue du petit Poucet’, Logre, who pictures the Fall of Man
as a fall from the 'règne végétal', envisages the possibility of secular redemption (54) through the intercession of the tree:

C’est pourquoi toute sagesse ne peut se fonder que sur une méditation de l’arbre, poursuivie dans une forêt [...] (CB 60)

Not every tree exhibits this perfectly balanced exchange of opposites however. The cedar, says Logre, is renowned for its shallow roots, which are often insufficient to support the spreading crown. Intra-textually, this may be seen as a justification for the collapse of the cedar in Vendredi, at the point where the 'île administrée' collapses and gives way to the emergence of the 'autre île'. For if the absolute represents the balanced interface of opposite forces, clearly the cedar, emblem or 'génie tutélaire' of the subjectively dominated island (55), must cede to emblems of the absolute: the kite and aeolian instrument.

But it is the beech which occupies the most singular place in the Tournierian landscape, for in addition to its mythical rapport with the absolute, it suggests a further complicity with Tournier's project as a philosoper-writer.

In an 'out-take' from La Goutte d'Or, (subsequently published in Petites Proses), the artist Épéechevalier tells Idriss of the etymological unity of the beech and the written word. For beech, or buche as it is in German, derives from the old Teutonic term bok, from which the modern English book and German buch are also derived. Possibly the smooth bark of
the beech was used to write on or bind the document
(similarly, in Latin, *liber* means both book and bark);
buchstabe, 'beech stick' is German for letter or character.

Tournier is eminently sensible to the possibility of
locating truth in etymology and, like Heidegger, his puns
endeavour to disclose reality (56). *Hêtre* / *être* have no
common etymological source, but they are united by an
assonance which humourously harbours a metaphysical
affiliation in the Tournierian construct: Epéechevalier
 transforms a painting of the dying Sartre into a picture of a
beech tree and the shadow it casts, with the philosoper, now
smiling, in the background. Idriss naturally asks why the
artist has chosen a beech tree and receives the following
reply:

Parce que le principal livre de J.-P. Sartre s’intitule
*L’Être et le Néant*. Le néant, c’est donc l’ombre portée
par l’arbre. [...] Le livre et le hêtre ont des racines
communes. Saint-John Perse a dit : 'Publier un livre,
c’est détruire un arbre.' En d’autres termes: l’hêtre et
le néant. (PP 165)

Through etymology and humour which respectively
associate the beech with the act of writing and the nature of
Being, the beech tree may thus be seen to represent the union
of the literary discourse and ontology: an emblem indeed for
Tournier’s project (57).

NOTES

1. The concept of boundary is evinced in the respective
etymologies of *jardin* / garden and *île* / island; see
note 12, below.

3. On the masculine or feminine aspects of certain trees, the seventeenth century Chinese artist, Li-Leng Weng epitomises the (phallocentric) desire for male dominance in the otherwise female suggestion of the garden in his identification of the pine tree with the male: 'When one sits in a garden with peach trees, flowers and willows, without a single pine in sight, it is like sitting among children and women without any venerable man in the vicinity to whom one may look up.' Cited in Thacker, *The History of Gardens*, p.58. Tournier’s chauvinism with regard to the female characters in his writing may find further expression in his own garden at Choisel.

4. See for example, RA 262. In *Le Vent Paraclet* (140-1), Tournier compares his imagined view of the Prussian landscape, expressed in *Le Roi des Aulnes*, with his first visit to the region in 1975.

5. See VP 299-302


7. Alexander Selkirk, the source of Defoe’s *Robinson Crusoe*, was abandoned on Mas à Tierra in the Juan Fernandez archipelago (1704-9). Defoe, however, locates his castaway on an island in the Caribbean. In *Vendredi*, Tournier, faithful to the original source of inspiration returns his Crusoé to Mas à Tierra (see VP 217-8). In 'La Fin de Robinson Crusoé' (*CB* 21-25), Tournier follows Defoe in determining the island to lie at the mouth of the Orinocoo river, for the Robinson of this short story resembles Defoe’s character, not least in that he has left his island at the earliest possible opportunity.

8. Julie, however, explains that the garden is only contrived to look this way, ('il n'y a rien là que je n'aie ordonné' (*opus cit.*, p.354)


10. Set forth, for example, in the 'Discours sur l’Inégalité, passim.

11. See *CB* 15.

12. See Kusch, *The Garden, the City and Language in
Rousseau's *La Nouvelle Héloïse* pp.45-7.

13. Both these quotations are from Christopher Thacker's *The History of the Garden*, p.9. I am also grateful to Thacker for bringing to my attention the relevant passages from Troyes, Lorris, Boccaccio and Bacon quoted above.


19. VP 298. See also Ch. 2, pp. 47-9 of the present study.


21. Paul acknowledges his inability to engage in this kind of creative participation / transformation at this stage of his 'voyage initiatique': '[...] à Nara mes yeux de profane ne voyaient dans les jardins Zen qu'une page blanche - cette nappe de sable ratissé, ces deux rochers, cet arbre squelettique, ce n'était évidemment qu'une portée vierge attendant les notes de la mélodie. (M 614)

22. Tournier's description of the absolute as a 'fleur métaphysique' (my italics) is not as contrary as his antipathy towards flowers in his own garden, described above, suggests: trees and shrubs (even pine trees) flower and bear fruit.

23. C.f. VP 299: 'L'île déserte devenue expression géographique de l'absolu, c'est la conclusion de Vendredi ou les limbes du Pacifique.'

24. See in particular, *Mythologies*; 'La famille Adam' in *Le Coq de Bruyère*; 'La légende de la musique et de la danse' and 'La légende du parfum' in *Le Médianoche Amoureux*. Also: RA 34-5, 132, 145; M 61; CJV 9; TS 89; VI 65; PP 169; CS 99; VV 39.

25. '[...] il [Taor] ne cessait de rapprocher et de comparer deux images apparues en même temps, et pourtant violemment opposées : le massacre des petits enfants et le goûter du jardin des cèdres.' (GMB 233)
26. See 'Cinq jours ... cinquante ans à Hammamet' (PP 38-52)

27. See also Mythologie and the two légendes in Le Médianoche Amoureux, where violence is succeeded by reconstruction.

28. The image of the chemical process of sublimation is repeatedly deployed throughout Tournier’s writing to represent 'altération immobile' (VP 282, c.f. intra-textually, VV 67-8). It appears as the final word at the end of Les Météores to describe, on an explicit level, the evaporation of snow into steam, which on an implicit level may be interpreted as an image for Paul’s ultimate non-subjective participation in the world, in which he remains physically tied to his bed but simultaneously participates / is transformed into in the elemental natural world outside.

29. See Ch. 2, pp. 15-7 of the present study.

30. 'Paul Valéry disait que l’inspiration n’est pas l’état dans lequel se met un poète pour écrire, mais celui dans lequel il espère mettre son lecteur par l’effet de ce qu’il écrit. "Je te donne mon livre, dit l’écrivain au lecteur, qu’il fasse de toi un inspiré, fais de moi un auteur de génie"' (VV 24).

31. See pp. 78-80 of the present study.

32. The term ‘truth’ is used here to express the ontological reality disclosed in the dialectic of the absolute, which is masked by the factitious ‘reality’ created by the subject-object hierarchy. Truth is not ‘annihilated’ in an ontological sense, but merely on a subjective level.

33. See VP 295-6 and pp. 50-1 of the present study.

34. Freudian treatment of neurosis is of course dependent upon the disclosure of infantile trauma. With some trepidation I have associated this, in the context of the present argument, to the words of Christ reported in Matthew 18, 3 : 'Truly, I say unto you, unless you turn and become like children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven'. (C.f. also Mark 10, 15 and Luke 18, 17).

35. Participation in the miniature garden evidently reflects Paul’s eventual participation in the elemental world and Petit Poucet’s ability to participate in the natural world although confined to a bedroom at the top of a skyscraper.

36. See VP 194 : 'Mais bien entendu il ne pouvait être
question pour moi que de romans traditionnels.'

37. Of this short story, Tournier says that 'l’essentiel de mes réflexions sur l’arbre se trouve [...] dans 'La fugue du petit Poucet.' Magazine littéraire, p.23.

38. 'En toute saison les gazons du jardin sont aussi verts et bien rasés [...] Dans le jardin papa a disposé des cendriers pour les promeneurs-fumeurs' (CB 36)


41. The tree of Life and tree of Knowledge both figure in the Creation story in Genesis; the Tree of Liberty is a later invention, probably of medieval origin. In 'La fugue du petit Poucet', Tournier adds a number of other 'magical trees' to those described in Genesis: 'celui qui apportait la force, celui qui douait du pouvoir créateur, ceux grâce auxquels on acquérait la sagesse, l’ubiquité, la beauté, le courage, l’amour, toutes les qualités et les vertus qui sont le privilège de Yahvé.' (CB 59) C.f. Mythologie. In the légendes in Le Médianoche Amoureux, Tournier refers to 'l’arbre de la musique,' 'l’arbre des parfums' as well as trees whose fruit imparted knowledge of mathematics, chemistry and oriental languages (MA 251, 255).

42. Descartes, Oeuvres Complètes, Vol IX, p.14

43. Bachelard, L’Air et les Songes, Ch.X p.233

44. See Philpot, The Sacred Tree or the tree in religion and myth.

45. See Lehrer, Folklore and symbolism in flowers, plants and trees, pp.20-21 on the Yggdrasil.

46. Ibid.

47. Bachelard, opus cit., p.232

48. In Les Météores, Shonin describes the symbolic value of certain trees, including the pine, which occupies the most privileged position in the social hierarchy of the tomb in the miniature Japanese garden:

' Sur une tombe, on plante un saule ou un peuplier pour un paysan, un acacia pour un lettré, un cyprès pour un seigneur féodal, un pin pour un Fils du Ciel' (M 541)
Acquisition of 'Sagesse' in Tournierian terms is a form of secular redemption in that it requires a child-like immunity to the subjective constructs of adult society and offers an immediate intuition of the absolute. In Le Vent Paraclet, Tournier describes the disintegration of Sagesse in the wake of modern (Newtonian) science and the rare possibility and opportunity, partially, to regain its salvatory potential, which recalls the Fall of Man and his potential redemption. See VP 281-296.

V 190: 'Miné par l'explosion, le génie tutélaire de Speranza n'avait pas résisté au souffle vigoureux - bien que sans rafales - qui animait les frondaisons. Après la destruction de la grotte, ce nouveau coup à la terre de Speranza achevait de rompre les derniers liens qui attachaient Robinson à son ancien fondement.'

C.f. VV 68: 'Il ne s'agit là : ... d'un simple jeu de mots - stendhalien avant la lettre - ou plutôt nous sommes déjà avec Novalis dans ce courant qui dure encore (Heidegger) et pour lequel le calembour à valeur d'intuition métaphysique. Toutes les relations de Novalis et de sa fiancée tiennent dans cet aveu : "Je suis philosophe parce que j'aime Sophie."'

See Ch. 5 of the present study for the relation of 'l'humour blanc' and the absolute.
CHAPTER FOUR

LANGUAGE RE-CALLED

'Language speaks. Its speaking bids the difference to come which expropriates the world and things into the simple onefold of their intimacy.' (Heidegger, Poetry, Language, Thought, p.210)

1. THE PARACLETE

The word of the Holy Spirit, the Paraclete, is considered at length in Les Météores, where it is linked by Thomas Koussek to the Judaeo-Hellenic logos, the principle of divine genesis (1). Similarly, in the introductory exegesis to the title of Le Vent Paraclet, the divine Word is identified with 'le secret de la création' (VP 7). However, the initial positning of an original creating word naturally arouses the question of the nature and possibility of its participation in, or its alienation from, human speech and language. Thomas Koussek envisages a bleakly riven dichotomy:

[...] c'est le logos divin dont les mots sont les semences des choses. Ces mots sont les choses en soi, les choses elles-mêmes, et non leur reflet partiel et menteur, comme le sont les mots du langage humain.

(M 159)

Koussek's polarised vision of logos and language, the latter a malign and deceitful inversion of the divine reality is not, however, consistent with Tournier's own theory and practise of language. Certainly he identifies a binary opposition; indeed, binary oppositions are a characteristic trait of all Tournier's writing, but here, as elsewhere, the opposition is subverted, inverted and re-inverted to such a
degree that difference is transformed into dialectic.

It is the purpose of this chapter to examine the dialectical progression of *logos* and language, Word and world that results from this elimination of difference. In the course of this analysis, Tournier's insistence on the guidance of etymology will again be brought into evidence. For in the first instance it may be noted that the term Paraclete derives from the Greek 'kleitos', to call, and 'para', meaning through, across or by. The envisaged dialectic will thus be seen to represent the call of the absolute Word and the necessary response of the imperfect, human tongue participating in an infinite dialogue which the gulf of difference or opposition between them is effaced.

2. LOGOS AND LANGUAGE: PARTICIPATION AND ALIENATION

No dialogue or dialectic can be constructed without knowledge of its constituent conflicting forces. The logos as a language participating in the world will first be given consideration.

Humanity lives within the act of discourse; the conscious ego is engaged in perpetual dialogue composed of the verbal, symbolic and iconic matrices which shape and govern perception of self and the world. Thus to the primitive psyche, words, signs and images may be confused with - if not identified with - the object they are held to represent. Even in the modern world, superstition occasionally
prevents a word from being uttered, for fear that it might be actualized. The verbal matrix above all (2) conditions human perception and activity so thoroughly that it is impossible to consider what it is to be human, let alone what it is to be, in the absence of language, for it is as inconceivable to lever oneself out of language as it is to lever oneself out of consciousness.

The basic affinity between word and world is expressed in the creation myths of both Oriental and Occidental cultures, in which the primary function of the divine word is revealed, paradoxically, one of alienation: a positive alienation which results from the fundamental schism of being from non-being, cosmos from chaos. Hinduism, for example, designates the Word (Vac) as the first and ultimate principle of the universe (3) and Taoism states that 'when the Tao had no name, that was the starting point of heaven and earth, then, when it had a name, this was the mother of all creation' (4). Similarly, Ancient Babylonian, Assyrian and Egyptian myth equates namelessness with Chaos (5). Judaeo-Hellenic cosmogony places no less an emphasis on this equation. 'In the beginning was the Word' writes Saint John; the first transcription of his words uses the Greek logos (word or speech), a term penetrated with Heraclitean meaning. For Heraclitus and his followers (6), the logos designates the eternal World-Law in which all creation and its creator have their origin; and yet it is more than this
sum of all being, for it also designates the potential for
the expression of that being, that is to say, the perfect
coincidence of word and world. Even in North American Indian
cosmogony, the ontological sameness of word and world is
affirmed; with striking echoes of Saint John, Uitoto myth
announces that 'In the beginning was the Word and the Word
gave the father his origin' (7).

The divine word is thus traditionally envisaged as
absolute, in that it is self-creating, without predicate or
referent. However, by virtue of the fact that it encompasses
the totality of being, it is necessarily linked to the
imperfect, finite world of human expression. In Christian
theology, this mysterious communion is embodied by Christ,
'the Word made flesh'; this corresponds so precisely with the
Heraclitean notion of the coincidence of word and being that,
to this day, there are still some middle-Eastern orthodoxies
which identify Christ with the logos. Tournier himself
employs a more prosaic metaphor to explain the concept of
coincidence or participation to a photographer friend:

Edouard Boubat, qui est plongé dans Héraclite, me
demande tout à trac ce que c’est que le logos. Question
redoutable qui me laisse d’abord sans voix [...] Je
finis par lui répondre que le logos, c’est la parole
lourde, comme il y a l’eau lourde. Une parole qui ne
vole pas - verba volent - qui retombe au contraire, à
peine proférée en choses et en êtres. (CJV 107)

The idea that a deeper or truer reality is to be found in
density (heavy water is denser than H₂O), is re-examined
in Le Roi des Aulnes by Nestor, who finds revelatory signs
more legible in 'la densité de l'atmosphère' (RA 79). It is, perhaps, Tourrier's knowledge that one religious sect which specifically identifies Christ with the logos calls itself the Nestorian church (8), which prompted him to name Tiffange's mentor 'Nestor'.

The Heraclitean vision of a reciprocating word and world is pursued by Plato. Cratylus examines the often obscure, but nevertheless intimate relation between the etymological meanings of words and the things or people that they describe. Neo-Platonism also seeks to uncover this reciprocity culminating in the Renaissance concept of the épistème, in which, as Michel Foucault writes, the 'vu' and the 'lu' are held to be identical. Spoken language in its original form, is seen to be a simple process of reading nature aloud; Foucault writes:

[...] le langage était un signe des choses absolument certain et transparent parce qu'il leur ressemblait. Les noms étaient déposés sur ce qu'ils désignaient, comme la force est écrit dans le corps du lion, la royauté dans le regard de l'aigle [...] par la forme de la similitude. (9)

However, the story of Babel imposes an awareness of the loss of this original, creation duplicating language. The unity of Creator and creation is severed and man becomes alienated from his God, his fellow man and from himself. Nevertheless, the 'lost language of Adam' was believed to survive, if only fragmentarily, in Hebrew, a language written without vowels and supposedly 'inflated' by the breath of God when uttered aloud. Rousseau, in the Essai sur l'origine des langues, the
Discours sur l'Inégalité and Emile discovers traces of the lost language not only in Chinese, Greek and Arabic, but also in the pre-articulate cries of babies, animal noises and music (10).

The possibility of re-discovering, or perhaps more ambitiously, of re-creating a universally intelligible language was a common preoccupation amongst the philosophes of the Enlightenment, and a large number of universal language schemes, some based on onomatopoeia and the concept of 'similitude' (11), others on the principles of music and mathematics were advanced (12).

The prospect of such a universally intelligible language is, of course, immensely attractive, but if, by virtue of its universality it is held to be the language of God, then the temptation to dismiss it as a psychotic dementia might appear equally attractive. Sigmund Freud documents a patient, the Statsprezident Schreber, who imagined that 'in the course of their purification, souls learn the language which is spoken by God himself, the so called Grundsprache, a vigorous, though somewhat antiquated form of German' (13). Thus Schreber felt that he could enter into conversation with 'highly gifted persons from the past such as Goethe and Bismark' (14). However, Freud did not dismiss this case as a mere 'phantasy', but returned to it later for evidence to support his own theory of the Grundsprache. Recognising the same symbols appearing recurrently in dreams, folklore, myths
and proverbs, Freud concluded:

One gets the impression that what we are faced with here is an ancient but extinct mode of expression of which different pieces have survived in different fields. [...] And here I recall [...] an interesting psychotic patient who imagined a basic language [...] of which all these symbolic relations would be the residues. (15)

The evidence of Tournier’s writing indicates that he subscribes to the concept, described variously by Foucault, Rousseau and Freud among many others, of an original language, which though fragmented, may still survive, albeit cryptically. Hebrew, writes Tournier, citing the anthropologist Marcel Jousse, ‘n’est autre que la vérité mimée du cosmos’ (CS 134). The preface to Herman Hesse’s Das Glasperlenspiel, published in Le Vol du Vampire, further reveals Tournier’s fascination for a language, which although only available to the ascetic inmates of Castelia, ‘est capable de mettre en rapport les métaphores et inversions d’un poème de Gongora et la trajectoire de la planète Vesta [...] la mythologie crétoise, la logique aristoléciienne, l’alchimie, la physique quantique sont équivalents et s’éclairent mutuellement.’ (VV 279)

Tournier identifies the initiative behind Hesse’s Universitas litterarum in Leibniz’s ‘caractéristique universelle’, which he translates as ‘un désir de trouver un langage qui permette une extension des opérations mathématiques à tous les domaines du savoir et même de la création artistique’ (VV 278).

Within his own fiction writing, Tournier expresses his
fascination with this subject most notably in *Les Météores*. Here, apart from Koussek’s discussion of the logos, various other relics of the lost, participatory language emerge in the pre-articulate exchanges of the mentally handicapped and the very young inmates of Sainte Brigitte; in the rhythms of the Jacquard loom and the lighthouse flashes; in éolien, the secret language shared by the twins; in Daniel’s sleep talk and in Mélène’s indecipherable scribbles. Each of these is identified with a nostalgic longing for a lost unity, often associated with a state of innocence or redemption. The salvoes of light from the lighthouse are restored through etymology to their original status as ‘salvateurs’ for Franz (16); the handicapped children’s utterances are compared with ‘la langue originelle, celle que parlait entre eux au Paradis terrestre Adam, Eve, le serpent et Jéhovah’ (*M* 61), and the twins’ Eolian recalls the shared intimacy of the womb.

However, as has been established in the preceding chapters of the present study, it is not Tournier’s literary or philosophical intention merely evoke this kind of nostalgia: the possibility of recreating the lost unity of word and world is also emphasized in his writing. This idea was adumbrated by the Romantic poets who envisaged the poetic word as the genie of the essential ‘world-in-itself’, and taken up by Mallarmé, writes:

*Je dis : une fleur ! et hors de l’oubli où ma voix relègue aucun contour [...] musicalement se lève, idée même et suave, l’absente de tous bouquets* (17)
But whereas for Mallarmé the unification of the word and its object occurs in an entirely abstract world of Platonic essences, far removed from the concrete world ('l'absente de tous bouquets'), Tournier's concept of the absolute as a physical, object-orientated reality insists on the movement of the abstract language of autrui towards the concrete Word of the absolute. As he says to Boubat, the logos is 'une parole lourde [...] qui retombe [...] à peine proférée en choses et en êtres' (CJV 107). Thus, in Le Roi des Aulnes, when Rachel says to Tiffauges, 'Tu es un ogre' (RA 13), her words do not merely evoke the abstract idea of an ogre; the gravity of the word invades its object, becomes its object, initiating a literal reaction: for from that moment, Tiffauges begins to assume his mythical and physical status as an ogre.

Names are similarly endowed with this kind of gravity in Tournier's writing, for the etymological meaning of the name is frequently actualised in the text (18). In Le Roi des Aulnes, the Jewish boy, Ephraïm fulfils the etymological significance of his name, for Ephraïm in Hebrew means 'flowering branch'. In Tournier's interpretation of the legend, Saint Christopher's reward for bearing the infant Christ across the torrent is represented by the flowering of his staff, the symbol of benign and fertile inversion of the malignant, sterile ogre. The parallel history of Tiffauges is fulfilled through Hebraic etymology; in the act of bearing
Ephraîm away from Kaltenborn on his shoulders through the marshes, the wicked ogre is transformed into the fertile, (child-bearing) *figure* of the mythic pedaphore.

* * *

The obverse of the participatory word is the alienated word. Despite the *Idealist* endeavour to restore or recreate the mystical unity of word and world, the probability of an arbitrary relationship between them (with the exclusion of onomatopoeic words) has been emphasized by Saussure, who argues for the origins and development of language from communal convention and historical praxis as opposed to divine revelation (19). Magritte illustrates this idea succinctly; when one sees a figurative illustration of a pipe with the legend 'Ceci n'est pas une pipe' attached to it, the fragility of meaning, the arbitrariness of the *relation of the* signifier to the signified and the complete alienation of the word from its object, let alone the image of its object are immediately evoked (20).

Alienation coincides in the Tournierian construct with the emergence of the subjective ego - *autrui* - in the world, where the subjective ego is consciousness and *creator* is difference. It calls itself 'I' in order to express its difference from a world of things that are 'not-I'. 'I' makes itself the subject and the world becomes the object of subjective consciousness. Thus objectified, the world then assumes a fundamental coherence for the subject, which
increases as each new object and experience is named. Adam, naming the animals in Eden, metaphorically asserts the dominance of the subject over the object. If it were possible to imagine the world before, or in the absence of the subjective ego, clearly there would be no difference between an object or a being and the world it inhabited. The pre-subjective world, devoid of the fundamental word of subjective consciousness, ('I'), is evidently a pre-verbal world, inaccessible to the language of consciousness. On a narrative level, this is expressed in Vendredi by Robinson’s abandonment of the personal pronoun in his attempt to describe his new found objectivité:

[...] je constitue loin de moi un individu qui a nom de Crusoë, prénom Robinson, qui mesure six pieds, etc. Je le vois vivre et évoluer dans l'île sans plus profiter de ses heurs, ni pâtir de ses malheurs. Qui je ? [...] Car si ce n'est lui, c'est donc Speranza. (V 88-9) Alors Robinson est Speranza. Il n’a conscience de lui-même [...] il ne se connaît que dans l’écume de la vague glissant sur le sable blond. (V 98)

The poignancy of the intuition that there may be a reality ulterior or anterior to consciousness, which because of the impossibility of levering consciousness out of language, must remain inaccessible or hidden, is evoked in Sartre’s La Nausée. The tension and regret of man forever alienated from that part of him that is pure being is expressed by Roquentin who appears to witness the extinction of his own subjective consciousness:

A présent, quand je dis ‘je’, ça me semble creux [...] et soudain, le je pâlit, pâlit, et c’en est fait, il
However, the real tragedy of Roquentin's situation, (from an existentialist's point of view) is that however much his consciousness tries to escape itself and lose itself on the brown wall, up a lamp-post or in the evening mist it is unable to forget itself, to extinguish its presence entirely, 'Elle est la conscience d'être une conscience qui s'oublie' (22). Unlike Roquentin, who reveals the sadness of the inextinguishable conscience, Robinson discovers the joyful transferral of consciousness to the object: consciousness is not obliterated, but knows itself in itself, the object.

Philippe Sollers sees himself as more linguistically adventurous than either Tournier or Sartre in his attempt to describe what lies behind the curtain of subjective consciousness. His "je" polylogique, which according to Kristeva, speaks of 'un avant: avant la logique, avant la langue, avant l'être' (23) generates a linguistic expression which is supposed to convey the basic pulse of life and primal experience of the world (24). So, for example, writes Sollers, 'la nature est pour moi un lac rempli de poissons et moi poisson poisson poisson sans complexes' (25). But Sollers' dependence on a very traditional subject-object hierarchy is evinced in those first words, 'la nature est pour moi [...]'; his ambitious attempt to write outside that hierarchy is betrayed immediately.

Roland Barthes also recognises the desire of some
writers to 'atteindre un objet absolument privé d'Histoire et retrouver la fraîcheur d'un état neuf du langage' (26), yet he concedes that this ultimately represents a desire for silence, which, for the writer, is obviously suicidal.

Oriental thought however, is more inclined to accept the wisdom, as well as the inevitability, of silence in the object world. It is the aim of the intellectual progression of the *Upanishads*, for example, to eliminate the subject-object hierarchy and distinction in order to unify infinite being with the finite self. Ernst Cassirer describes the linguistic eventuality of this project:

[...] words can no longer grasp this and hold this unity of "subject" and 'object'. Language now vacillates between subjective and objective, it moves ever from one to the other, from the second back to the first; but this means that in combining the two it always has to recognise them as separate ideas. When religious speculation denies this distinction, it claims independence from the power of the word and the guidance of language; but thereby it arrives at the transcendental which is inaccessible [...] to language [...] The only name, the only denotation that remains for this Pan-Unity is the expression of negation. Being is called Atman, who is called 'no, no'; above this [...] there is nothing further, nothing higher. (27)

The evidence of Tournier's writing suggests that he concurs with the Upanishadic recognition that the absolute can only be expressed by negation. In 'Les Mots sous les mots', Tournier makes the following entry:

*Absolu*. Un concept qui pour exprimer le comble de la positivité emprunte une tournure négative. *Ab-solutum* : qui n'a pas de lien, sans rapport, non relatif. Or tout ce que nous sommes, tout ce que nous connaissons est tellement relie-à, c'est-à-dire relatif, que le
contraire devient pour nous inexprimable. À la limite, il faudrait, comme certains écrivains religieux qui se refusent à écrire le mot Dieu, laisser un blanc à la place d'absolu. (28)

But Tournier does not capitulate to the transcendental silence of the *Upanishads* or the suicidal silence suggested by Barthes; neither does he support the experimental language of Sollers nor share in the existentialist despair of eternal alienation.

His philosophical justification for refusing to 'laisser un blanc' has been determined in the first chapter of this thesis; his literary justification appears implicitly in *Le Vent Paraclet*. Here, Tournier identifies the language of philosophy when at its most precise, concrete and neologistic, as the least alienated form of verbal expression, where the word is a transparent duplication of the thing it describes. Of course, not every philosopher writes in this way; Tournier discounts Descartes for being too vague and too colloquial in his terminology (*VP* 206) and Heidegger's later work is dismissed on this score for poetic opacity (29). However, the combination of the novel with philosophy gives substance to the discourse of the latter which may still retain its transparency:

> En passant de la philosophie où les concepts jouent sans frottements ni perte d'énergie au roman avec ses personnages et ses paysages, on voit les mots se charger de substance et comme engraisser [...] le mot transparent [...] dans la philosophie [...] doit demeurer translucide dans le roman et mêler en lui autant d'intelligence que de couleurs et d'odeurs.

(*VP* 207)
Once again a dialectic may be seen to be at work in Tournier’s writing, which reflects the dialectic of the absolute.

3. THE DIALECTIC OF SILENCE

It has been demonstrated that silence is the condition of the pre-subjective, absolute world; through the dialectic of participation, silence is both in the absolute world and the abstract world of autrui. Thus the trace of the absolute available to human consciousness in silence is constantly subverted in Tournier’s writing with the silence of corruption and repression, eventually giving way to the dialectic silence of the absolute.

There are many examples in Tournier’s writing where concepts of perfection, divinity and the absolute are associated with silence. At the end of a concert, before the applause, for example, Tournier says, ‘il y a quelque chose de parfait, d’absolu qui impose le silence’; or in an examination of the silent wisdom of animal instinct, ‘le mutisme du bête est plus proche du silence du Dieu que la parole humaine’ (VP 286); or, epigraphically in the same vein, ‘La sagesse est un silence impur’ (VP 279). God and silence, wisdom and silence are paralleled, and a naïve equation begins to assert itself in which the good, the divine and the absolute are equated with silence, while the bad, the fallen and the relative are equated with language.
This is reinforced by a scene from *Les Météores* in which Alexandre recalls bathtimes shared with his mother in his infancy. So long as neither of them mention it, this intimacy of an undoubtedly proto-sexual nature is preserved within an aura of innocence. Yet this sense of innocence is immediately destroyed when the boy mentions these bathing arrangements in front of his mother’s friends one day. Reflecting on this, Alexandre makes the analogy between silence and sanctity, speech and profane destruction:

> Tous les couples ont entre eux cette sorte de réserve tacite et sacrée. Si l’un d’eux brise le silence, il rompt quelque chose, irrémédiablement, *(M 202)*

Similarly, in ‘La Logosphère et les Taciturnes’, Tournier uses the fall of man as metaphor for the fall from silence into speech, describing the world before language as ‘un paradis avant la faute’. *(30)* The same metaphor is deployed obliquely in *Des Clés et des Serrures*, in which Tournier describes the painted and tattooed bodies of a Sudanese tribe thus:

> Ici le verbe s’intègre totalement à la chair. Chaque corps est un poème muet et non écrit. C’est là sans doute le sens profond de ce paradis *(CS 135)*

The equation appears complete when Tournier declares his own desire to regain the fertile (suggested by the term ‘vert’), Edenic state of silence, ‘nous autres, verbaux, verbeux, et verbalisant, nous devons apprendre à trouver ou à retrouver le vert paradis du silence.’ *(31)*

However, this formula is subverted, even within the
context of the Eden metaphor. In a recent conte (published in *Le Médianoche Amoureux*), 'La Musique des Sphères', Adam and Eve are punished with silence for eating the fruit of the Tree of Music: they are denied their prelapsarian ability to hear the celestial music of the stars moving through the heavens.

The concept of silence as 'golden' is also subverted in *Le Roi des Aulnes*. Tiffauges recognises that silence is not always innocent; in the classroom at Saint Christophe he identifies the silence of repression, '[un] silence impur de quarante respirations retenues' (RA 47). Similarly, in *Le Vent Paraclet*, Tournier removes the innocence from silence with a reference to the collectively suppressed voice of the immigrant population in France:

Notre société [...] a posé ses fesses grasses et blanches sur ce peuple basané réduit au plus absolu silence. (VP 237)

In *Gaspard, Melchior et Balthazar*, the terrible scene after the massacre of Innocents in Bethlehem is described as 'un silence brisé par de rares sanglots' (GBM 232). Tournier also condemns the repression of children, brought up to be 'seen and not heard', and the silence of the taboo, the creator, he argues, rather than the mask of sexual perversion (32).

Silence and sterility or death are associated in *Les Météores*; after Marie-Barbara's arrest and deportation to a concentration camp, *Les Pierres Sonnantes*, symbol of
fecundity and clamorous childhood become a mute testimony to dispersal, desolation and infertility.

Subversion of this nature however, appears to generate only another polarized dichotomy: positive silence that is pure and absolute and negative silence that is orientated towards repression and sterility. And yet these distinctions are themselves subject to further inversions. In 'Les Mots sous les mots', Tournier indicates the inadequacy or impossibility of language in certain situations, as for example when he advocates the extreme expression of linguistic inadequacy: 'laisser un blanc'. However, even the inexpressible is atomised into its dialectical components in this lexicon, where the positive, negative and transcendental qualities of three terms, each of which denote inexpressibility are raised:

Ineffable ... Trop beau pour être dit
Innommable ... Trop laid pour être dit
Indéchiffrable ... Trop ... pour être dit (33)

Thus behind the explicit capitulation to silence, reminiscent of Wittgenstein's famous dictum, 'Whereof we cannot speak, thereof we must be silent', there is the implicit message that silence itself may contain the subtlest arguments.

Similarly, in Vendredi, the absolute silence of Robinson's cavern is transformed into a plethora of highly charged expression connoting beauty and ugliness, purity and corruption:
Ici je suis devenu peu à peu une manière de spécialiste du silence, des silences, devrais-je dire. De tout mon être tendu comme une grande oreille, j'apprécie la qualité particulière du silence où je baigne. Il y a des silences aériens et parfumés comme des nuits de juin en Angleterre, d'autres ont la consistance glauque de la souille, d'autres sont durs et sonores comme l'ébène (V 84-5)

The Baudelairean quality of these last lines, both in rhythm and synesthetic correspondance, ends with the oxymoronic (and thus Baudelairean par excellence) concept of 'silences sonores', in which apparent opposites are transcended by their mutual opposition. The transcendent concept of a 'silence sonore' is beyond language itself, but through the creative or poetic conflict of opposites the ineffable emerges, and the writer, committed to language, escapes the suicidal alternative of the blank space.

Tournier's writing then, at the very least, demonstrates the plurality and mutual antagonisms of silence. Silence, like the Heraclitean river, is never the same at the second approach. Silence fluctuates between the necessary and the possible, freedom and repression, innocence and corruption. For Tournier, this variance constitutes a language in itself, with a grammar and vocabulary as complex and nuanced as any spoken tongue. And although this language is impossible to transcribe, it is possible to construct it in poetic conflict or to describe it with metaphor. As with any description, where the writer reaches his descriptive limits, there the reader completes the task of reconstruction in the silence of
the imagination. Thus in *Les Météores*, there can be no direct transcription of the twins' secret language *à deux*, the Eolian, 'dialogue de silences, non de paroles' (*M* 183), but Paul’s description of it and the metaphor he employs enables the reader imaginatively to reconstruct an approximation:

> Or, dans l'éolien, l'accident c'est le mot, l'essentiel, c'est le silence. Voilà ce qui fait d'une langue gémellaire un phénomène absolument incomparable à tout autre formation linguistique. (*M* 181) Tout dialogue comporte une part d'explicite - les mots et phrases échangées, compréhensibles à tous - et une part d'implicite propres aux seuls interlocuteurs, voire au groupe restreint auquel ils appartiennent [...] Le dialogue partagé sans cesse entre explicite et implicite [...] est semblable à un iceberg flottant dont la ligne de flottaison varierait d'un couple d'interlocuteurs à l'autre, et au cours du même dialogue [...] L'éolien se caractérise par une part d'implicite anormalement importante, tellement que l'explicite reste toujours au-dessous du minimum indispensable à un déchiffrement par des témoins extérieurs. (*M* 182-3)

This metaphor of the iceberg may also be applied to Tournier’s relationship with his readers (described in Chapter 2 of the present study), a dialogue which is constantly underpinned - or undermined - by the implicit. It operates as a metaphor for Tournierian 'jeu spéculaire': Paul’s explicit description is implicitly linked to the article in *Espace*.

Indeed, if this text is read in conjunction with 'L'Impersonnalisme' what may have appeared as a fictional flight of fancy suddenly acquires a forceful logic. For the twins, Jean and Paul, exhibit through their secret language the complete absence of subject-object relationship which characterises the function of the subjective ego and
generates the impulse to language. Because there is no subjective difference between Jean and Paul (they refer to themselves as Jean-Paul, because neither is the object of the other's consciousness,) their language is necessarily one constructed of silence, the 'silence divin' of the world of the object.

The silences of Eolien correspond to the silence of the logos. Indeed, Paul makes an almost identical comparison between Eolien and 'parole sociale' to the one made by Tournier when explaining the logos to Boubat (34). Like Tournier, Paul insists on the gravity of the Eolien word-silence:

La parole est [...] légère, primesautière, abstraite, gratuite, dépourvue d'obligations [...] (M 183)

whereas 'l'éolien [...] était en vérité un langage de plomb parce que chacun de ses mots et ses silences s'enracinent dans la masse viscérale commune où nous nous confondions' (M 183). The difference between Eolien and the logos is that the former is sterile and non-creative whereas the logos is the principle of all creation.

The interpenetration of silence ('l'essentiel') and words ('l'accident') is applied not only to the twins' cryptophasie but also to the respective silence and utterances of those characters whom Tournier typifies as 'primaires' and 'secondaires' (35).

'Primaires' and 'secondaires' are a characteristic of
Tournier's fictional works and a key to his analysis of the lives and/or works of Gide, Grass, Calvino and Proust and Valéry (36).

The 'secondaire' is a creature of habit and reflection: 'c'est l'homme des maturations, des ruminations, de la reconnaissance et de la rancune, des habitudes et des nostalgies, bref, c'est celui dans la vie duquel le passé et l'avenir pèsent assez lourdement sur le présent.' (VV 326). The 'secondaire' views the world through the mediacy of language; Tournier places himself unapologetically in this category, and amongst his characters, this trait is evidenced by Tiffauges writing his 'écrits sinistres', Robinson keeping his log-book and Paul Surin's reflective monologues.

The 'primaire', on the other hand, lives in the eternal present in a state of adamic wonderment: 'c'est l'homme de l'évidence originelle et du premier commencement. Chaque matin est pour lui le premier jour de la Création.' (VV 227) This allusion to prelapsarian Eden indicates the affinity of the primaire to the 'vert paradis du silence' and, by extension of the same metaphor, as we have seen, to the absolute.

Mélanie Blanchard, Vendredi and Jean Surin are examples of this type of character, who refuse or are unable to construct a vision of the world through the mediacy of language. However, their silence is not to be taken literally; they express themselves in the 'parole humaine'
that all Tournier's characters are familiar with; their silence is the silence of those who are living embodiments of 'le verbe' or logos (37).

The silence of the 'primaire' then, is not one of animal dumbness but the silence of the pre-verbal, the pre-abstract. In 'La Jeune Fille et la Mort' Mélanie Blanchard speaks: she tells the amateur philosopher Coquebin of her childhood experience, but she is unable to abstract her experiences and distil their metaphysical content in the way that Coquebin is only too willing to do:

\[\ldots\] elle lui raconta \[\ldots\] l'étroite fenêtre, les carreaux multicolores qui lui permettaient de voir son jardin sous des aspects profondément différents. Kant ! pensa-t-il. "Les formes a priori de la sensibilité ! Elle a découvert à l'âge de dix ans \[\ldots\] l'essentiel de la philosophie transcendantale !" Mais quand il tenta de l'initier au Kantisme, il vit bien qu'elle ne le suivait pas, qu'elle ne l'écoutait même pas \[\ldots\] Non, décidément \[\ldots\] Mélanie n'avait pas l'esprit philosophique, malgré le don prodigieux qu'elle possédait de vivre spontanément, à l'état brut et en toute inconscience, les grandes problèmes de la spéculation éternelle \[\ldots\] Métaphysicienne de génie, elle demeurait à l'état sauvage et ne s'élèverait jamais jusqu'au verbe.

(CB 196)

Unlike Tournier, Coquebin identifies 'le verbe' with verbal utterance; for this he is condemned to lose the attention of his protégée and take his place among the ranks of 'nous autres, verbaux, verbeux et verbalisant'.

Vendredi also shares this primary inability to utter what he has so completely assimilated, 'le verbe'. He too is capable of human speech, but is unable to comprehend the abstracted language of autrui, of Robinson in his
colonial phase:

Les mots qu'il entend - péché, rédemption, enfer, parousie [...] apocalypse - composent dans sa tête un assemblage envoltant bien que dépourvue de toute signification. C'est une musique d'une beauté obscur et un peu effrayant. (V 150) (38)

For the 'primaire' such as Mélanie or Vendredi, it is the refusal of the 'verbe', as opposed to complete mutism which affords them their access to the absolute world which is denied to the 'secondaires', alienated from 'le verbe', and condemned to verbiage.

4. LANGUAGE AND THE DIALECTIC OF THE ABSOLUTE

It is by now evident that the term 'langage' has the same ambiguity or plurality of meaning as the term 'silence' in Tournier's writing, and that the habitual division of meaning between these two terms is by no means distinct or polarized. 'Langage' contains the imbricated, inverted patterns of logos, 'parole humaine' and 'verbe', each of which is penetrated by silence, both pure and contingent. The dialectical truth of the absolute emerges from the perpetual dialogue of opposites. One side of the dialogue is represented by Tournier's preoccupation with the logos and its imperfect human approximations, symptomatic of an incipient, but never fully realised nostalgia for the lost world of the first stage of the 'drame cartésien'. This nostalgia is foreshadowed in 'L'Impersonnalisme' where he
admits to the temptation of regarding autrui, 'un monde abstrait traduit en langage humain' as 'une maladie du monde, et le je pense un il y a dégénéré.' (E 64) 'N’est-ce pas', he continues, 'la victoire du temps sur l’éternel présent, la dégradation de l’absolu en relatif, et ne faut-il pas regretter la divine immuabilité des choses dans leur toute solitude ?' (E 64-5). With regard to language, this regret is most fully developed in 'La Logosphère et les Taciturnes' and Les Météores, in the latter of which, Soeur Béatrice and Docteur Larouet speculate on the possibility of a lost 'langue absolue' being available to the mentally handicapped children in their care; the twins' Eolien recalls the lost biological unity of the maternal womb and even the worldly, cynical Alexandre is moved by the sight of a sleeping boy's lips moving in unintelligible speech to wonder if these words 'appartenaient [...] à une langue secrète et universelle à la fois, la langue fossile que parlaient tous les hommes avant la civilisation' (M 297). But most importantly, Thomas Koussek recalls the Pentecost as a time when the logos was spoken by the human tongue; when for the first time since Babel men were able to communicate in the lost, original language. Koussek deliberately subverts the text of the Gospels which tells of the disciples gifted with the ability to speak every language of the world, and insists that this apparent plurality represents the single, universally intelligible language of the 'logos paraclétique'.
Désormais les apôtres dispersés jusqu'aux confins de la terre deviennent nomades, et leur langue est intelligible à tous. Car la langue qu'ils parlent, c'est le logos divin, dont les mots sont les semences des choses [...] Et parce que ce logos exprime le fonds commun de l'être et de l'humanité, les hommes de tous les pays les comprennent immédiatement, si bien que, trompés par l'habitude ou l'inattention ils croient entendre leur propre langue. Or les apôtres ne parlent toutes les langues du monde, mais une seule langue, que personne d'autre ne parle [bien que tout le monde la comprenne [...] et c'est également cette langue que parlait l'arch ange de l'Annocation, et dont les mots suffirent à engrosser Marie. \(M\ 159-60\)

This exact coincidence, or 'fonds commun' of 'l'être et l'humanité', divine word and human world, is not however a language that can comment, suggest or ask: it is a language of affirmation and annunciation. The divine creating word says: 'Let there be light' (and there is light); 'You shall conceive a child' (and a child is conceived); or most succinctly, 'I am that I am', where the perfect identity of word and being indicates the superfluity of language, which has lost its synchronicity with being and is thus destined to be a language which comments and describes ad infinitum without ever achieving the ontological coincidence of the logos. For this reason, Thomas Koussek impatiently dismisses the 'parole humaine' as 'le reflet partiel et menteur' of true being, a rejection reinforced by Paul Surin, who emphasises its superficiality: 'la parole est [...] légère, primesautière, abstraite, gratuite' \(M\ 183\).

However, the radical commitment to the logos and the Eolien expressed by Koussek and Paul Surin is of a very
different order to Tournierian theory and practise. Indeed, Tournier's obvious commitment to the written and spoken word undermines the very words with which Thomas and Paul proclaim the glory of the absolute language and the futility and imperfections of the 'parole humaine'! This deeply ironic subversion of his own thesis may be interpreted not only on an intellectual level, as evidence of Tournier's refusal to retain dichotomy and his privileged commitment to the dialectic, but also on a psychological level, as a symptom of the writerly complaint, described by Roland Barthes, that language has lost its 'pristine freshness' and that 'il [l'écrivain] a beau créer un langage libre, on le lui renvoie fabriqué [...] et c'est de ce langage rassis et clos par l'immense poussée de tous les hommes qui ne le parlent pas, qu'il lui faut continuer d'user' (39).

Faced with this frustration, Barthes writes:

L'écriture littéraire [...] se hâte vers un langage rêvé dont la fraîcheur, par une sorte d'anticipation idéale, figurerait la perfection d'un nouveau monde adamique où le langage ne serait plus aliéné. (40)

It is perhaps in response to this desire to create a new, Adamic language, as much as an intellectual desire to respond to the call of the absolute, that Tournier pursues his own, creative manipulation of the 'parole humaine'. For example, he creates neologisms, words such as 'anatopisme', 'bassitude', 'héliophanie' or 'phorie' (41), which, newly coined, have a certain pristine freshness, yet which, because of their obvious Greek or Latin derivations are immediately
intelligible.

Similarly, Tournier insists on the guidance of etymology to restore forgotten meaning, or to avoid tautology. Thus he will speak of 'un ruisseau scrupuleux' (scrupulus being Latin for a small stone, which, if caught in the sandal would impede smooth progress), or use 'obnubiler' to mean 'to cover with clouds' (42). Tournier does, however, recognize that this insistence upon etymology does not always make him immediately intelligible, and renders him accessible only to a classically educated elite minority. 'Hélas, ce beau mot mot, [obnubiler] n'est guère utilisable dans son sens propre. Car si j'écris : la lune était obnubilée qui me comprendra ?' (43).

Furthermore, Tournier will juxtapose like-sounding words to suggest meaning, born of their association: hêtre / être, Luxe / luxure for example (44). Or, as demonstrated earlier in this chapter, he will attempt to transcend the limitations of language by means of juxtaposed opposites, such as 'silences sonores'.

Tournier's evident predilection for a vocabulary rich in technically precise or arcane diction is further evidence of his commitment to a language that, for all its imperfections, is as little alienated as possible, where, as Cassirer says, 'the word [...] is not a mere conventional symbol, but is merged with its object in an indissoluble unity' (45). Thus when, in 'La Logosphère et les
Taciturnes’, Tournier disparages the ‘logosphériques’, he is careful not to decry the ‘parole humaine’, but its malign inversion, ‘le verbe’, the abstract and alienated language of autrui at which his attack is aimed. This distinction is implicit in ‘Les Mots sous les mots’, where Tournier stresses the positive qualities that the term ‘parole’ has in the French language (‘tenir, donner sa parole, un homme de parole etc.’) whereas the term ‘verbe’ is seen to lose its original positive status as the translated equivalent of the logos and is given a negative orientation by its derivations, ‘verbeux’ and ‘verbiage’ (46).

On a thematic level, Paul Surin and Thomas Koussek’s rarified vision of a perfect logos finds its response in Jean, the subversive twin who shatters the closed, silent and sterile ‘cellule gémellaire’. His subversion entails the refusal of the perfection of Eolien silence and an acceptance of the imperfect but fertile ‘parole humaine’. Unable to explain to his fiancée the anguish her presence has caused his twin, because he can only express his deepest feelings in Eolien, Jean loses her and with her the promise of escape from the sexless sterile cellule, where ‘cellule’ now connotes a prison cell rather than a biological unit of life:

Il fallait me délier la langue afin que j’apprenne à parler avec les mots de tout le monde, du sexe et du coeur. (M 413)

These textual and thematic reminders of the necessity of
the word strategically recall the dialectic necessity of the absolute. Tournier will not allow his writing to reflect or rest in the nostalgic recall of a Utopic world - word, nor to wallow in the misery of alienated otherness of language; he pursues the dialectic central to his philosophy, rigorously to its term, where the necessity of the language-fixed cogito emerges as 'le retour du monde à l’harmonie rationelle' (E 66). For the absolute demands, it calls for the response of the thinking subject which in turn re-calls, reconfirms the absolute even as it speaks the imperfect human tongue.

This then is authentic dialogue, which eternally calls and recalls itself into being, and which determines Tournier's own act of writing as the constant prologue to the authentic dialectic of the absolute.

NOTES

1. See Les Météores, pp. 156-61

2. I am not suggesting that the verbal matrix can be separated from the symbolic and iconic matrices: their mutual inter-dependence is not in dispute; I merely suggest that for most people language is pre-eminent in their most basic response to their own consciousness and consciousness of the world around them.

3. See Nakamura, A Comparative History of Ideas, pp. 60-1

4. Nakamura, opus cit., p. 61

5. Cassirer, Language and Myth, pp. 44-50
6. The Stoics, Philo and Neo-Platonists in particular. See Nakamura, opus cit., p.61.

7. Cassirer, opus cit., p.45

8. See Badger, The Nestorians and their rituals

9. Foucault, Les Mots et les Choses, p.51

10. Rousseau, Essai sur l’origine des langages. p.53: ‘[la première langue] auroit peu d’adverbes et de mots abstraits [...] Elle auroit beaucoup d’augmentifs, de diminutifs, de mots composé, de particules explétives [...] elle auroit beaucoup d’irrégularités et d’anomalies – elle négligeroit l’analogie grammaticale pour s’attacher à l’euphonia, au nombre, à l’harmonie et à la beauté des sons [...] elle persuaderoit sans convaincre et peindroit sans raisonner; elle ressembleroit à la langue chinoise à certains égards, à la gréque à d’autres, à l’arabe à d’autres.’ See also Chapter VII, ‘Origine de la Musique’. Emile I, p. 45: ‘On a longtemps cherché s’il y avait une langue naturelle et commune à tous les hommes; sans doute il y en a une, et c’est celle que les enfants parlent avant de savoir parler.’ ‘Discours sur l’Inégalité’ (Oeuvres complètes III, p.148: ‘Le premier langage de l’homme, le langage le plus universel, le plus énergique [...] est le cri de la Nature’.

11. See Foucault, opus cit., pp. 32-40

12. See Knowlson, Universal Language Schemes in England and France 1600-1800; for schemes based on music, see pp.119-22; for schemes based on mathematics see pp.21-2

13. S.Freud, Complete Psychological Works Vol XII, p.23

14. Ibid.

15. S.Freud, opus cit., Vol XV, p.166

16. ‘Le phénomène salvateur qu’il [Franz] guette s’annonce par d’infimes lueurs [...] Trois fulminations en salve, puis […] Une nouvelle salve blanche’(M 78-9) (My italics)

17. Mallarmé, Divagations, p.

18. See also Arlette Bouloumié, Michel Tournier, Le Roman Mythologique pp.41-56
20. See Foucault, *Ceci n'est pas une pipe*.
22. *Ibid*.
24. Kristeva uses the term 'rythme pré-logique' to describe this innate pulse of language, *opus cit.* p.190
27. Cassirer, *Language and Myth* p.79
31. *Opus cit.*, p.176
32. See *opus cit.*, p.174
33. *Le Débat*, No. 33, Jan 1985 p.104
34. *CJV* 107
35. Tournier's distinction between 'primaires' and 'secondaires' reflects the distinction made by Roquentin in *La Nausée*: 'Mais il faut choisir: vivre ou raconter' p.62.
36. See *VV* 226-30, 236 and 351-3
38. Madame Teste responds to abstract utterances in the same way: 'Les choses abstraites ou trop élevées pour moi ne m'ennuient pas à entendre; j'y trouve un enchantement presque musical.' Valéry, *Monsieur Teste* in *Oeuvres II*, p.26
39. Barthes, *opus cit.*, p.64
40. Barthes, *opus cit.*, pp.64-5

42. See *Vendredi*, p.232 : 'Un petit nuage de l’occident vient obnubiler l’oeuf de Léda.‘

43. *Le Débat*, p.107

44. *Le Débat*, p.106; see also 'Pierrot ou les secrets de la nuit’, (*SC* 25) on alliterative word associations.

45. Cassirer, *opus cit.*, p.58

46. *Le Débat*, p.108
CHAPTER FIVE
LAUGHTER AND THE ABSOLUTE (1)

'As yet he has not learned laughter or beauty. Gloomy the hunter returned from the woods of knowledge [...] As yet his knowledge has not learned to smile' (Nietzsche, Thus Spake Zarathoustra, p.228)

1. NOVELISTS AND AGELASTES

In L'Art du Roman Milan Kundera examines the relationship, which he regards as a natural affinity, between truth, laughter and the novel and the correspondent antinomy between the novelist and the agélaste, a Rabelaisian neologism, meaning 'celui qui ne rit pas, qui n’a pas le sens d’humour' (2). His argument is supported by the evidence of repressive social or political regimes in which truth and laughter are the first victims in the suppression of imaginative artistic freedom (3):

Il y a un proverbe juif admirable : L’homme pense, Dieu rit. Inspiré par cette sentence, j’aime imaginer que François Rabelais a entendu un jour le rire de Dieu et que c’est ainsi que l’idée du premier grand roman européen est née. Il me plaît de penser que l’art du roman est venu au monde comme l’écho du rire de Dieu. Mais pourquoi Dieu rit-il en regardant l’homme qui pense ? Parce que l’homme pense et la vérité lui échappe. [...] 

Rabelais détestait les agélastes. Il en avait peur. Il se plaignait que les agélastes fussent si ‘atroces contre lui’ qu’il avait failli cesser d’écrire, et pour toujours. Il n’y a pas de paix possible entre le romancier et l’agélaste. N’ayant jamais entendu le rire de Dieu, les agélastes sont persuadés que la vérité est claire, que tous les hommes doivent penser la même chose et qu’eux mêmes sont exactement ce qu’ils pensent être. (4)

Although terms such as ‘penser’ and ‘vérité’ are more
narrowly specified in Tournier’s theoretical writing (5), Kundera’s affirmation of the power of the novelist’s laughter (first seen in Rabelais’ writing) to subvert received ideas, and to suggest an alternative to the ratiocentric truth of the agélastes, comes very close indeed to Tournier’s own position.

During a television interview with François Mitterand in 1983 (6), Tournier was delighted to acknowledge the similarity which the President of France had perceived between his work and that of Rabelais. Indeed, once the comparison has been made, a number of analogies present themselves immediately: both writers, for example, take a recognisable pleasure in a richness of diction, which frequently has recourse to neologisms or to an arcane, archaic or jargonistic lexicon; there is also a similar amplitude of narrative scale and style, in which ideas develop centrifugally (if even on occasion at the expense of form) (7); a similar investment in both myth-heritage and mythopoecism; and, not least, a common awareness of the subversive potential of humour and the revelatory power of laughter, in a world dominated by 'agélastes'. The agélaste, it need hardly be said, corresponds directly to Tournier’s vision of the third movement of the 'drame cartésien' in which autrui, the busy manufacturer of the rational world, struggles for subjective domination over the inchoate world of the object.
Milan Kundera and Michel Tournier figure amongst the few authentic scions of the Rabelaisian lineage. Their shared belief in the power of art inspired by ‘le rire de Dieu’ to reveal a truth about being more fundamental than the specious, albeit comforting, reality manufactured by the agelastes, and in the particular, subversive gift of the novel to expose this ontological dichotomy, distinguishes their writing, like that of Rabelais, from both the discourse of philosophy and the discourse of comic fiction.

Their commitment to the Rabelaisian legacy is expressed in almost identical terms and images. Kundera writes that ‘l’art inspiré par le rire de Dieu [...] à l’instar de Pénélope [...] défait pendant la nuit la tapisserie que des théologiens, des philosophes, des savants ont ourdie la veille’ (8). Tournier envisages a similar process, ‘Car nous sommes dressés à tisser constamment un réseau relationnel où nous sommes pris avec les choses et les gens qui nous entourent’ (VP 298), to which the antidote is laughter; ‘le rire de Dieu’, he writes, ‘accompagne l’émergence de l’absolu au milieu du tissu de relativités où nous vivons’ (VP 198).

For both Kundera and Tournier, their task as writers is to confront the ‘agelastique’ vision of the world; theirs is a quasi-ontological attempt to reach and disturb ‘le fond chatouilleux de l’être’ (9).
2. COLLECTING AND DISSECTING LAUGHTER

Tournier listens attentively to laughter, and a singular interest in its nature and effect is expressed throughout his writing. In *Le Vol du Vampire* for example, Tournier's literary meditations are penetrated with a desire to seek out laughter, whether in the personal histories of the writers and / or their characters which he examines, or in his own reaction to the text, and to trace the types of humour which determine these varied manifestations of laughter.

His reflections on Gide, for example, include Roger Martin du Gard and Maria Van Rysselberghe's descriptions of the writer's habitual 'glou-glou mouillé' (VV 216) and occasional 'fou rire' (VV 217). Other examples in this assembly include Victor Hugo's eulogy to the laughter of the child, which represents 'l'amour, l'innocence auguste, épanouie [...] La gloire d'être pur, l'orgueil d'être debout' (VV 178), 'les rires diaboliques' of Adrien Leverkuhn (VV 291) and 'le sens profondément destructeur du rire' of his creator, Thomas Mann (VV 291); the ability of Jules Vallès to look at himself and 's'en rire et s'en libérer' (VV 193); the revelatory laughter of Frédéric Lange looking at what goes on underneath the pristine napery of the dining table (VV 371) and the astonished laughter of the photographer Jacques Lartigue, amazed and amused to confront himself, aged five, in a photograph of a crowd of children, at an exhibition of Eugène Atget's work (VV 349).
Rather like a lepidopterist, Tournier 'brings home' his ephemeral catch and submits it to microscopic observation and classification. As literary production, these observations emerge in three different perspectives: physiology, psychology and philosophy. The intensity with which he scrutinises the physiology of laughter for example, is brought to light in the conte, 'La Jeune Fille et la Mort', in which a young doctor explains with comic pedantry that:

[... ] le rire dans un premier degré se caractérise par une dilation subite de l'orbiculaire des lèvres et de la contraction du risorius de Santorini, du canin et du buccinateur [... ] mais que, dans un deuxième degré, les contractions musculaires pouvaient [...] s'étendre jusqu'aux muscles du cou, en particulier au peaucier. Et que, à un troisième degré, il ébranle tout l'organisme, faisant [...] contracter par saccades douloureuses le diaphragme aux dépens de la masse intestinale et du coeur. (CB 200) (10)

Two other contes in Le Coq de Bruyère reveal a similarly detailed and observant investigation into the nature of laughter, approached however, on these occasions, from a socio-psychological perspective. Laughter may, as in 'Que ma joie demeure' prove to be a sum of hostile reactions:

Raphaël évalua la qualité de ce rire. Le sadisme, la méchanceté et le goût de l'abjection s'y étalaient cyniquement. (CB 90)

In 'Le Nain Rouge', on the other hand, the laughter of the audience signifies an equally complex, though benevolent, response to the performer, which Tournier breaks down into its constituent elements:

C'était un rire stylisé, esthétique, cérémonieux, collectif, plein de déférence de la foule femelle à
l'artiste qui la subjugue. (CB 114)

Looking at laughter in terms of its physiology or psychology does not, however, permit the observer to see a way out of the 'ordre social'. No matter how microscopic the observation, physiology and psychology conform to the subjective aspirations of the ratiocentric mind. It is only by adopting a radically alternative perspective which stands outside the 'web' of social relativism that an ontologically separate kind of laughter emerges. This is what both Tournier and Kundera describe as 'le rire de Dieu', the effective counterstroke to the 'agélastes', and which Tournier further designates as 'le rire blanc', claiming it to be 'la marque d'authentification' (VP 152) of all philosophical enquiry.

3. LE RIRE BLANC

From Cicero to Lacan, there have been few thinkers who have not speculated upon the origin and significance of laughter—significance to which the history of European poetry, philosophy and fiction readily bears witness (11). However, it is rare to encounter a writer who distinguishes the phenomenon of laughter and the humour from which it is generated into distinctly metaphysical and non-metaphysical groupings (12); this is Tournier's principal innovation. He determines three categories of humour, which he labels 'rose', 'noir' and 'blanc', each of which raises its own type of laughter. 'Le rire blanc', the successor to the third category, alone represents the 'rire de Dieu', the sudden expression of
absolute as opposed to manufactured truth. The most concise portrait of these categories appears in the lexicon to the Jules Tallandier edition of *Le Roi des Aulnes*:

> En vérité, il faudrait distinguer trois sortes d'humour. L'humour rose qui aide la digestion en désopilant la rate. L'humour noir qui est tout simplement le premier appliqué à des choses macabres. La troisième sorte d'humour - qu'on pourrait appeler l'humour blanc - surgit d'un brusque face à face avec l'absolu, à croire que l'être est dans son fond chatouilleux. (13)

Tournier provides several examples of each of these three categories of humour. The first type, 'l'humour rose', he posits as the model for laughter in Bergson's *Le Rire* (14). This is the kind of humour that reveals its subjects to be ridiculously adherent to the prescribed codes and programmes of their immediate society, who cannot adapt themselves to unforeseen situations; 'C'est pourquoi les personnages les plus enfoncés dans des structures immuables - fonctionnaires, gendarmes, militaires, médecins, hobéreaux etc. - étant plus exposés que d'autres aux déments de leur milieu, à la tentation de plaquer du mécanique sur du vivant, ont une vocation comique particulière que le théâtre et le satire exploitent traditionnellement.' (VP 196-7). This undoubtedly is the genre of humour in which Tournier would place a scene from his schooldays, when he remembers a teacher who, seeing a piece of paper lying on the ground by a waste paper basket, picked it up and mechanically signed it before throwing it away (VP 40).

The second genre, 'l'humour noir' is illustrated by
macabre graveside or 'gallows' humour 'qui nargue la mort elle-même, mais sans l'arracher pour autant à ses cadres sociaux.' (VP 197). Witness the gravedigger who informs the priest that the funeral cortège will not be long 's'ils ne sont pas amusés en route' (VP 197); the humour of his speech is derived from its contrast - not rupture - with 'normal' social etiquette which prescribes a sense of gravitas at funerals.

The function of 'l'humour blanc', however, is to subvert the social framework of received ideas and values within which the other two genres of humour are contained. It is the laughter provoked by the sudden intuition that 'rien n'a aucune importance' (VP 199); laughter which undermines Tournier's 'agélastes; 'ceux qui [...] se veulent dupes de la cohérence, de la fermeté, de la consistance dont la société pare le réel' (VP 199), showing their deepest beliefs to be but a 'tissu de relativités'. It is the laughter of those who are invited to admire the king's invisible suit 'et chantent gaiment que le roi est nu' (VP 199). Tournier, like Kundera, looks to Jewish wit to describe the mixture of anguish and joy that accompanies this laughter: anguish at the sudden loss of what has been held to be real or of value, joy at the deliverance from what is suddenly revealed to be an artificial construction (15). Max Brod, Tournier writes, recalled listening to Kafka reading The Trial to a group of Jewish friends who interrupted him constantly, not with their
tears at its relevance to their own plight, but with howls of laughter (16).

Although Tournier is explicit in his description of these three genres of humour, and in his affirmation that 'le rire blanc' erupts from a sudden brush with the absolute, much more remains to be derived on an implicit level from the 'jeu spéculaire'.

* * *

Tournier does not explicitly enlighten the reader on his decision to call the third genre of humour, 'l'humour blanc; he merely states with apparent disingenuity that he wishes to 'rester dans la gamme des couleurs' (VP 198). Other writers however, have also coloured their laughter in order to endow it with certain characteristics; Nietzsche, for example, postulated 'golden laughter' as a fundamental characteristic of his superman (17), Sartre uses the phrase 'un rire jaune' to describe Bataille's humour, and in the same essay, mentions Bergson's 'rire blanc et inoffensif' (18). Each of these colours carries its particular associations: 'yellow laughter' seems to convey an image of laughter that is slightly sick, bitter and perhaps tinted with fear (19); gold on the other hand, suggests royal or solar splendour and opulence; but whether, as Sartre implies, whiteness reflects inoffensiveness, is surely much more debatable. For of all the colours, whiteness is open to the most dramatically ambiguous interpretations. Milton, in the Areopagitica
suggests this kind of ambivalence when he writes that 'that virtue [which] is but a youngling in the contemplation of evil, and knows not the utmost that vice promises to her followers, and rejects it, is but a blank virtue, not a pure; her whiteness is but an excremental whiteness' (20).

No writer, however, has expressed this ambiguity better (on an explicit level) than Herman Melville:

Though [...] whiteness has been even made significant of gladness [...] and though in other mortal sympathies and symbolizings, this same hue is made the emblem of many touching, noble things - the innocence of brides, the benignity of age [...] though even in the higher mysteries of the most august religions it has been made the symbol of the divine spotlessness and power [...] though in the Vision of St. John, white robes are given to the redeemed, and the four-and-twenty elders stand clothed in white before the great white throne, and the Holy One that sitteth there white like wool; yet for all these accumulated associations, with whatever is sweet, and honorable, and sublime, there yet lurks an elusive something in the innermost idea of this hue, which strikes more of panic to the soul than that redness which affrights in blood. (21)

The terror evoked by whiteness, Melville argues, lies in the concept of absolute absence which it represents, '[...] it shadows forth the heartless void and immensities of the universe and thus stabs us from behind with the thought of annihilation' (22). Colour is merely a play of light on retinas, and nature a 'painted harlot' who masks a 'palsied leper'. The frightening truth, Melville concludes, is that beneath the common will to be reassured by this deception, there exists a universal blankness which denies even the deity; in whiteness the 'colourless, all-colour of atheism' may be discerned (23).
The evidence of etymology is less emotive than Melville’s striking analysis, but nevertheless it clearly shows the close association of \textit{blanc} (white) and \textit{blanc} (blank).

There can be little doubt that Tournier consciously - though not explicitly - has sought a creative exploitation of the fundamental cultural and semantic ambiguity of whiteness in his choice of nomenclature. For on the one hand, 'le rire blanc' may be identified with the laughter of innocence, (that of the child, the savage or of prelapsarian man). On the other hand, however, it represents the subversive laughter evoked by a sudden intuition of the blank chaos that underlies the structures of society. Colour is a reassuring fiction of the retina, held to be part of reality by the agélastes; whiteness, on the other hand ('all colour, no colour') is the colour of absolute (dialectical) truth.

The emergence of absolute truth from antagonistic forces met in a single image, is of evident relevance to the dialectic of the absolute described in 'L'Impersonnalisme'. The tension of opposites found in the term 'blanc' is adumbrated in Tournier's description of 'l'humour blanc' as the meeting place of diametrical opposites : the comic and the cosmic.

Le cosmique et le comique. Ces deux mots qui paraissent faits pour être rapprochés se repoussent presque toujours en réalité [...] le comique [...] est un phénomène social, un jeu dont la piste habituelle est le salon, un milieu plat, superficiel, aussi étendu
The mutual interpenetration of the horizontal (the superficial, subjective, language orientated world of autrui), and the vertical (the silent world of the object that reaches from the core of the earth to the extremities of the universe) points irresistibly and intra-textually to the anterior argument of 'L'Impersonnalisme', which describes the dialectic of the absolute. The development of Tournier's argument in *Le Vent Paraclet* may appear to be philosophically facile or obscure when he writes: 'Mais il y a un comique cosmique : celui qui accompagne l'émergence de l'absolu' (*VP* 198); but when paralleled with the primary text, the emergence of the absolute which Tournier posits in the later text, without apparent philosophical justification, may be seen as the ontologically inevitable consequence of this coincidence of the world of the subject and that of the object.

It is probably worth re-stating at this point (24) that Tournier is not incomprehensible if his argument is divorced from 'L'Impersonnalisme'; the laughter of the little boy who shouts that the emperor has no clothes on is an immediately intelligible illustration of absolute truth unmasked by laughter. But the 'infrastructure métaphysique invisible' (*CS* 193) behind the easily apprehended anecdote or image is deliberately obscure, for *Le Vent Paraclet* represents the
The distillation of Tournier's filial (dependent and antagonistic) response to a vast philosophical heritage into 'une philosophie de disette': a dry concentration whose substance is replenished with the vital anima of literary discourse. Only through the intra-textual 'jeu spéculaire' can the reader 'remonter le courant' and re-discover Tournier's philosophical sources and speculations.

The anterior text then, illuminates the relationship between laughter and the dialectic of the absolute which is forever affirmed, though never philosophically justified, in Le Vent Paraclet and later commentaries. 'Simplement, je le répète,' Tournier writes, 'l’approche de l’absolu se signale par le rire' (VP 153); but despite the repetition, the relationship is not so obvious. First the connection between dialectics and laughter must be made; a close examination of the text of Le Vent Paraclet reveals that Tournier's gratitude to Bachelard for introducing him to 'le grand couteau de la dialectique' appears conjointly with the realisation that laughter is the guarantee of the correct deployment of this tool: 'Bachelard me révélait un trait fondamental de l’entreprise philosophique et qui est comme sa marque d’authentification : le rire' (VP 152) (25). Once this relationship has been established, the intra-textual link with the dialectic of the absolute in 'L’Impersonnalisme' may be made. Can 'le rire blanc' be detected in this early work? Certainly, despite the weightiness of the subject, the tone
of the article is light-hearted, self-assured and often humorous: 'or, si j’interroge mon expérience,' says Tournier, cocking a snook at the philosophical canon upheld by most of his teachers at the Sorbonne, 'je n’y trouve pas trace de ce qu’on appelle la conscience, car je ne puis l’opposer pour la saisir à ce qui le nie' (E 49) (26).

Moreover, he makes explicit reference to 'un sursaut cosmique' (E 65), integral to the cogito, which throws into relief the 'absurdity' of a system which disallows the simultaneous existence and non-existence of God, essential to the dialectical construct of Being. Tournier the atheist of 1935 confronts Tournier the convert of 1940 to illustrate this point:

Dans ce court récit un cogito prend place en 1940 au moment de ma conversion, de laquelle aussi bien il ne se distingue pas. Appliqué à un monde sans Dieu, il l’a résorbé dans un Autrui-atheé sur le fond d’un monde avec Dieu c’est-à-dire dans une erreur. Pour voir ce qu’il adviendra, tentons maintenant de reprendre notre récit en nous interdisant de faire jouer le cogito - en ne constituent par conséquent aucun sujet. Avant 1940, Dieu n’est pas : après cette date il existe, voilà déjà qui est absurde. Mais la contradiction va devenir intolérable, si j’observe, d’une part, qu’en 1935, non seulement Dieu n’est pas, mais qu’il se donne comme ne devant jamais exister dans l’avenir, en particulier en l’année future 1940, et d’autre part, qu’en 1940, non seulement Dieu est, mais qu’il suppose comme ayant existé de tout temps, notamment en l’année passée 1935. (E 65)

Here Tournier might be seen to be labouring his point, but his evident irreverence, in complete contrast to conventional theo-philosophical discourse, constantly breaks through. This humour draws attention to Tournier’s belief that humourless
theo-philosophical discourse actually obstructs the discovery of ontological truth, the absolute. For Tournier is convinced that 'le rire [...] caractérisé toute découverte profonde et fondamentale' (VV 371); and contrasts the 'agélastes', Pascal and Flaubert's Monsieur Homais (27) 'qui [cherchent] en gémissant' (VP 158) with 'le métaphysicien qui trouve en riant' (VP 159). The latter finds what the former must seek without end.

Vendredi and the short story, 'La jeune fille et la mort', can be used to illustrate how this works in the practice of Tournier's fiction. For it is in the characters of Vendredi and Mélanie Blanchard that the devastating and revealing effects of 'le rire blanc' are best observed.

4. VENDREDI AND MELANIE

Vendredi's laughter contributes directly to Robinson's metamorphosis from subject who creates and dominates the 'Île administrée', into subjectless object - 'l'homme-île' (28). From his first meeting with Vendredi, Robinson confesses his unease in the presence of 'ce rire dévastateur' (V 153), without knowing - or without admitting in his log-book - what exactly is being 'devastated'. The narrative reveals what Robinson fails to see:

Robinson hait ses explosions juvéniles qui sapent son ordre et minent son autorité. (V 149)

The vocabulary privileges expressions of violence; terms such
as 'dévastateur' and 'explosions' prefigure the physical destruction of 'l'île administrée'. The syzygy which relates laughter to destruction is a prophetic indication that Vendredi will be responsible for this destruction, as much by his laughter, as by his involuntary detonation of the arsenal. The narrative, which reveals the effect of Vendredi's laughter is equally revealing with regard to its cause:

Mais si la bonne volonté de Vendredi est totale, il est encore très jeune, et sa jeunesse fuse parfois malgré lui. Alors il rit. (V 149)

For Vendredi's laughter issues from his 'bonne volonté' and his 'jeunesse'; characteristics which affirm his close association with the absolute. Unconditional goodwill is intra-textually shown to be related to the absolute in the Tournierian construct. It goes back to his reading of Kant's Fondement de la métaphysique des moeurs, described in Le Vent Paraclet which leads him to extrapolate from Kant's conclusion that 'cette bonne volonté seule est un absolu' (VP 288).

In Tournier's work, youth and childhood are also intimately linked with the absolute. Vendredi, who has no experience of the 'réseau relationnel' which Robinson has carefully woven around himself and the island during the period of the 'île administrée', lives like a child, in the absolute.

For Tournier, the child, laughter and wisdom are all
part of the same equation; semantically, children and wisdom are linked: 'La sagesse est inséparable de la taille et de l'âge. C'est en ce sens qu'elle comporte toujours une connotation enfantine et justifie l'usage français de parler d'enfants sages' (VP 290). Children's laughter bears witness to this wisdom, ('le roi est nu!'); it expresses their extra-ordinary perception of the world which places them outside the 'réseau relationnel' (29). Tournier's vision transforms Bossuet's 'le sage ne rit qu'en tremblant' (VP 199); Tournier's 'sage' is no grey-beard intellectual, but a child who laughs fearlessly, for fear is a contingent product of relativity.

Verndredi's 'rire dévastateur' is the laughter of the child who looks at the clown and sees through the artifice of adult society. And in fact, Vendredi plays the clown: he adorns cacti with clothes; he plants trees upside-down; he apes all Robinson's solemn activities. To be more precise, Vendredi plays the red clown to Robinson's unconscious adoption of the white clown's role (30). For through the children's laughter, the red clown causes 'la destruction du monde mesuré, verbal et immaculé du clown blanc par une contre logique toute pénétrée d'éléments physiques' (VP 38). According to Tournier it is this destructive role of the red clown which makes him a children's hero, for he supplies 'un modèle de lutte contre la société policée des adultes' (VP 38) (31).
Robinson's metamorphosis into 'l'homme-île' is finally marked by his desire to learn to laugh like Vendredi:

Soleil [...] donne-moi le visage de Vendredi, épanoui par le rire, taillé tout entier pour le rire. (V 217)

Significantly, this is one of the last entries Robinson makes in his log-book. It is (necessarily) left to the narrative to describe the conclusion of his laughing integration into the world of the absolute (32).

Further expression of the destructive effects of 'le rire blanc' may be found in 'La jeune fille et la mort' in which Mélanie Blanchard's strange humour places her beyond the pale of society and within the realm of the absolute. Her name, which etymologically recalls both blackness and whiteness (33), indicates her affinity with the macabre, expressed in her cult of lethal objects and inherent death-wish as well as a correspondent affinity with the absolute, expressed in her refusal of social convention and perception.

The short story may be read inter-textually against Sartre's La Nausée; certainly it refers intra-textually to Tournier's reading of Sartre's novel in Le Vol du Vampire (pp. 304-309). Like Roquentin, Mélanie suffers from a dread of 'l'engloutissement dans la nausée de l'existence' (CB 198). In his preface to Sartre's Les Mots, Tournier explains that 'nausea' 'n'est pas l'état d'âme de Roquentin. C'est la nature même des choses qui l'entourent et dont il fait partie' (VV 307); similarly, Mélanie's revulsion is located
in the world around her, rather than in herself:

Au demeurant était-ce bien elle qui s’ennuyait ?
N’était-ce pas plutôt les choses, le paysage autour
d’elle ? [...] La chambre, la classe, la rue paraissait
pétries dans une boue blafarde où les formes se
dissolvaient lentement. Seule vivante au milieu de cette
désolation nauséeuse, Mélanie luttait avec acharnement
pour ne pas s’enliser à son tour dans cette vase. (CB
178)

Both characters respond to their asocial perception of
themselves and the world with what looks to the outside world
like madness. Roquentin himself refers to his altered
perception as 'une petite crise de folie' (c.f. VV 306);
Mélanie’s taste for bitterness, extreme cold and the
contemplation of lethal instruments give those who know her
similar concern for her sanity. Comparable also is the
inevitable solitude of Roquentin and Mélanie, both of whom
are unable to participate in the 'réseau relationnel'. For
Tournier, the marginality that results from their 'farouche
solitude' is both the witness and the agent of a natural,
intuitive grasp of metaphysics: he describes Roquentin
as a man afflicted by a 'don métaphysique' (VV 307); Mélanie,
likewise, is described as a 'métaphysicienne de génie'
(CB 198)

But there the resemblance ends. For there are two sorts
of metaphysician in the Tournierian construct. On the one
hand, Roquentin may be seen to embody Tournier’s concept of
the 'métaphysicien qui cherche en gémissant', while on the
other, Mélanie (like Vendredi) may ne seen to represent 'le
sage qui trouve en riant' (34). Roquentin's history is one of continuing torment; as Tournier explains, he represents Sartre's conviction that 'l'être se saisit dans la nausée' (VV 308). Tournier lightly paraphrases his own description of the laughter that accompanies the emergence of the absolute (35) in his description of Sartre's concept of nausea: 'C'est par delà les fragiles constructions que la société édifie autour de nous, l'émergence terrible et menaçant de l'Être. Tout l'édifice de paroles, vêtements et décors s'effondre devant cette chose impensable et innommable qui réduit à néant nos projets, notre passé, notre présent.' (VV 308) For Tournier, the intuition is identical, but it is experienced with the joy of deliverance that eclipses the anguish of this revelation. Thus when Mélanie laughs, exactly like Vendredi, 'la réalité quotidienne était frappée de dérision, dénuée de l'importance bouffie dont elle se pare [...] Rien n'avait aucune importance' (CB 181).

Just as Vendredi and ultimately Robinson's 'rire blanc' signals their alienation from the 'réseau relationnel' and joyful complicity with the 'autre île', so Mélanie's 'death by laughter' bears witness to her ultimate alienation from the social construct, and integration with the absolute.

5. IRONY: A POSTSCRIPT

The term which Tournier uses most frequently to
characterise 'le rire blanc' is irony. Valéry's 'comique cosmique', for example, is described as 'une sorte de métaphysique de l'ironie' (VP 200); Robinson depicts Vendredi's laughing countenance, dominated by 'Cet oeil toujours allumé par la dérision, fendu par l'ironie' (V 217); Mélanie pursues her strange activities 'la bouche pleine de rires ironiques' (CB 180); Ibrahim (La Goutte d'Or), whose single eye 'pétillait de lueurs ironiques' at his own sense of superiority (GO 19), dies laughing - this is his 'triomphe et son défi' (GO 25).

Irony may be defined in the context of Tournier's writing as a form of epistemology which postulates two levels of knowledge, shallow 'science', and profound 'sagesse'; the former is an artificial construct based on relative values and rational observations, the latter is the intuitive participation in the dialectic of the absolute. Ironic laughter results from their confrontation; it is sagesse's intuition that science's constructs have no meaning or importance whatsoever. Hence Vendredi's explosive irony when confronted by Robinson's efforts to control the 'ile administrée' and Mélanie's 'rires ironiques' in the face of a society whose values and perspectives are so alien to her own. If the argument of the present study, that Tournier's project is both participation in and manifestation of the dialectic of the absolute, is accepted, then all Tournier's writing must be seen as the work of an ironist (36).
However, this conclusion poses a significant problem: can the ironist—Tournier, or characters such as Vendredi and Mélanie—be a metaphysician? Richard Rorty thinks not. Certainly, as Rorty argues, there seems to be an irreconcilable difference between the metaphysician whose starting point is a conviction that an ultimate reality exists (and that it is the inclination and duty of the human mind to enter into a relationship with it) and the ironist who is constantly alert to the contingency of his or her most profoundly held convictions (37).

The present study has sought to demonstrate that a primary belief in the absolute and its dialectical engagement with humanity is central to Tournier’s philosophical and literary discourses. In Rorty’s terms, Tournier’s argument is founded upon the primary desire of every metaphysician ‘to make sense of the claim that human beings are something more than centerless webs of beliefs and desires’ (38). However, Tournier’s position as an ironist challenges, derides even, the validity of this deep conviction and desire at its very outset. This fundamental ambiguity evidently places the creative reader-participant of Tournier’s work in an awkward position. The ‘jeu spéculaire’ which has been regarded as an invitation to participate in the disclosure of an ultimate position of reality or truth, an ontological certainty at the heart of a creative dialogue, is suddenly subverted and the reader is confronted with the ironic spectacle of the
meaninglessness of his or her labours.

It is a paradox that cannot be unambiguously resolved; it might be argued (and this, in effect, is the justification of this thesis) that to enter into a creative dialogue with the Tournierian text is sufficient justification in itself, for it demonstrates the dynamism of the dialectic, which is not teleologically orientated towards a final goal, 'the primary absolute', but which is an eternally self-creating dialogue which creates, rather than discovers metaphysical truth (39).

Nevertheless, to have that dialogue constantly subverted by the laughter of the ironist serves as a timely reminder (to the present study) that nothing, no theory or conviction lies beyond the reach of time, chance or language (40).

Between creation and nothingness there are no eternal truths.

For Kundera, the irreconcilable ambiguity of irony is an authentic characteristic of the novel:

Plus on lit le roman, plus la réponse devient impossible car, par définition, le roman est l'art ironique : sa 'vérité' est cachée, non prononcée, non-prononçable [...] L'ironie irrite. Non pas qu'elle se moque ou qu'elle attaque, mais parce qu'elle nous prive des certitudes en dévoilant le monde comme ambiguïté. Leonardo Sciascia: 'Rien de plus difficile à comprendre, de plus indéchiffrable que l'ironie.' Inutile de vouloir rendre un roman 'difficile' par affectation de style; chaque roman digne de ce mot, si limpide soit-il, est suffisamment difficile par sa consubstantielle ironie. (41)

Irony guards against both the writer and the reader's rigid imposition of a single, eternal truth upon the text, insisting on creation or nothing. Sagesse is as simple as
Socrates’ recognition of the virtuality of knowledge.

Nietzsche, in whose work Tournier perceives ‘un friselis de drôlerie qui sapent les racines même de l’être’ (VP 200), figures at the head of Tournier’s short list of writers whose works reflect the creative impetus and invitation of irony and the virtuality of knowledge. For Nietzsche, more than any other writer in Tournier’s philosophical ancestry expresses the ‘comique cosmique’ of the self-creating dialectic: ‘Il faut avoir un chaos en soi-même pour accoucher d’une étoile qui danse.’ (VP 200)

For Tournier, Kandinsky’s art has exactly the quality of irony, virtuality and anti-reductivism which he discerns in Nietzsche’s writing. The intratextual link between artist and writer is reinforced by the occult reference to Nietzsche’s Human, All Too Human:

Mais c’est déjà donner de la joie de ces dessins une interprétation humaine trop humaine. Cette gaieté, c’est celle du chaos tâtonnant qui se découvre cosmos, à la fois parfaitement équilibré et débordant de virtualités. Il y a là des vagissements de nébuleuses, des sourires de comètes, des tendresses de voie lactée, et jusqu’au rire gras d’un nadir. Virtualités. C’est peut-être le mot qui convient le mieux à ces traces d’une fermeté impeccable. (CJV 128)

The contradiction of the metaphysical ironist is, to some extent, resolved in the way that the issue of language, silence and the absolute was sorted out in the preceding chapter: language and silence are seen as the respective products of contingent autrui and the necessary absolute and
the writer's utterance a response to the invitation to participate in the dialectic of the absolute.

NOTES

1. I have presented the substance of parts 2 and 3 of this chapter (in French) under the title 'Le rire et l'absolu dans l'oeuvre de Michel Tournier', published in SUD, no. 61, 1986, pp.76-89.

2. Kundera, L'Art du Roman, p.193

3. Kundera was himself a victim of Czechoslovakian totalitarianism which placed a ban on his writings; his self-supposed affinity with Rabelais who also suffered from attempts to suppress his writing is understandable.

4. Kundera, opus cit., pp. 193-4

5. See, in particular, 'L'Impersonnalisme' pp.64-5, where concepts of thought and truth are envisaged as components of the dialectic of necessity and contingency between the world-in-itself and autrui.


7. Les Météores, for example, has been criticised for a certain looseness of construction. From Gilles et Jeanne onwards, however, Tournier's writing has reflected an increasing attention to form.

8. Kundera, opus cit., p.195

9. See the Jules Tallandier edition of Le Roi des Aulnes, p.10, where Tournier writes of 'l'être dans son fond chatouilleux'. C.f. also VP 203 where Tournier describes the anguished laughter of the patient undergoing an operation on his pleurum in Thomas Mann's The Magic Mountain : 'Messieurs, la palpitation de la plèvre, c'est comme si on vous chatouillait de la façon la plus infâme, la plus raffinée, la plus inhumaine" Cette page nous donne la transcription romanesque du phénomène du rire blanc.'

10. C.f the similarly pedantic - and comical - description of snoring in Le Médianoche Amoureux, pp. 31-2.

12. An exception is Baudelaire’s ‘De l’essence du rire’.

13. See the Jules Tallandier edition of *Le Roi des Aulnes*, p.10

14. See also VP 197, where Tournier creates the same colour categories of laughter and places Bergson’s view of humour in the first category of ‘l’humour rose’.

15. Jewish wit is particularly expressive of ‘l’humour blanc’ because it is the product of a marginalised people; both Kundera and Tournier insist that marginals, i.e. types that are not fully admitted to society (e.g. artists, children and homosexuals), are more in touch with the absolute because less fettered by social constructs.


19. This is a subjective response on my part to the suggestions of the colour yellow; on reflection, I think my response has been conditioned by Van Gogh’s last self-portrait in the Courtauld Galleries, in front of which I have been writing this chapter, and which makes extensive use of this colour. The sickly yellow background perfectly reflects the artist’s queasy mental state and fright at the ‘unheimlich’ threat of both himself and his world.


23. Melville, *ibid*.

24. See Chapter Two, Part I of the present study

25. See Davis, *opus cit.*, p.3 for an alternative and derisory view of Bachelard’s influence upon Tournier’s
development as a metaphysician.

26. The period when Tournier was a student at the Sorbonne (1942-6) was the heyday of phenomenalist philosophy. (Merleau-Ponty came, by invitation, to teach at the Sorbonne in 1949); phenomenalism privileges consciousness and holds reality to be that which exists as the object of consciousness. Consequently metaphysics was in disrepute (c.f. VV 384: 'la métaphysique étant, de l'avis même de [mes] maîtres en Sorbonne, chose vague et nébuleuse'). Quite clearly, Tournier and the group of friends who contributed towards Espace are completely opposed to this philosophical stance.

27. See VP 158-9

28. See also on this subject, Deleuze, 'Michel Tournier et le monde sans autrui', postface to the Folio edition of Vendredi ou les limbes du Pacifique.

29. See note 15 above.

30. C.f. the prophecy of Van Deyssel's tarot reading when the 'bateleur' is revealed (V 7).

31. On the opposition of the red and the white clown in the Tournierian analysis, see 'le rouge et le blanc', (CS 73-5 and PP 131-2).

32. In the final pages of the novel, Robinson has adopted the pre-verbal silence of the 'primaire', i.e. he will not express himself reflectively or prospectively in writing.

33. Mélanie derives from melas (in Greek, black); Blanchard needs no explanation.

34. See above, p.233

35. In Le Vent Paraclet, p.197

36. See my forthcoming article in La Revue des Sciences Humaines (1992), 'Totalité et ironie'.

37. Rorty, Contingency, Irony and Solidarity, pp.73-8.

38. Rorty, opus cit., p.88

39. A term like 'metaphysical truth' in the ironist's vocabulary is not an anomaly; it must be seen, however, as a term in a language game rather than in a 'final vocabulary'. See Rorty, opus cit., p.73)
40. Tournier’s post-modern use of philosophical intertexts confirms his position as an ironist; philosophical systems which he refers to as ‘citadelles de granit’ (VP 158) are ironically subverted in the course of his mis-reading and re-writing.

41. Kundera, *opus cit.*, pp.163-4
'We define the nature of creating by its relation to the nature of truth as the unconcealedness of beings' (Heidegger, *Poetry, Language, Thought*, p.57)

1. WORD AND IMAGE

There is an ancient bond between the visual arts and the written word which reflects a fundamental co-efficiency of communication by image and language. Egyptian hieroglyphs, Amerindian totems and oriental pictograms reveal an undifferentiated view of image and word: each of the dual components is at the service of the other’s desire to speak to the mind that knows their code.

In *Le Tabor et le Sinaï* Tournier makes frequent allusions to this kind of reciprocity; in the essay on Mac Avoy, he compares the writing hand with the drawing hand and, in the introductory essay, proposes a neologism, ‘kalologue’, to describe the language-based activity of question and answer that takes place in the spectator’s mind when confronted by the work of art: ‘c’est dire que l’oeuvre créatrice suscite naturellement le signe’ (*TS* 12). The influence of Valéry may be discerned here; in ‘Autour de Corot’ he writes:

La cause première d’un ouvrage n’est-elle pas un désir qu’il en soit parlé, ne fut-ce qu’entre un esprit et soi-même ? [...] ôtez aux tableaux la chance d’un discours interérieur ou autre, aussitôt les plus belles toiles du monde perdent leur sens et leur fin. (1)
However, this suggestion of reciprocity begs a pertinent question: can the image exist independently of language, or less specifically, can it have any life of its own? Recent thinking responds in the affirmative. Jacques Derrida acknowledges not only the discursivity but the resolute silence of the image:

[...] c’est comme s’il y avait eu pour moi, dans la peinture, deux peintures. L’une coupant le souffle, étrangère à tout discours, vouée au mutisme présomé de 'la chose-même', restitue, en silence autoritaire, un ordre de présence. Elle motive ou déploie donc, le déniant totalement, un poème ou un philosophème dont le code me paraît épuisé. L’autre, la même donc, volubile, intarissible, reproduit virtuellement un vieux langage [...] (2)

Norman Bryson posits that the work of art is created within—and with varying degrees of—voluble discursivity and silent figurality. He describes ‘the subtle mutuality and co-operation between the component of the image which declares its allegiance to discourse, and the component which refuses alignment to discourse’ (3) and draws the conclusion that ‘the image is the site of convergence of two antithetical forces [...] at the pole of pure discursivity, the hieroglyph or pictogram [...] at the opposite pole [...] the asemantic brushwork of abstract expressionism’ (4).

Colin Davis argues that Tournier’s theoretical writing reveals him to be virtually insensible to the silent side of the image, unable to ‘abandon the assumption that it contains a disguised message which only the hermeneut can raise to the dignity of language’ (5). Certainly, the evidence of
Tournier's writing reveals that Tournier almost invariably responds to the image in the role of provider: he provides the image with a voice it cannot speak for itself. However, it is wrong to suppose that because of this Tournier is unable to accept or wilfully ignores the fundamental silence of the image. This is far from being the case. Tournier is not looking to speak the authentic meaning of the dumb work of art; like Baudelaire, his response to the image engages 'la reine des facultés': the imagination. Far from wresting meaning from the painted or sculpted surface, Tournier's objective is to continue the process of creation (6).

This chapter will show that Tournier privileges the visual arts in his writing because of their very silence; for the muteness of the painted or sculpted surface corresponds to the silence of the primary absolute, while the 'kalologue's' continuing creation reflects the dialectical absolute in the Tournierian construct. The activity of the 'kalologue' responds to this absolute in the same way that the creative dialectic of the fourth moment of the 'drame cartésien' restores coherence and harmony to the immutable sterility of the first moment, the primary absolute.

Whilst other writers may incorporate real or invented works of art into their fictions in order, for example, to provide ironic commentary on the activity of the characters (the 'Ghent Altarpiece' in Camus's *La Chute*), or to reveal a psychological mystery (Guido Reni's 'Beatrice Cenci' in
Hawthorne's *The Marble Faun*), or to show prophetic insight (the 'after Moralès' 'Damned Souls' in Merimée's *Les Ames du Purgatoire*) or act as an eternalising agent of fragmented memories (Vermeer's 'View of Delft' in Proust's *A la Recherche du Temps Perdu*), Tournier deploys both real and imaginary works of art in his writing to reflect a fundamental philosophical concern: the destiny of the absolute.

If the dialectical structure of the absolute is borne in mind, the tension between word and image in Tournier's writing begins to make sense. This tension reveals itself most clearly in Tournier's fictions in *La Goutte d'Or* and in his theoretical writing in *Le Tabor et le Sinaï*. In both works, Tournier examines two types of relationship; on the one hand, he describes the conflict between the sign and the image, and on the other, the symbiotic attachment of the sign and the 'oeuvre créatrice'.

'L'image partout présente, obsédante, adorée' (*TS* 11) is held by Tournier to be a particular ill of Western civilization. 'C'est plus vrai aujourd'hui que jamais', he continues, 'avec le déferlement des images des magazines, du cinéma, de la télévision.' In *La Goutte d'Or*, Idriss, a young Berber shepherd is brutally initiated into this obsession. First photographed, then filmed, then reproduced as a cartoon drawing and finally used as a model for a mass production of plastic dummies, Idriss suffers an increasing loss of
identity with each image taken from himself. The fact that
Idriss has grown up not only in the Islamic tradition, which
privileges semiography over iconography but also in the
desert where again, the interpretation of signs is a way of
life, intensifies the portrayal of the aggressive relation of
the image to the sign.

However, this aggression is superseded by the removal of
the factitious image and the introduction of the 'oeuvre
créatrice'. This idea is introduced in the form of a parable
in La Goutte d'Or, 'Barberousse ou le portrait du roi' and
further explored in the second 'légende', 'La Reine Blonde'.

In the first tale, the artist Ahmed ben Salem is charged
with the responsibility of painting the portrait of the
pirate-king, Kheir-ed-Dîn. The latter's sensitivity about his
red hair dictates that the portrait should be in black and
white; furthermore, it has to be made in his absence. The
poor artist dissatisfiedly produces a series of 'hachures
noires sur fond blanc', which, because of the absence of the
model, derive from an impulse that is both 'abstraite et
symbolique' (GO 48). The sketch evidently has more in common
with writing than with painting. It is unsatisfactory to the
artist who claims 'je peins la vérité' (GO 43). The sketch
that resembles writing is transformed, however, into a
colourful tapestry by the artist Kerstine, in which the
portrait of the red-head and an autumnal forest scene are
indissolubly united. The king responds to the first (black and
white) portrait with violent pleasure:

Kheir ed Din fit irruption dans son atelier, et, planté les jambes écartées et les mains aux hanches devant l’esquisse [...] il éclata d’un rire sauvage [...] - ce portrait de moi me plait hautement dans son débordement de force brutale (GO 48)

The tapestry, however, provokes an entirely different response: ‘Comme c’est harmonieux ! murmura Kheir ed Din après un long silence [...]’ (GO 52). Furthermore, he strokes and smells the tapestry ‘pour mieux goûter sa propre douceur’ (GO 53), in direct contrast to his previous physical attitude to the sketch. In this tale, the violence of the sign is tamed by the ‘oeuvre créatrice’.

The second tale inverts the narrative, but not the theme of the first. This time the royal portrait is of a woman; this time the story begins rather than ends with the portrait and this time the portrait is diabolic rather than symbolic. The apprentice-calligrapher Riad learns to tame the malevolent image of ‘la reine blonde’ with writing. The portrait of the beautiful queen that has driven so many to death is transcribed into a calligrapher’s pattern which reveals the essence of the power of the image (7).

In both tales, it is important to note that mere copying - the production of an image - does not effect the benign inversions which occur. Kerstine paints the king ‘réduit à sa couleur fondamentale’ (GO 52), Riad limns not only a face, but a story ‘où une fillette malaimée en raison de ses origines infamantes devenait une jeune fille
dangereusement désirée, puis une femme haïe par les uns, adorée par les autres, et ne trouvant une sorte de paix que dans l’exercice austère et solitaire du pouvoir.’ (GO 251)

How does Tournier’s own writing respond to the dialectic of word and image? In essence, his aim appears to be to preserve the integrity of both forms; by this I mean that Tournier does not attempt to write about images in such a way as to submit discourse to the image; nor is the image forced to capitulate to discourse. Norman Bryson makes a similar point in describing how traditionally, art-commentary has attempted to force language into a verbal equivalent of the image, and consequently forced the image into another form, that of discourse. He quotes the Goncourt brothers’ description of a fête champêtre by Watteau:

[
...] a smiling Arcady, a tender Decameron, a sentimental meditation, a dreamily distracted courtship; words that soothe the spirit, a Platonic gallantry, a leisure given over to things of the heart, a youthful indolence. (8)

Bryson notes that ‘those linguistic features which language cannot easily share with the image are underplayed, particularly the verb, for the image, being static and outside process, has nothing that resembles it [...] the brevity of the phrase is the index of an immersion of language in the image by which language tries to shed the features peculiar to itself.’ (9)

Tournier’s response to the visual arts is, of course, contained in discourse, but it does not suffer any alteration
or adjustment to its subject matter. Neither in the photography books, where he produces a text to accompany an image, nor in Le Tabor et le Sinaï, a series of essays on contemporary artists and their work does Tournier attempt ekphrasis, the reincarnation of the image as discourse. This refusal is especially significant in Le Tabor et le Sinaï, which has no accompanying illustrations of the artist’s work; moreover, the artists and their work, for the most part, are not well-known (10). Tournier’s commentaries do not furnish the reader with an ersatz of the absent image; they do, however, attempt to convey the essential quality of the artists’ works, that essence being the generative power of the image to induce further creation (i.e. Tournier’s response). A typical example of this type of response may be found in Tournier’s essay on Alberto Magnelli. Let it be reiterated that no illustration accompanies this text:

Le dynamisme des œuvres les plus anciennes de Magnelli part [...] du fond du tableau. Ce fond n’est pas ouvert. Il ne permet aucune évasion. Il est encombré de formes ou carrément bouché. Il y a en revanche comme une ruée en avant dans la direction du spectateur [...] A la notion de profondeur s’est substituée celle de relief, un relief puissant, presque menaçant [...] On a parlé d’une sorte d’"inconfort" de ses constructions abstraites qu’on a attribué à la prédominance des formes anguleuses sur les formes rondes, mais qui tient plus profondément, croyons-nous, au dynamisme centrifuge qui en rayonne. Quant aux personnages qui habitent cette œuvre — marins, hommes ivres, ennemis, paysans, cantatrices, baigneuses, nonnes —, il me semble que leur dénominateur commun est la force, une force calme, souvent répulsive, un peu triste, mais au total tonique et roborative.

Sans doute est-ce encore ce trait ultime du dernier seigneur de Florence qui va le plus loin dans sa généalogie. Car, en décrivant ainsi ses personnages, on
songe irrésistiblement aux figures hautaines et puissantes, amères, distantes, mais rassurantes pourtant du grand maître toscan auquel il se rattache : entre Piero della Francesca et Alberto Magnelli la filiation nous en dit plus que les analyses les plus subtiles.

(TS 118-9)

Once the reader has overcome the initial irritation of not having any visual image of Magnelli's painting to attach to the text, Tournier's project becomes clearer. The absence of the image clears the way for a wholly new, possibly utopic relationship between the reader and the painting. How can the reader's imagination fail to be provoked and stimulated by these words which themselves continue to create in the reader's mind powerful, though non-specific images of energy and desolation; gusty, invigorating pictures of the marginal world of the sea-side town and its denizens? And the imprint of a recognisable artist, Piero della Francesca, on all this anchors the reader's imagination within a fixed framework of reference. Tournier's text functions as an intermediary between two sets of images: the actual paintings of Magnelli and the imagined images of Tournier's reader.

Inversely, Tournier may look to a text in order to create an image. His response to Tristan et Iseut is to create a picture:

Tristan. Ce prénom trop beau et trop grave évoque aussitôt à mon esprit une frêle embarcation sans voile ni gouvernail, une harpe dressée qui tamise le vent à travers ses cordes, et, couché à bord, un jeune garçon cruellement blessé [...] abandonné aux remous et courants de la mer d'Irlande. (VV 25)

The creative response of either the text or the image to its
visual or discursive counterpart, might appear to suggest that truth is the first casualty of these operations. The reader of the essay on Magnelli cannot form a true picture of the artist’s work; Tournier’s image of Tristan does not give a true picture of the character’s role and complexity in the narrative. It remains to be seen how Tournier engages the concept of truth in his approach to the visual arts.

2. THE ESSENTIAL COPY

In Le Tabor et le Sinai, Tournier explicitly emphasises the difference between copying (images) and art (l’oeuvre créatrice) (see TS 11) and again uses two royal portraits to make his point. He refers to the portraits of François 1er, in the Louvre, by Frans Hals and Jean Clouet (11). Tournier cites a female visitor to the museum who declared the portrait by Hals to be "plus ressemblant" (TS 12) than the one by Clouet. Tournier assumes that, never having met François 1er the woman meant that Hals’s portrait was "plus vivant, d’une intensité plus frappante" (TS 12). The dual concept of ressemblance and image is fundamental to Tournier’s aesthetic which, naturally enough, derives from his philosophical position: ressemblance figures the essential sameness or identity that inhabits not only the subject and
the work of art in which it appears but also the artist:

Car, si une oeuvre d'art doit être 'ressemblante', ce n'est pas à son modèle extérieur qu'elle se doit de ressembler, mais à son auteur, comme un enfant légitime ressemble naturellement à son père. Ici ressemblance veut dire signature. (TS 12)

Image, on the other hand, as has already been noted, describes the 'superficielle et fallacieuse' (TS 11) relation of the servile copy to the world it purports to represent.

In Le Vol du Vampire Tournier addresses the concept of mimesis in his preface to Goethe's Elective Affinities. In this novel, the characters perform a series of 'tableaux vivants', that is, they amuse themselves by miming exactly the figures in identified paintings by Van Dyck, Poussin and Terborch. However, although Goethe furnishes himself with a rich opportunity for ironic or prophetic commentary, he does not exploit the situation. Yet it is Goethe's singular attachment to the discursivity of the chosen paintings which appears to provoke Tournier most:

Goethe rend compte sans la moindre ironie de ces divertissements, sans songer comme cela nous paraît évident, qu'ils bafouent la peinture en ne retenant, à l'exclusion de toute autre, que l'élément basement pittoresque et anecdotique. (VV 77)

Quite clearly, Tournier identifies the value of the image to be located somewhere other than in its availability to mimetic reproduction. Furthermore, Tournier may be seen to be issuing an occult statement about the inclusion of works of art in his writing; Tiffauges and Etienne's activities in the Louvre (RA 138-44) or the boys roller-skating around the
bas-relief of Terpsichore (RA 171) are not to be understood as merely engaged in the mimetic reproduction of the picturesque and anecdotal in their models of stone and bronze. Michael Worton has shown that Tournier goes so far as to punish with death those characters who are resolved to mime only the picturesque and anecdotal element in their chosen images: Alexandre in Les Météores buys a kilo of grapes to give to an adolescent who reminds him intensely of Murillo’s ‘Boy with a bunch of grapes’. This mimetic action, suggests Worton, is responsible for Alexandre’s death as surely as his decision to venture into the docks of Casablanca at night, alone (12). If it is not the superficial ‘élément bassement anecdotique et pittoresque’ to which Tournier’s aesthetic responds, what is it? There is much in Tournier’s writing to suggest that he follows in the Idealist tradition of supposing art to be the medium in which perfect forms or essences are rendered intelligible to the human mind (13). Writing about still-life painting in Le Vagabond Immobile, Tournier reprises his concern for the life of the primary absolute to be acknowledged (14):

Le véritable sens de la nature morte, c’est plutôt, semble-t-il, de considérer des objets d’usage – normalement oblitérés à nos yeux par leur utilité – hors de tout usage non seulement actuel, mais possible. Leur présence, habituellement très effacée dans notre vie, devient tout à coup exorbitante. Le dessin les fait passer du relatif à l’absolu. La cafetière et le pot à tabac se refusent désormais à contenir du café ou du tabac. Ce sont des archétypes, des idées platoniciennes. (VI 69)

Similarly, in ‘Barberousse ou le portrait du roi’, when Ahmed
ben Salem promises to paint a 'warts-and-all' portrait of the king, he is also able to give his assurance that the painting will be 'le portrait même de la royauté' (GO 43). The wart on the king's nose will be 'si royale' that everybody will want one, he says. And Urs Kraus, the artist in Les Météores 'était parvenu à saisir dans chaque chose une essence, un chiffre, sa relation directe au cosmos, plus simple et plus profonde que tous les attributs, couleurs, qualités et autres accessoires qui découlent de cette relation [...]’ (M 534). Elsewhere, Tournier emphasises that it is the role of the artist to penetrate the superficial world of appearances and paint the world of things-in-themselves. Nowhere is this more plainly stated than in the essay on Kandinsky, whom he admires for having 'levé le rideau d'images et peint des choses en soi' (TS 79).

When it is a question of figurative artists as opposed to abstract artists like Kandinsky, Tournier is still concerned to discover, beneath the veil of images, 'la chose en soi, seul véritable sujet du peintre’ (TS 81).

Thus it appears that Tournier rejects the world of appearances in favour of a world of real essences, revealed by art. This does not exactly correspond to his theory of the absolute, where the factitious world of autrui is re-integrated into the world-in-itself as both necessary and contingent to it. Intra-textually, however, the full picture emerges: in Des Clefs et des Serrures, Tournier recuperates
the anecdotal and the picturesque as a vital part of the artistic process. A photograph by Boubat shows a hen under a tree; there is no foreground and only a misty, indeterminate background. Tournier fully describes the figural content of the photograph in a few words: "'Ce jour-là, il y avait une poule sous un arbre.'" (CS 69) (15) However, Tournier looks at this image and sees something akin to 'la révolution de Kandinsky' in Boubat's shot. For like Kandinsky, Boubat has stripped away 'les accidents et les niâseries' (CS 70) to reveal the essential, the noumenal world of essences that underlies the phenomenal world. Tournier sees beyond a hen and a tree to images of 'permanence [...] fidélité [et] confiance' (CS 71). But - and this is most important - Tournier is haunted by the actual image of the hen and the tree and insists in his conclusion that 'on ne peut davantage tourner le dos au pittoresque, à l'anecdote' (CS 71). He does not describe how the phenomenal (tree and hen) interpenetrate with the noumenal (permanence, fidelity), so that they inhabit a single image; but certainly it seems that neither has been purchased at the expense of the other. To describe Boubat's photo as a dialectic of reality and appearance, of authentic Being and factitious existence might seem a trifle pompous if taken out of the context of Tournier's philosophical impetus, but the image illustrates well the theme of 'L'Impersonnalisme'.

In Gaspard, Melchior et Balthazar Tournier continues to
pursue his examination of the relation between the essential and the superficial in art. Balthazar meditates on the creation of Adam, where, he reads, God has made him both in his image and his likeness (image et ressemblance).

Balthazar rejects the interpretation that this is a mere 'redondance rhétorique' (GMB 53); he recognises a fundamental schism in the concepts purveyed by the two words:

Quelle différence y a t-il entre l'image et la ressemblance ? C'est sans doute que la ressemblance comprend tout l'être - corps et âme - tandis que l'image n'est qu'un masque superficiel et trompeur. Aussi longtemps que l'homme demeurait tel que Dieu l'avait fait, son âme divine transverbera son masque de chair [...] Alors l'image et la ressemblance proclamaient ensemble une seule et même attestation d'origine. On aurait pu se dispenser de deux mots distincts. Mais dès que l'homme désobéissant eut péché [...] sa ressemblance avec son créateur disparut, et il ne resta que son visage, petite image trompeuse, rappelant, comme malgré elle, une origine lointaine [...] mais non pas effacée. On conçoit donc la malédiction qui frappe la figuration de l'homme par la peinture ou la sculpture : ces arts se font les complices d'une imposture en célébrant et en répandant une image sans ressemblance. (GMB 47-8)

Balthazar has a particular gift for observing the duality inherent in apparently homogenous concepts or events. His early experience of watching a butterfly emerge from a chrysalis (see GMB 64-5) may be interpreted as the key event which opens his eyes to the possibility of opposites cohabiting a single concept and appears to enable him to apply what Tournier would term 'un trousseau de clefs binaires' (VV 213) to the problem of aesthetics. As a child, for example, he noticed how differently he and his
grandfather reacted to the royal treasures:

[...] tandis que je m'enfonçais dans la contemplation d'un objet précieux, mon grand-père le prenait comme point de départ d'un processus ascendant de sublimation aboutissant à un chiffre pur. (GMB 57)

In Greece, Balthazar observes how polytheism influences the work of art, privileging the sacred at the expense of the profane:

Les dieux, les déesses et les héros prolifèrent en Grèce au point de tout envahir et de ne laisser aucune place notable à la modeste réalité humaine. (GMB 69)

Balthazar dreams of an art in which both the sacred and the profane will be conjointly celebrated, in which both image and likeness will be restored to their original unity of meaning. This dreamed of 'impossible mariage de contraires inconciliables' (GMB 212) is revealed to Balthazar by the sight of the infant in the manger at Bethlehem:

[...] le simple geste d'une mère jeune et pauvre, penchée sur son nouveau-né, élevé soudain à la puissance divine. La vie quotidienne la plus humble - ces bêtes, ces outils, ce fenil baignée d'éternité [...] j'y ai trouvé la réconciliation de l'image et de la ressemblance, la régénération de l'image grâce à la renaissance d'une ressemblance sous-jacente. (GMB 213)

It is important to note that Balthazar is not expressing the fulfilment of a nostalgic wish for a past and fallen unity; his vocabulary ('régénération', 'renaissance') privileges concepts of prospectively orientated creation; indeed, his vision of the renascent, rehabilitated image enables him to imagine the birth and future of Christian art.

The creative response of Christian art in its 'impossible mariage de contraires inconciliables' undoubtedly
marks a further textual manifestation of the destiny of the absolute described in 'L'Impersonnalisme' (16).

Nevertheless, Tournier's fictions after Gaspard, Melchior et Balthazar continue to evoke the tension of the antinomies inherent in the work of art. In Gilles et Jeanne, Tournier introduces Donatello's (bronze) sculpture of David - a strategy which may be seen to disclose the play of the sacred and the profane in a single figure. Prélats, acting as a guide to the naïve and unwordly abbé Blanchet, is anxious to include this sculpture in his tour of Florence (17).

Blanchet is alarmed and confused by his guide's response to the work of art (GJ 75), but is unable to express adequately the reason for his unease. The reader, however, may understand that Blanchet's unease stems from Prélats's seizure of the profane and neglect of the sacred aspect of the adolescent hero: his response is etymologically diabolical. Furthermore, Prélats appears to have confused anatomic penetration of the body with spiritual penetration of the soul, just as he later confuses the power of perspective with the spiritual exploration of God's universe. Prélats's description of the 'David' runs over the boy's entire physical appearance, lingering sensuously over his adolescent sexuality, and betraying an ogrish predilection for youthful flesh and blood: 'nous sommes des amoureux, des amants [...] pour qui le squelette existe. Et pas seulement le squelette: les muscles, les viscères, les entrailles, les glands [...]

et le sang!' (GJ 70-1) (18)

The inversion of the sacred/profane in this scene may be read as a metaphor for the récit as a whole. The status of both Jeanne and Gilles is ambiguous and the reader is forced to hesitate over the traditional attributions of sanctity and diabolism. Prélat's response to Donatello's 'David' prefigures his response to the equally ambiguous Gilles. Soon after Prélat's arrival at Gilles's court, the Florentine finds him in a village square, 'où veille une statue si délabrée qu'on ne saurait dire s'il s'agit de la Vierge ou de Vénus' (GJ 94-5). Gilles is surrounded by a crowd of children, one of which he has taken upon his knee, while 'la main lourdement gantée de cavalier s'attarde sur ses cheveux, puis elle dégage ses vêtements et elle se referme sur le cou fragile' (GJ 95). The situation exudes ambiguity, for which the statue acts as a trope: this might be a saintly, Christ-like figure, 'suffering the little children' watched over by the Holy Virgin, but this might equally be a cruel ogre, acting in the shadow of Venus, symbol of profane love.

3. TEMPORAL AMBIGUITIES

The ambiguities and antinomies which inhabit the work of art have not so far been shown to include the opposed concepts of the eternal and the transitory. For Tournier, as for other
aestheticians, most notably Kant, Hegel and Baudelaire, the temporal antinomies of the work of art are best represented by sculpture. Kant, Hegel and Baudelaire place sculpture on the lowest level of their invented hierarchies of artistic media (19). Each, in his own way, envisages the three dimensional image to be more accessible to the primitive psyche because it appears to belong to the real, tangible world of objects, whereas painting, poetry and music require increasing leaps of the imagination on the part of the viewer, reader or listener for them to acquire meaning. For Baudelaire in particular, the degree to which his imagination is stimulated sets the pattern of the hierarchy; the solid presence of sculpture inhibits his 'reine des facultés'; hence his most important observations on three-dimensional art are entitled 'Pourquoi la sculpture est ennuyeuse' (20). For Hegel, who takes a more theosophical standpoint, sculpture is deemed to transcend nature to a lesser degree than painting and this is held to be consistent with the representation of the pagan god, whose presence necessarily corporeal rather than spiritual (21). Hegel has a point, insofar as the association of sculpture with icons and idols is inextricably linked to our response to the plastic arts. Furthermore, the sculpted surface betrays the effects of time more obviously (i.e. tangibly) than a painting, a sonnet or a symphony. The present (the time in which the spectator is located) is inexorably drawn back to the past (the time of the creator):
'singulier art qui s'enfonce dans la nuit du temps' as Baudelaire phrased it (22).

Significantly, Tournier's treatment of sculpture in his fictions plays upon this perceived temporal duality. The 'Louvre scene' in Le Roi des Aulnes illustrates the point succinctly and may be seen to parallel the function of myth in Tournier's writing (23).

The time of the episode is given with pinpoint precision: it is the afternoon of the 4th November, 1938. The sculpture galleries of the Louvre where this episode takes place belong to the same coherent spatio-temporal organization which structures the narrative throughout the novel. Tiffauges's mythic identity, however, subverts both the temporal and spatial coherence of the narrative, creating a dual polarity which operates as a consistently self-reinforcing structure throughout the novel. From this point of view, it is essential that the sculptures alluded to in the Louvre episode be real, identifiable works of art, in order that this double construction of real and mythic time may operate.

Tiffauges, then, enters a 'real' gallery of 'real' sculptures at an historically identifiable moment. Yet he is also entering the timeless dimension of myth as he moves amongst the figures of gods, heroes and satyrs. The statues offer the temptation of withdrawal into the past and the assumption of a fixed mythic identity; Tiffauges is seduced
by the marble figures whose attitudes he copies with the help
of his child companion, Etienne. He is absorbed by the idea
that in death he will become as timeless and immobile as the
statuery he seeks to identify himself with:

Je sais maintenant ce que sera ma fin : elle sera la
victoire définitive de l’homme de pierre qui est en moi
sur ce qui me reste de chair et de sang. Elle
s’accomplira la nuit où mon destin ayant pris totalement
possession de moi, mon dernier cri, mon dernier soupir
viendra mourir sur les lèvres de pierre. (RA 150-1)

The desirability of this 'death' is contained in an earlier
meditation. Standing in front of the Paros Apollo, Tiffauges
concludes that 'rien n’illustre mieux que cette statue la
fonction essentielle de l’art : à nos coeurs rendus malades
par le temps [...] par la promesse inéluctable de
l’anéantissement de tout ce que nous aimons - l’oeuvre d’art
apporte un peu d’éternité.’ (RA 139) The retrospective
desire for immutability and eternity is fractured - as the
dialectic of the absolute demands - by Tiffauges’s statue
imitations for these not only represent his wish to be united
with a fixed mythic identity but also, and just as
importantly, reverse this ambition by giving transient,
unstable life to the marble figures. It is significant that
Tiffauges’s itinerary through the sculpture galleries begins
with a solitary, static contemplation of the stiff, solo
figure of the Paros Apollo and proceeds by incorporating a
series of increasingly animated figures. First he approaches
and imitates the standing figure of Hercules cradling a child
in his arms, then he adopts the contraposto of Hermes holding
a grasping infant Bacchus. The dynamism increases as Tiffauges and Etienne mimic the dancing figure of Bacchus with a young and lively Dionysius perched on his shoulders and culminates in front of the extraordinary figure of Hector, striding away from battle with his younger brother, Troilus, slung over his back, held by one calf, the other waving furiously in the air (see RA 142-3). The increasing animation of the figures of stone and flesh suggests the 'coming to life' of the statues, as though they are about to be liberated from their eternal immutability (24).

Perhaps this scene may be interpreted as paradigmatic of the power of the word to release the image from its immutable appearance. For language has a mutability that is as infinite as the individual's response to, and use of, words, sounds and phrases. Indeed, Tournier makes this very distinction in his essay on Massoudy:

Un roman illustré par des images : le texte donne des ailes à l'imagination du lecteur; les images lui imposent des semelles de plomb. (TS 130)

4. REALISME OPERATOIRE

So far, Plato, Kant, Hegel and Baudelaire have been suggested as precursors of the Tournierian aesthetic, which itself is a derivative of the philosophy expressed in 'l'Impersonnalisme'. 
In addition to these, one further source should be added, for it substantially illuminates the foregoing argument and discloses the beauty of a metaphysics that is grounded in the concrete world. It is Raymond Bayer's *L'Esthétique de la Grâce*.

In 1959 Tournier was working as a researcher/writer for the Services Culturels de Radiodiffusion-télévision française; the death of Bayer presented him with the occasion to write his obituary which was broadcast as 'L'hommage de la R.T.F.' on 9th September of that year. It was published in the following year by the *Revue d'Esthétique*; in a prefatory note the editor explained that the obituary had been 'confié à un ancien étudiant du philosophe, M. Michel Tournier' and added, 'Il faut féliciter son auteur de la vivacité de son évocation et de la clarté de son effort de synthèse sur le réalisme opératoire de Raymond Bayer' (25): warm if somewhat patronising praise for someone preparing (in secret) (26) to write his first philosophical novel.

Tournier's admiration for Bayer's aesthetic derives from his perception that his former teacher does not abandon his discipline as a metaphysician when he pursues the philosophy of beauty. 'Il en est résulté,' he writes, 'un fructueux phénomène d'osmose entre la métaphysique et l'esthétique, un mariage heureux entre la rigueur philosophique et le foisonnement artistique.' (27) This kind of union is undoubtedly at the heart of Tournier's own endeavour as a
writer, and helps to explain his rigorous attachment to the metaphysical infrastructure of his fictions. For he recognises that Bayer has avoided 'l'écueil majeur de l'esthétique', that is 'l'isolement du tronc métaphysique, sa rupture avec les disciplines de la logique, et la mainmise sur elle de certains amateurs - poètes et romanciers de talent, voire de génie, mais d'une culture philosophique rudimentaire qui répandent l'obscurité autour d'eux, même si des lueurs fulgurantes la traversent parfois.' (28)

*L'Esthétique de la Grâce* reveals the theory and application of Bayer's aesthetic concept of 'réalisme opératoire'. Above all, it is a philosophy of active, creative participation: art, he claims, lies in the 'processus actif mariant la main et le cerveau [...] c'est l'artiste créateur dialoguant difficilement avec l'oeuvre ébauchée et peinant pour la mener à son achèvement' (29). As Tournier points out, Bayer's aesthetic has little in common with 'l'amateur des sensations rares, le Des Esseintes des expositions et des salons' (30); it belongs in the studio or the workshop, not in the gallery. Taken to its extreme, Bayer's aesthetic confidently declares: "Poser le ciseau [...] l'art n'est plus [...] contempler, c'est n'être pas"' (31). This is strongly reminiscent of the argument of 'L'Impersonnalisme', where the creative participation of autrui in the world and the world in autrui is seen to generate an ontological stability. Nostalgic retrospection
for the primary absolute is discarded as sterile and lifeless; what matters is the creative and fertile result of the dialogue between the primary absolute and the fallen world of autrui. This assures the mutual recognition of both parties, and guarantees the survival of the beauty of the pristine, pre-Adamic world-in-itself even in the factitious world. It is no accident that Tournier selects a passage from Bayer’s enormous work which reflects this idea so well:

Bayer’s work is a celebration of the grace that the world is invested with when seen with this ‘regard purifié d’habitude’. The movement of a duck in water, of a cat or a gazelle, of a skater, a fencer or a dancer (33), and above all the movement of a landscape of trees and hills, woods and water confirm Bayer’s aesthetic engagement with the world:

Bayer’s vision of a landscape as the concrete embodiment of an aesthetic in which a basic impulse of consciousness is renewed, commands Tournier’s filial respect and collaboration, which has re-emerged creatively, some thirty years after his homage to Bayer, in one of his most recent
contes, 'La légende de la peinture'.

The conte tells how a caliph of Baghdad invites two artists, a Chinese and a Greek, to compete in the decoration of the two great facing walls of his 'salle d'honneur'. After an interval of three months, the caliph and his court reassemble in the great room. The Chinese artist unveils his fresco, 'qui figurait en effet un jardin de rêve planté d'arbres en fleurs avec des petits lacs en forme de haricot qu'enjambaienent de gracieuses passerelles. Une vision paradisiaque dont on ne se lassait pas de remplir les yeux' (MA 262); the Greek, however, simply unveils a mirror which covers the entire facing wall. Tournier describes the effect this has:

[...] bien sûr ce miroir reflétait le jardin du Chinois dans ses moindres détails. Mais alors, direz-vous, en quoi cette image était-elle plus belle et plus émouvant que son modèle ? C'est que le jardin du Chinois était désert et vide d'habitants, alors que dans le jardin du Grec, on voyait une foule magnifique [...] et tous ces gens bougeaient, gesticulaient et se reconnaissaient avec ravissement.

(MA 262-3)

In this fine image, both the spirit of Raymond Bayer's aesthetic and Tournier's early philosophical commitments may be discerned: the Chinese artist's garden may be seen to represent the first movement in the life of the absolute, the first stage of the 'drame cartésien'. It is a perfect but sterile spectacle, being deprived of the creative influence of human consciousness. The mirror-garden of the Greek, however, suggests the fourth stage, where previously
alienated consciousness may now joyfully participate: the courtisans 'se reconnaissent avec ravissement' for they now exist in a world in which they are as much the creators as the creation. It represents a world which welcomes them and which they welcome in fulfilment of the promise of the dialectic.

This, then, is the promise of the work of art in the Tournierian construct: to create a field of recognition, in which creator and creation participate on equal terms, and where the aesthetic value of that dialogue exists only insofar as it is actively maintained.

NOTES


2. Derrida, La Vérité en Peinture, p.178. See also Lyotard, Discours, Figure, p.10.

3. Bryson, Word and Image, p.27.

4. Ibid.

5. Davis, Michel Tournier, Philosophy and Fiction, p.140

6. See Baudelaire's Salon de 1859, especially III, 'La reine des facultés' (pp. 750-2) and IV 'Le gouvernement de l'imagination' (pp. 753-5). In the latter section, Baudelaire writes that 'la création, telle que nous la voyons, est le résultat de plusieurs créations dont les précédentes sont toujours complétées par la suivante.'

7. See also Tournier's introduction to the calligraphy of Hassan Massoudy in Le Tabor et le Sinaï, p. 130.

8. Bryson, opus cit., p.73.

10. Exceptions are Wassily Kandinsky and Yves Klein.

11. It is perhaps only coincidental that Barberousse takes refuge in the court of François Ier (see MA 54) and that the two men are linked in Tournier’s writing by their portraits.


14. C.f. VP 298

15. I am struck by the relevance of a recent poem by James Mitchie to Boubat’s photo and Tournier’s response:

*Is a rose a rose?*

A pig under a tree in the Peloponnese  
Is a pig under a tree ... But add to these  
Facts of zoology, botany, geography,  
A south wind, fulvous evening light, you, me,  
Fecundity and idleness, then snap!  
Memory’s caught in a photographic trap,  
And birth and death and marriage won’t efface  
That animal, an olive and the place.

(First published in *The Spectator*, 30 August 1986)

16. I do not wish to labour the point, which will be familiar by now, by offering a fuller description of this relation.

17. The abbé Blanchet is reminiscent of Fleurissoire in Gide’s *Les Caves du Vatican*. This analogy may have some further corroboration: Tournier’s description of Donatello’s ‘David’ is unmistakably derived from Gide’s account of the same figure, see his *Journal*, 30.12.1895

18. Prélat’s description of himself as ‘un amant’ and focus of attention on the sensual aspect of the figure responds to the deliberately sexual portrayal of David by the artist. Witness the long feather on the decapitated giant’s helmet, which reaches the length of David’s inner thigh: an indication that the slain Goliath symbolises a transferal of potency to the boy?

pp. 77-91 and Baudelaire, Salon de 1846, in Oeuvres Complètes, pp.683-5. See also Hofstadter, Truth and Art, Ch.1

20. Baudelaire, opus cit., passim.
21. Hegel, opus cit., p.90
22. Baudelaire, opus cit., p.270
23. See Chapter 7 of the present study.
24. See Worton, opus cit., p.205 for an alternative interpretation of the Louvre scenes as essentially narcissistic in their mimesis.
25. 'L'Hommage de la R.T.F.' in Revue d'Esthétique, no.150, 1960, p.206
26. See Merllié, Michel Tournier, pp.232-3
27. 'L'Hommage de la R.T.F.', pp.207-8
28. There is a clear relation to Tournier's later statement that surrealist artists who have bypassed philosophy en route to the absolute have chosen a route which is 'aberrante, hérétique, méprisable' (CJV 58)
29. Opus cit., p.208
30. Ibid.
31. Ibid.
32. Opus cit., p.209
33. Opus cit., pp.210-5
34. Opus cit., p.214
CHAPTER SEVEN

MYTH AND THE ABSOLUTE

'Whenever I think of [...] the Cree I think of the dignity that is ours when we cease to demand the truth and realize that the best we can have of those substantial truths which guide our lives is metaphorical - a story.'

(Barry Lopez, Crossing open ground, pp.70-1)

1. INTRODUCTION

In Le Vent Paraclet, Tournier describes how his first attempts to write fiction had to be aborted; the transition from philosophy to literature and the subtle marriage of the two disciplines to which he had aspired was simply not working (VP 193). An early version of Le Roi des Aulnes, entitled La Vie d'Oliver Cromorne, is described, for example, as being possessed of 'je ne sais quelle courbature' (VP 194) which effectively prevented the novel from developing beyond what was intended to be its dynamic fulcrum, the outbreak of the Second World War.

Relief came, however, when Tournier made the decision to jettison Oliver Cromorne and rewrite the story of Robinson Crusoe, making use of the ethnological research he had undertaken twelve years earlier at the Musée de l'Homme, whilst preparing for his agregation in 1949-50. The course he had followed was taught in part by Claude Lévi-Strauss (1). The subsequent publication of Vendredi and the immediate popular and critical acclaim which it received convinced Tournier that the transition/transmission of the
philosopher into the novelist had at last been achieved.

However, Tournier does not draw an explicit conclusion from the success of his decision to rehabilitate the teaching of Lévi-Strauss in his writing. Characteristically, refusal of explicitness is complemented by intratextual implicitness: the history of Tournier’s emergence as a novelist is prefaced by his own affirmation that: ‘Le passage de la métaphysique au roman devait m’être fourni par le mythe’ (VP 183). The creatively participating reader may then assume the existence of a parallel between the function of myth in Tournier’s writing and the theory of myth elucidated in Lévi-Strauss’s ethnological studies; an affiliation which, as might be expected, bears the traces of both respect and antagonism to the parent influence.

An analysis of the relationship between the deployment of myth in Tournier’s writing and the theory of myth posited in *Anthropologie Structurale* reveals the attractiveness of Lévi-Strauss’s argument to Tournier’s philosophy of the absolute. Four main points of contact may be discerned, which will be used to structure the present chapter; these are: creation, repetition, dialectics and language.

2. CREATION

Lévi-Strauss departs from his predecessors in the study of myth by eliminating what he sees as ‘un des principaux obstacles au progrès des études mythologiques’, namely,
'la recherche de la version authentique ou primitive.' (2)
The structuralist approach, developed by Lévi-Strauss, is antithetical to the pursuit of origin or authenticity, because it is concerned with the re-organization of the constituent elements of a totality, (a myth for example) into their structural groups so that the myth (or any other subject) may be looked at synchronically as well as diachronically. A myth, argues Lévi-Strauss, should be defined as 'l’ensemble de toutes ses versions' (3); his structural analysis of the Oedipal myth takes into account therefore not only Sophocles’s drama, but also its Theban antecedents and Athenian palimpsests, as well as the Freudian interpretation. Viewed in this light, the question of authenticity or acceptability of these variations becomes irrelevant:

Il n’existe pas de version ‘vraie’ dont toutes les autres seraient des copies ou des échos déformées. (4)

This argument was formulated and developed between 1944 and 1957 and there is every reason to believe that it should have informed Lévi-Strauss’s lectures at the Musée de l’Homme which Tournier attended in 1949-50. For Tournier, this theory must have seemed pleasingly resonant of his own philosophical composition, articulated only three years previously in Espace. Tournier’s appreciation of structural analysis appears to have been more aesthetic than intellectually committed (5), but the concept of accumulated creative
participation taking precedence over the hitherto privileged concern for the recovery of the lost, 'authentic' original undoubtedly echoes the philosophical register of 'L'Impersonnalisme'. Twelve years after he had written this article, the notion that myth could operate as a practical medium of expression for his theory of an ironic absolute must have returned to the emerging novelist still bound by a raw attachment to the argument of 'L'Impersonnalisme' with a forceful sense of appropriateness (6).

In this first publication, it may be recalled (7), Tournier dismantles the Cartesian cogito in order to replace it with his own argument for the mutual interpenetration of the absolute world and the world of autrui as a dynamic, self-creating dialectic that exists only insofar as that creative interaction is maintained. Tournier's 'recherche de l'absolu' is not a pursuit of original, authentic, existence, but a celebration of an ongoing, dynamic principle of continuous creation. This, we also saw is a fundamental tenet of his theory and practise of writing (8) which is dependent upon the creative co-efficiency of author and reader. The same principle is equally applied to painting and sculpture, conceived as a creative dialogue between artist and subject and subsequently between the work of art and the spectator (9).

Tournier's definitions of myth revolve around the central concept of continuous creation and not, as several of
his critics have suggested, the return to origin (10). A myth, he writes in the essay on Tristan, is 'une image vivante que nous berçons et nourrissons en nous' (Vv 25); similarly, in Le Vent Paraclet, myth is held to be 'une histoire fondamentale' (VP 188) which, rather than being seen as a fixed archetype, must be refreshed and renewed 'comme tout ce qui vit' (VP 193). Failure to treat the myth as a living thing results in its degeneration into the ossified, immutable forms of allegory: 'Un mythe mort, cela s'appelle une allégorie' (VP 193). Michael Worton provides a suitable illustration to complement Tournier's argument:

Hercules as a mythic figure is vulnerable (the tunic dipped in Nessus's blood sent to him by Deianeira has the power to drive him mad with pain); as allegorical figure, he is only strong. (11)

Although Tournier believes it to be the function of the writer to 'enrichir' or 'modifier' the myths circulating in his society (VP 192), the writer is not held to be the privileged gardener of the myth. For the myth only remains alive so long as it is adopted and recognised by the individuals which comprise that society in which it circulates. The myth of Don Juan, for example, argues Tournier, has endured successive retellings in so many voices because 'nous sommes tous en partie des êtres mythologiques' (12), or more specifically, because 'il y a des Don Juan autour de nous, [...] des Don Juan en nous.' (VP 190). To read or hear the myth of Don Juan is to participate in the myth, to realise the creative dialogue, 'le va et vient
continuel entre l’image mythique et le personnage de chair’ (13).

Tournier’s argument that this creative and vital participation in the life of the myth takes place ‘au coeur de chaque individu modeste et prosaïque’ (14), parallels his philosophical conviction that the absolute is continually realised on an ‘atomic’ level by ‘chaque être, chaque chose qui crie – d’une voix souvent imperceptible – pour être reconnu comme absolu’ (VP 298). Neither myth nor the absolute should be construed as a nostalgic return to origin or archetype; both, in the Tournierian construct, should be seen rather as an eternal act of creative participation.

This conviction may be discerned in Tournier’s treatment of familiar myths, most notably those which concern the Creation of Man, the Ogre and the Heavenly Twins.

The published works and interviews in which Tournier does not refer to the Genetic myth of creation are rare indeed; the history of Adam and Eve and their relationship with Jehovah, the Serpent, Cain and Abel is a subject which Tournier returns to over and over again. It must be noted, however, that Tournier never merely repeats the appropriate verses of Genesis; he makes substantial additions and alterations to the anterior text, (as for example in Mythologie where the creation of Eve takes place after Adam has succumbed to the Serpent’s temptation). Moreover, Tournier is just as unfaithful to his own rewritings which
may share certain details, but which never tell the same story twice. There is no return to a uniquely authentic original; Tournier is engaged in a continuous process of creation and re-creation in an endeavour to keep the myth alive. In this respect, Tournier’s role resembles that of the Cartesian divinity, as he recalls:

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ce que Descartes appelait une création continue - et il voulait dire par là que Dieu ayant créé le monde ne s’en est pas retiré, mais qu’il continue à le créer chaque instant autant qu’au premier instant de la génése, le maintenant sans cesse à l’être par son souffle créateur, faute de quoi, dans la seconde même, toutes choses retournerait au néant’ (PP 41)
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This process of continuous creation may be illustrated by the variations on the motivation behind the creation of Eve in the Tournierian rewritings of the myth. In *Mythologie*, for example, Yahweh creates Eve in order to punish Adam’s disobedience and impede his ‘ambitions surhumaines’; in ‘La famille Adam’, Eve is created in order to release the nomadic Adam from his ‘côté sédentaire’ which has been hindering him from producing children (*CB* 12–3); in ‘La légende de la musique et de la danse’, Eve is created in order to provide Adam with a dancing partner (*MA* 250) and in ‘La légende des parfums’, (in which Eve is not created from a part of Adam, but out of the fertile soil of Eden), so that Adam can enjoy the sensual plenitude of a ‘vie olfactive’ (*MA* 254).

Yet despite these changes and variations, certain elements remain constant throughout the retellings of the
creation myth which are consistent with the concept of
création continue. Inevitably, there is a Fall; Adam and
(with the single exception of Mythologie) Eve eat the fruit
of a forbidden tree, (not necessarily the tree of knowledge)
and are punished for their disobedience by the withdrawal of
a privilege: the hermaphroditism which had made Adam 'si
fort, si sûr de soi' in Mythologie, the right to live in Eden
in 'La famille Adam', the divine silence of the universally
intelligible logos in Les Météores, the ability to hear
celestial music in 'La légende de la musique et de la danse'
and the ability to recognise the perfumes of paradise in 'La
légende du parfum'. In every case, however, the Fall and
the loss it incurs are followed by creation; the loss proves
to be unbearable and the punished are compelled to reproduce
the forbidden privilege as acts of their own creation. Adam
's'épouse à reconstituer l'ancêtre originel bardé de son
attirail au grand complet' in Mythologie; Cain builds Hénoch
a beautiful garden city, created out of his mother's memories
of Eden in 'La famille Adam'; Adam and Eve and their
descendants become composers of music 'et il y eut Orphée, et
il y eut Monteverdi, Bach, Mozart, Beethoven' (MA 252) and
manufacturers of perfumes in the two contes from Le
Médianoche Amoureux. The fall from divine silence into
language, as we saw in Chapter Four, has its compensations,
not least in literary production. Creation, it may be
inferred, offers its own form of redemption.
The creative imperative of the myth is developed in *Le Roi des Aulnes*, in which the myth of the Ogre may be seen to offer the dual perspective of redemption via creation on the one hand, and ossification or death through identification with the archetype on the other.

Tiffauges’s self-identification with the archetypal mythic ogre is retrospective and regressive; his obsession with ‘l’antiquité vertigineuse de mes origines’ (RA 12) which concomitantly privileges the past over the future (‘l’en deça vaut bien l’au-delà’ (RA 13) forces him — and encourages the reader — to associate his physical stature, myopia and infant-sized genitalia with the characteristic attributes of the mythic ogre (16); while his conviction that ‘tout est signe’ (RA 152) ensures that his increasing predilection for raw flesh and milk, for ‘capturing’ children with his tape-recorder and ‘devouring’ them with his camera and his ‘pediaphoric’ ecstasies are recognised by both protagonist and reader alike as belonging to the same myth. Similarly, Tiffauges’s role at Kaltenborn, where he tenderly prepares children for their destruction, may be seen to underline his association with the eponymous ogre of Goethe’s poem, *der Erlkönig* from which Tournier’s novel takes its title.

The equation with death, inherent in this retrospective and non-creative association, is illustrated by the episode in the Louvre (RA 141-4). Tiffauges and a child companion, Etienne, wander through the Greek and Roman sculpture
galleries, pausing in front of mythological heroes and giants depicted (somewhat atypically) at moments of physical contact with children: Hercules and the infant Telephus, Hermes the infant Bacchus, a satyr and the infant Dionysius, Hector and his little brother Troilus. For Tiffauges, whose admitted intention in looking at works of art is to
'[scruter] mon image en eux - miroirs incomparables' (RA 140), the desire to identify with the marble child-bearing giants is irresistible; he and Etienne perform a series of physical imitations. This determination to identify with a literally petrified myth, fixed for eternity in an immutable form, offers Tiffauges (and the reader) a pressentiment of the death it invokes:

Je sais maintenant ce que sera ma fin : elle sera la victoire définitive de l'homme de pierre qui est en moi sur ce qui me reste de chair et de sang. Elle s'accomplira la nuit où mon destin ayant pris totalement possession de moi, mon dernier cri, mon dernier soupir viendra mourir sur des lèvres de pierre. (RA 150-1) (18)

Indeed, Tiffauges's death, implied in the closing lines of the novel, marks his complete absorption into the ancient history of the 'roi des tourbières' (19), another immutably preserved image of the deathward-bound, child-bearing giant.

A tension exists, however, between Tiffauges's determination to identify with a mythic archetype (and the readers' consequent encouragement to do likewise), and Tournier's creative participation in the renewal of the myth of the Ogre.
As Michael Worton and Arlette Bouloumié have shown (20), this tension is realised through the co-existence in the novel of two temporal schemas: a historically precise chronology, prospectively orientated, which structures the narrative; and a historical, mythic time, which has no temporal reference, which thereby escapes the narrative structure (21), a duality neatly summarised by Tournier's own epithet, writes Worton, as 'un progres à rebours' (22). Myth and recent history are seen to co-operate in mutually self-reinforcing, self-subverting opposition. This temporal duality gives the myth of the Ogre renewed impetus, linking anhistorical terrors of cannibalism and child abuse furnished by the mythic consciousness with the generalized monstrosity of Nazism, represented as the devourer of young flesh, and the particular ogrishness of Hitler and Göring (23).

It should be said, moreover, that the Second World War, although a relatively recent historical event, had already been mythicized by the time that Tournier began writing Le Roi des Aulnes (24). It is inadequate to say that the War — within or outside the context of Le Roi des Aulnes — is definable as a chronological sequence of events which shaped the history of the world in the twentieth century; the Second World War became mythicized by poets, journalists and filmmakers within its own duration and in the following decades, and insofar as it has become a cultural myth, it escapes the boundaries of history. In fixing the history of
Tiffauges to the myth of the War, as much as the myth of
the Ogre is fixed to the history of the War, Tournier draws
attention to mythicization as an ongoing creative process and
subverts the temporal opposition of history and myth.

Redemption too, emerges from the renewal of the myth.
For if, largely thanks to Perrault, the archetypal ogre has
been allegorized as a myopic, sterile, child-eating monster,
the new myth, ushered in by Le Roi des Aulnes, speaks of an
altogether more ambiguous creature. For in conjunction with
his desire for assimilation with the archetype, Tiffauges is
tenderly aware that his mythic identity rests on an intuitive
need to bear and serve children. Tiffauges dreams of a
hermaphrodite Adam, before the creation of Eve, self-
fertilizing and bearing his own progeny (RA 33-5); he is
moved by Montaigne’s account of Alphonse d’Alberquerque,
lifting a child onto his shoulders as a mantle of innocence
to protect him from harm (RA 88-9); and his fertility is
symbolically restored through identification with the
apocryphal legend of St Christopher. For the saint is
rewarded for carrying the infant Christ across the river by
‘la floraison de [sa] perche’ (RA 72); if ‘perche’ is read
as a euphemism for penis, Christopher’s reward may be
interpreted as the gift of fertility. Similarly, Tiffauges
carries a child away from the massacre at Kaltenborn,
struggling, like Christopher, under a seemingly intolerable
burden. The child’s name is Ephraïm, which means ‘flowering
branch' in Hebrew. Thus, although the closing image of *Le Roi des Aulnes* may be interpreted as the fulfilment of Tiffauges's own prophecy that he would die at the point of his complete assimilation with the eternally fixed mythic archetype ('l'homme de pierre') within him, the child's name may also be seen to offer a vision of redemption through creation. A new version of the myth has been put into circulation, in which the ogre serves and saves the child. Tiffauges's fertility, restored through etymology, emblematizes the continued creation of the myth, which Tournier has served - and saved from death by petrification.

Similarly, in *Les Météores*, we witness the opposition of archetype and innovation in the relationship of the twins, Jean and Paul. But whereas Tiffauges's quest for identification with the mythic archetype co-exists with his pressentiment of the petrification it entails, in *Les Météores*, this dual perception is separated and identified with each twin separately; Paul, for example, exhibits a Tiffaugean conviction that he and his twin are attached to a mythic past which exerts a powerful influence over their destiny:

Selon moi, la gémellité est affaire de conviction [...] qui a la force de modeler deux destins, et quand je regarde mon passé, je ne puis douter de la présence invisible, mais toute puissante de ce principe, au point que je me demande si - à l'exception des couples mythologiques comme Castor et Pollux, Remus et Romulus, etc., - Jean et moi nous ne sommes pas les seuls vrais jumeaux ayant jamais existé. (M 164)

Jean, however, shares Tiffauges's haunting vision of the
petrified myth; he understands that such complete adherence
to the self-sufficient, immutably preserved mythic archetype,
represented by their 'communion séminale', invites death;

Il y a du marbre et de l'éternité dans les amours
ovales, quelque chose de monotone et d'immobile qui
ressemble à la mort. (M 278)

Paul's attempt to recover the eternally fixed identity
is doomed to failure and is ultimately replaced by a new
version of the myth of the twins, in which the old image of
the inward-looking, hermetically sealed and sterile
relationship gives way to the concept of the twin as
the fertile protagonist of a creative partnership (25).

It may further be noted that, as in Le Roi des Aulnes,
Tournier fixes the history of the twins to a recognisable
chronology which structures the narrative and climaxes with
the construction of the Berlin wall on 13th August 1960, the
day fixed for the re-unification of the twins. It is
significant that this date which marks the eternal physical
sundering of the twins from each other and thus signals the
end of the mythic archetype of the twins as a hermetic unit,
has like the Wall, become a potent contemporary myth, re-
emphasizing the continuing process of mythicizationm.

3. REPETITION

In Anthropologie Structurale, Lévi-Strauss argues that
'la répétition a une fonction propre, qui est de rendre
manifeste la structure du mythe' (26). In Lévi-Strauss's construct, the various forms of the myth are superimposed on each other and read 'vertically' (as one might 'read' a fault in geological strata), thereby allowing the core structures and patterns to emerge. The multiplicity of variations in Tournier's treatment of familiar themes and myths would seem to invite a structuralist method of approach, that is to say, to privilege a synchronic as opposed to a diachronic reading.

The benefit of this approach was evidenced in the preceding section where it was shown that, despite the dissimilarity in detail of Tournier's several versions of the creation myth, a clear structure emerged, consonant with the Tournierian theory of the absolute: an original unity is destroyed and subsequently recreated as a dynamic dialogue between past perfection and present invention.

In this analysis, a binary opposition of destruction and creation may be discerned, where each is presented as the *sine qua non* of its opposite. In other words, the basis of a dialectic is established, which as we have seen, lies at the heart of the Tournierian concept of the absolute.

The purpose of this section is to demonstrate, by returning to the myth of the Ogre that the function of repetition in Tournier's writing is to draw attention to the underlying binary opposition that structures myth. The fourth section will seek to establish the relevance of this structure to the dialectic common to both myth and the
absolute in Tournier’s writing.

The myth of the Ogre is not restricted in Tournier’s writing to Le Roi des Aulnes; it reappears in Gaspard, Melchior et Balthazar, Gilles et Jeanne, ‘La fugue du Petit Poucet’, and continues through the theme of cannibalism (as actuality or trope), in Les Météores, Vendredi, Le Vol du Vampire, ‘Les suaires de Véronique’ and ‘Pierrot ou les secrets de la nuit’. Indeed, it is in the retellings of the myth that cannibalism - specifically of young flesh - emerges as the single defining characteristic of the Ogre: Hérode, Tiffauges, Gilles de Rais and, (in the eyes of Poucet père), Logre, are presented as carnal (in either its sexual or dietary sense) predators of innocents. Similarly, Paul Surin posits that during pregnancy (except in the case of identical twins) the stronger twin kills and eats his weaker sibling; Véronique is shown to prey upon the body of her youthful escort Hector while Pierrot models his Columbine (as a ‘jeune fille’ not ‘femme’) in dough which he bakes and then devours. Emma Wilson points out that ‘Robinson absorbs Vendredi’s qualities just as a cannibal eats his victim’ (27); she also argues that Tournier’s relation to his anterior texts has an ogrish dimension: ‘Vendredi stands in relation to Robinson Crusoe [...] as devouring brother’ (28).

Repetition also draws attention, however, to the fundamental ambiguity of cannibalism which characterises the potency of the myth of the Ogre. Adoration and abomination,
life and death structure the ambivalent character of the mythic Ogre (29). In *Tristes Tropiques*, Lévi-Strauss articulates the belief of the primitive psyche that consuming the flesh of an adversary endows the eater with the associated powers and virtues of the victim (30). Cannibalism may thus be construed as an act of admiration or devotion; the superficially brutal destruction of the flesh is outweighed in importance by the resurrection of the victim's characteristics. This primitive formula is repeated in Christian religion which furthers the ambiguous status of cannibalism. The Eucharist, which celebrates the physical assimilation of Christ's body and blood by the believer, promises the gift of eternal life (31). This belief is integral to the portrait of the ogre in *Le Roi des Aulnes*:

Tiffauges rejects Rachel's accusation (which commences 'Tu es un ogre') that he debases her sexually by devouring her as he would a piece of meat; rather he sees the likeness as a sign of sacramental devotion:

> Mais d'abord l'assimilation de l'amour à l'acte alimentaire n'a rien d'avilissant, puisque aussi bien c'est à une pareille assimilation que recourent nombre de religions, et la chrétienne au premier chef avec l'eucharistie. (RA 22)

Similarly, Tiffauges's Communion responds literally to the words of the Celebrant, ('take, eat, this is my body'); yet true to his ogrish vocation: Tiffauges prefers to think of the body of Christ as that of a toothsome infant as opposed to that of a tortured adult:
Tiffauges rejects Mlle Toupie’s vegetarianism on similar grounds, arguing that the slaughter and ingestion of animals represents the supreme manifestation of his love for them:

Je suis tout amour. J’aime manger de la viande parce que j’aime les bêtes. Je crois même que je pourrais égorger de mes mains, et manger avec un affectueux appetit, un animal que j’aurais élevé et qui aurait partagé ma vie. (RA 112) (32)

His belief is actualized when he finds himself in a position to devour the carrier pigeons he has raised and loved; Tiffauges considers that ‘l’ingestion dévot et silencieuse des trois petits soldats égorgés revêtirait un caractère presque religieux’ (RA 238). The sacramental aspect of the act is again linked with cannibalism in the description of the birds as ‘petits soldats’ and their evident prefiguration of the destruction of the boys, Haro, Haïo and Lothar at Kaltenborn.

The ambivalent nature of the ogre is given perhaps its fullest exposition in Tournier’s writing in Gilles et Jeanne. Prélat’s speech which aims to convert Gilles de Rais to the service of Barron, the child-devouring demon, seeks to establish God as the original model for the Ogre:

Et il expliquait à Gilles que ce goût invétéré de Barron pour la chair venait de loin, venait de haut. Dès les premières pages de la Bible, ne voyait-on pas Yahvé repousser les céréales que lui offre Cain et se régaler au contraire des chevreaux et des agneaux d’Abel ? [...] Mais c’est que Yahvé a fini par se lasser de toutes ces bestioles dont les hommes le gavaient. Alors un jour, il s’est tourné vers Abraham. Il lui a dit : prends ton
petit garçon, Isaac, égorge-le et offre-moi son corps tendre et blanc ! [...] Cette fois, c'était raté, mais ce n'était que partie remise. Jésus, ah cet enfant-là, Yahvé ne l'a pas manqué ! Flagellation, croix, coup de lance. Le père céleste riait aux anges. (GJ 100)

Prélat's argument turns on the inseparable co-efficiency of God and Satan, good and evil, 'Il n'est rien de Satan qui ne se retrouve en Dieu' (GJ 136). Nothing less than the dual status of God is therefore posited as the source of the Ogre's ambivalence. In Prélat's construct, saintliness is begotten in Satanism and the torture of innocents becomes the legitimate expression of 'sollicitude maternelle' (GJ 98).

However, Prélat's dehumanised argument is tempered elsewhere in Tournier's writing by the presentation of flesh and bread as dual objects of desire. Whereas Prélat insists on the suffering of infant flesh and Tiffauges concentrates upon the 'chair pantelant' in his communion wafer, Robinson and Pierrot subsume their desires for the flesh in the dough that they knead, bake and consume, thereby achieving a delicate coalescence of the opposite images of the warm, crusty loaf and brutalized infant flesh.

Robinson prepares his first loaf of bread and recalls a childhood memory in which he imagined the dough, as it was kneaded by the baker's boy, to be like '[un] grand corps sans tête, tiède et lascif qui s'abandonnait au fond du pétrin aux étreintes d'un homme à demi nu [...] j'imaginais d'étranges épousailles entre la miche et le mitron.' (V 81) As Emma
Wilson has pointed out, 'the word *miches* can mean both loaves and buttocks' (33), and draws attention to the (homo)sexual nature of the fantasy. Flesh and bread and the ambivalence of consummation as both sexual and alimentary act remain intact. Similarly, Pierrot works his dough while fantasizing about the sleeping Colombine:

> Pierrot baisse les yeux vers son pétrin ou dort la grande miche de pâte blonde. Blonde et tendre comme Colombine [...] Ses mains aîmeraient caresser l'endormie, bien sûr, mais fabriquer une Colombine de pâte, c'est presque aussi plaisant. *(SC 27-8)*

The consummation of the loaf by not only Pierrot and his rival, Arlequin, but Colombine as well, confirms the successful integration of opposites, bread and flesh.

4. DIALECTICS

In 'Structure et Dialectique', Lévi-Strauss argues that the relationship between myth and ritual is not based upon a homology, but rather that it is expressive of a dialectic, 'accessible seulement à la condition de les [mythe et rituel], au préalable, réduire l'un et l'autre à leurs éléments structureaux' (34). His subsequent analysis of the Pawnee 'myth of the pregnant boy' discloses the reciprocating antimonies at work both within the myth itself and in the relationship of the myth to the rituals of the Pawnees and their neighbours.

The influence of Lévi-Strauss in this respect is, again, discernable in Tournier's treatment of myth. As demonstrated
above, the myth of the Ogre is based upon a series of binary oppositions, chief among which are love and hate, life and death, submission and aggression. Similarly, the myth of the Twins reveals a series of mutually opposed concepts such as nomadisme/sédantarisme, silence/parole, interieur/extérieur etc. Sufficient evidence has been accrued to further the direction of this analysis towards a theory of dialectical reciprocity, functioning not only within Tournier's treatment of individual myths, but between one text and another, inasmuch as, for Lévi-Strauss, Pawnee myth emerges and re-emerges in inverted patterns in ritual and ceremony. Let it be emphasized that the aim of this section is not to reiterate the auto-referential nature of Tournier's writing, but to demonstrate the dialectical impetus of related myths which he deploys throughout his work.

The variations on the creation myth have been noted above and we shall return to these in order to illustrate this point (35).

The internal antinomies which inhabit this myth and which are consistent to the variants are perhaps best set out in the form of a table:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>male</th>
<th>female</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>fertility</td>
<td>sterility</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>good</td>
<td>evil</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>reward</td>
<td>punishment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>possession</td>
<td>loss</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The left hand column represents the earlier condition in the course of the narrative. That is to say, the creation of the male precedes the creation of the female, the fertility of Eden precedes the sterility of the desert, etc. Yet it is clear from Tournier's tellings of the myth and related myths that each of these antitheses is subject to inversion: in *Le Roi des Aulnes* Tiffauges restores the myth of hermaphrodite Adam in his bearing of Ephraïm, symbol of fertility; in 'La famille Adam' Cain recreates the fertile oasis of Eden out of the sterile desert in building the garden-city Hénoch; in the 'légendes' of music and perfume the lost original is recreated, transforming punishment into reward, and concomitantly with these transformations, the evil wrought by the serpent is optimistically inverted to positive ends.

In addition to these internal inversions it must be noted that (although they may be read by and for themselves in isolation), each version has an external rapport with the other variants. The rapport suggests homogeneity because of the shared reference to a biblical text and *dramatis personae*, but as has been demonstrated above, beyond this, no such homogeneity exists; each version serves to emphasise difference as much as identity, individuality as much as cohesion.

Myth, I would suggest, in the Tournierian construct, is not a function of desire for authenticity or origin, nor does it inhabit, as Arlette Bouloumié argues, 'le temps des
origines' (36). Rather myth is the expression of a dynamic
dialectic of creation which ensures that myths do not become
fossilised (allegories) belonging to the past but remain
unstable, in a constant and present state of becoming.
Because of this, Tournierian myth is ironic; contrary to
popular belief, his treatment of myth reveals no fundamental
truth about the world or society other than the knowledge that
there are no certainties, and that the quest for such
absolutes is false. This is comforting ('Un grand mythe,
c'est d'abord une image vivante que nous berçons et
nourrissons en nous, qui nous éclaire et nous réchauffe'
[VV 25]), because wherever or whenever myth is stabilised and
forced to purvey a single ethical message and irony is
disallowed, it is because totalitarian, repressive
governments have ordered it so. 'Les grands mythes sont là,
writes Tournier, 'pour l'aider [l'homme] à dire non à une
organisation étouffante' (VV 32). Mythopoeism, infused with
dialectical irony - as opposed to non-ironic myth making
which merely perpetuates bourgeois idealism (37) - is the
happy expression of democracy.

5. LANGUAGE
Most 'mythologues' are agreed that myth operates as
language (38); to be known, myth has to be told. However, the
fact that myth is language and yet has its own specificity
points to an immediate and fundamental ambiguity. Lévi-Strauss recognises this as a problem and offers the following solution:

Cette difficulté n’est pas [...] étrangère au linguiste: le langage, n’englobe-t-il par lui-même des niveaux différents ? En distinguant entre la langue et la parole, Saussure a montré que le langage offrait deux aspects complémentaires : l’un structural, l’autre statistique. La langue appartient au domaine d’un temps réversible, et la parole, à celui d’un temps irréversible. (39)

The dialectical structure of Lévi-Strauss’s analysis is already apparent; the similar and the different are conjoined in a single concept. Myth, he goes on to argue, combines the temporal referents of langue and parole and, in so doing, creates a third referent, for, on the one hand, ‘un mythe se rapporte toujours à des événements passés [...] il y a longtemps’. Mais la valeur intrinsèque attribuée au mythe provient de ce que ces événements, censés se dérouler à un moment du temps forment aussi une structure permanente. Celle-ci rapporte simultanément au passé, au présent et au futur.’(40). Lévi-Strauss concludes:

Cette double structure, à la fois historique et anhistorique, explique que le mythe puisse simultanément relever du domaine de la parole (et être analysé en tant que tel) et de celui de la langue (dans laquelle il est formulé) tout en offrant à un troisième niveau, le même caractère d’objet absolu. Ce troisième niveau possède aussi une nature linguistique, mais il est pourtant distinct des deux autres. (41)

This argument and conclusion are reflected in Tournier’s treatment of myth throughout his writing. It has been noted earlier that Tournier fixes his myths to a precise historical
chronology (42). Atemporal myths are thus forced to co-exist with historical events. This emerges most obviously in *Le Roi des Aulnes* in which the timeless myth of the ogre is fixed to the chronology of the Second World War and in *Les Météores* in which the myth of the Twins is attached to a chronology which begins at precisely nineteen minutes past five on the afternoon of September 25th 1937 and takes in such dateable events as the Second World War and the building of the Berlin Wall (43).

With reference to language, these examples suggest that the question of how Tournier writes, i.e. his style, is more or less irrelevant to the mythic dimension in his writing. What critics such as Arlette Bouloumié appear to be saying is that it is the content of *Le Roi des Aulnes* as opposed to its means of expression that conveys the ambiguity of its temporal schema (44). To a certain extent, this is consistent with Lévi-Strauss’s view that 'on pourrait définir le mythe comme ce mode du discours où la valeur de la formule tradutore, tradittore tend pratiquement à zéro [...] la valeur du mythe comme mythe persiste, en dépit de la pire traduction [...] La substance du mythe ne se trouve ni dans le style, ni dans le mode de narration, ni dans la syntaxe, mais dans l’histoire qui y est racontée. Le mythe est langage; mais un langage [...] où le sens parvient, si l’on peut dire à décoller du fondement linguistique sur lequel il a commencé par rouler.’ (45)
However, although I have no wish to dispute this argument, I am persuaded that Lévi-Strauss's view that 'le mode de narration' counts for nothing in the telling of myths, is not entirely consistent with Tournier's later mythopoeic writing. The question being posed, then, is how does Tournier's mythopoeic style distinguish itself from what may broadly be termed his style as a writer of fictions? A response to this problem may be suggested by a close reading of *Le Médianoche Amoureux*.

Tournier makes it clear in the liminary narrative which precedes the collection of tales in this volume that two types of story will emerge, 'tantôt des contes inaugurés par le magique et traditionnel "il était une fois", tantôt des nouvelles racontées à la première personne, tranches de vie souvent saignantes et sordides' (*MA* 40). The *nouvelles* are characterised as 'âprement réalistes, pessimistes, dissolvantes' (*MA* 40), whereas the *contes* are 'savoureux, chaleureux, affables, travaillant au contraire à les [Nadège et Oudalle] rapprocher' (*MA* 41). Tournier thus emphasises the presence of two distinct styles in his writing; what needs to be done is to go beyond the simple 'il était une fois' and 'je' distinction he offers in order to discover what are the essential traits of mythic discourse.

The properties of the *conte* reveal an intra-textual relationship with Tournierian myth, 'qui nous éclaire et nous réchauffe' (*VV* 25), which, as demonstrated above, is
optimistic and which is symptomatic of man's creative
dialogue with the absolute. In the Tournierian construct, the
conte is infused with myth.

But what is in the language rather than the story which
is meant to warm the cockles so? Quite clearly it is
occult and complex, for beginning a story with 'il était une
fois' is not guaranteed to sustain a mythic discourse or
persuade the reader that he is participating in the dialectic
of the absolute. Galen Strawson, for example, reviewing the
English translation of Le Médianoche Amoureux, (The Midnight
Love Feast) has not been persuaded:

Turning to the tales [Strawson's translation of contes], we find a depressed king - Faust I of Pergamum -
following a shooting star. It shoots a ray of silver
light onto a sheepfold. 'What a surprising sight there
was inside! In a wooden manger lined with straw and
made into a crib, a new-born baby was wriggling in his
swaddling clothes.' "Lord, where is the truth?" Faust
asks the disturbingly active baby. The baby opens his
blue eyes very wide. A slight smile lights up his mouth
and suddenly everything is all right for Faust.

This is delectable, but it is not easy to share
Tournier's sense of the 'irresistible charm' of his
tales. The last guest leaves having told 'the most
beautiful tale no doubt ever written', and one takes it
that this is the last chapter in the book, a miserable
item which argues that 'the sacred arises only through
repetition'. (46)

Quite clearly, the myth does not survive in Strawson's
cynical retelling. Either, we must conclude, there was no
myth in the conte to start with or there is some quality of
Tournier's writing which renders it mythic and not available
to paraphrase.

I would suggest that the answer lies partly in
Tournier’s inter-/intra-textuality. Yanking any passage out of its context and partially paraphrasing it has the immediate effect of severing it from its matrix of related texts. If it is then shown to a reader who has no knowledge of this matrix that reader will be able to conduct a fair analysis of its intrinsic literary value but will remain ignorant of its inter-/intra-textual quality. Of course, the reference to the biblical birth of Christ cannot be ignored, but it is devalued by the cynical paraphrase and demythicized by the loss of the repetitions and resonances of its contextual matrix. If we accept that inter-/intra-textuality confers mythic potency, then, as Strawson demonstrates, his uncontextualized reading will remain as alienated and ‘miserable’ as the text in front of him. For the same conte (‘Le roi mage Faust’) which Strawson derides is available to an infinitely richer reading if released from the narrow parameters of a non-intertextual reading and allowed to fill its intertextual space.

The title itself refers to a number of texts outside the conte both within and outside Tournier’s writing. ‘Le roi mage’ immediately suggests an affinity with both the biblical text and Tournier’s Gaspard, Melchior et Balthazar (and its distillation, Les Rois Mages); ‘Le roi mage Faust’ opens up a vast range of texts, to name but a few, Marlowe’s Doctor Faustus, Goethe’s Faust, Valéry’s Mon Faust, Klaus Mann’s Mephisto and Vaclav Havel’s Temptation; within Tournier’s own
writing it may evoke Gilles et Jeanne (47). Before even
reading the conte, the reader may wonder if this is the tale
of 'the fifth wise man'.

Locating the palace of Faust at Pergamum and setting the
events that take place in the conte in the time of
Herod the Great gives the myth its spatio-temporal 'reality'
and fixes it to a historical period. Pergamum and Herod
operate as potent myths in themselves. Pergamon signifies the
origin of parchment fabrication (Pergamum and parchment have
a common etymology) and site of excavation where layers upon
layers of remains of civilizations have been excavated and so
by itself may be seen as a powerful metaphor for the
intertextual process; Herod operates on a mythic level as
ogre and tyrant.

These are names or titles, of course, which may be
expected to have strong echoes and reverberations. What of
the other words or word-groupings which make up this tale?
Does not every word have private and communal reverberations
(intertextual references) which could be construed as
myths? At this point the concept of 'myth' as a useful
analytic tool breaks down. So, quite simply, I propose that
certain words and word-groupings, such as 'Faust', 'ogre'
'mangeoire/bébé nouveau-né' have communal rather than private
reverberations - and this confers mythic quality.
Consequently, it might be argued, a discourse that is dense
in such myth-words could be identified as mythic discourse.
Yet Strawson's piece contains nearly all these myth-words: Pergamum, Faust, baby-in-a-manger and yet, as I have said, the mythic quality of the conte it describes is lost in the re-telling. How is this explained? The point is that Strawson's text is not a part of Tournierian discourse, it does not form any part of the intertextual 'jeu spéculaire'. Myth-words need a myth-matrix if they are to survive. When Strawson writes 'Faust' it has an infinitely meaner meaning than when Tournier writes the same word. Myth, therefore, may be - to contradict Lévi-Strauss - a style, a syntax - if, and only if, that style, syntax, word, word-grouping, recalls another text and another beyond that, ad infinitum.

*Le Médianoche Amoureux* celebrates repetition. The last conte, 'Les Deux Banquets', enables the unhappy and taciturn couple to recognise the sacred in the everyday, and to see reaffirmation and renewal in repeated events, gestures and words. Like his other novels, *Le Médianoche Amoureux* reflects a positive and optimistic dynamic. The dialectic of the absolute, operating through myth, reveals a philosophy that is, above all, human: it invites a universal participation in the building and habitation of a 'house of words'. Beyond this there is only failure of the imagination in which myths become allegories, science adopts reductionism and politics turn to fascism.

**NOTES**

1. See *VV* 384-7 and Merllié, *Michel Tournier*, p.229
2. Lévi-Strauss, Anthropologie Structurale, p.240

3. Ibid.

4. Lévi-Strauss, opus. cit., p.242

5. C.f. VV : 'Claude Lévi-Strauss nous montrait [qu’il] [...] convient de substituer à la représentation freudienne massive et fruste un système fin comme une tapisserie où les motifs se mêlent selon des lois définies.'

6. Tournier makes several references to the importance of the link between myth and his philosophy, although the nature of that link is never established. See, for example, VP 188-9.

7. See Chapter One of the present study.

8. See Chapter Four of the present study

9. See Chapter Six of the present study.


11. Worton, opus cit., p.300

12. Mythologie (pages not numbered)

13. 'La dimension mythologique' p. 127

14. Ibid.

15. In the 'légendes' (in Le Médianoche Amoureux) , for example, the forbidden fruits grow on the tree of music and the tree of perfumes. (MA 251, 255)

16. See VP 117-21

17. Hercules is most often represented in sculpture as a single figure, with his two main attributes, the aegis and club. Hermes is also typically represented as a single figure, recognisable by winged helmet and caduceus. Hector is frequently shown as a dead warrior, mourned by his wife, Andromache. By emphasising the break from the mythic mould in which these figures have been cast by tradition, Tournier creates a figure for the mythopoecism of his own writing as well as (more
obviously) prefiguring Tiffauges' pediaphoric destiny.

18. Similarly, in Robbe-Grillet's Les Gommes, Wallas's identification with Oedipus leads to tragic consequences: he kills his father because he cannot break the mould of the myth.

19. Let it be understood that this is only a partial interpretation of Tiffauges' destiny, and does not take into account his assimilation into Judaeo-Christian iconography, nor the 'textual programming' of Tiffauges' destiny.


21. Bouloumié, in fact, suggests that mythic time is retrospectively orientated; I have chosen to describe myth as existing outside temporal reference, in view of Tournier's concept of the myth as 'création continue', i.e., which exists in the present and future as much as the past.

22. Worton, opus cit., 310

23. I use the term 'orgrishness' in its negative sense; Tournier does, of course, attempt to rehabilitate the term in a dialectic of both its positive as well as its negative aspects.

24. 1958-68; See Merllié, opus cit., pp.232-4

25. The correspondence of this myth to the Tournierian absolute needs no further elaboration.

26. Lévi-Strauss, opus cit., p.254

27. Wilson, 'The desire to devour in Tournier's Vendredi ou les limbes du Pacifique', p.15

28. Wilson, opus cit., p.16

29. Arlette Bouloumié offers a slightly different analysis of the inherent antimonies at work in this myth; see Bouloumié, opus cit., pp.98-105

30. Lévi-Strauss, Tristes Tropiques, p.418

31. Lévi-Strauss refrains from making an explicit connection between cannibalism and Holy Communion, but a relationship may easily be inferred: 'outre que de tels rites s'accomplissent de manière fort discrète, portant
sur des menues quantités de matière organique pulvérisée, ou mêlée à d'autres aliments, on reconnaîtra [...] que la condamnation morale de telles coutumes implique, soit une croyance dans la résurrection corporelle qui serait compromise par la destruction matérielle du cadavre, soit l'affirmation d'un lien entre le corps et le dualisme correspondant, c'est-à-dire des convictions qui sont de même nature que celles au nom desquelles la consommation rituelle est pratiquée et que nous n'avons pas de raison de leur préférer.' Opus cit., p.418

32. C.f. Milan Kundera's anecdote about Gala and Salvador Dali's much-loved rabbit : 'Un jour qu'ils devraient partir pour un long voyage, ils discutèrent tard dans la nuit de ce qu'ils allaient faire du lapin [...] Le lendemain, Gala prépara le déjeuner et Dali se délecta, jusqu'au moment où il comprit qu'il mangeait un civet de lapin. Il se leva et courut aux cabinets pour vomir dans la cuvette son petit animal chéri, le fidèle compagnon de ses vieux jours. Gala, en revanche, était heureuse que son aimé eût pénétré dans ses entrailles [...] Elle ne connaissait pas d'accomplissement plus absolu de l'amour que l'ingestion du bien-aimé.' L'Immortalité, p.119

33. Wilson, opus cit., p.16

34. In For Roman Jakobson, p.289

35. I have only analysed one myth - the myth of Creation in terms of its dialectic composition for reasons of economy. It will be evident that the same analysis may be applied with similar results to the antimonies inherent in the myths of the Ogre and the Heavenly Twins.

36. Bouloumié, opus cit., p.20

37. C.f. Barthes, Mythologies, pp.224-9

38. Albert Cook writes that 'Insofar as myth must be communicated in language, and insofar as myth - a particular myth or 'myth' in general - necessarily constitutes the central reference for statements of or about it, then myth is continuous with language.' (Myth and Language, p.2) Mircea Eliade, in his study of religious myth also argues that 'Le mythe raconte une histoire sacrée; il relate un événement qui a eu lieu dans le temps primordial [...] En somme les mythes décrivent les diverses et parfois dramatiques irrruptions du sacré (ou du "sur-naturel") dans le monde'. (Aspects du Myth, p.14) Barthes argues that 'mythe est parole' (Mythologies p.193).

40. Lévi-Strauss, *opus cit.*, p.231


42. See pp.286-7 of the present study where I have shown that historical events are themselves transformed into myths.

43. See note 42 above.

44. An honourable exception is Michael Worton, who in 'Myth-reference in *Le Roi des Aulnes*'suggests that Tournier uses a specific kind of writing as initiatory to the discourse of myth. For example, the transmutation of the lower case 'o' (of 'ogre') of Rachel's metaphoric discourse to the capital 'O' of Tiffauges' mythopoeic discourse. *Opus cit.*, p.302


46. Strawson, *The Independent on Sunday*, 17.2.91, p.24

47. There is an undoubted similarity between the relationship struck between Prélal and Gilles de Rais and that of Mephistopheles and Faust.
PART III

PHILOSOPHY AND THE NOVEL
CHAPTER EIGHT

ROUSSEAU, VALÉRY, SARTRE, TOURNIER -

EN ROUTE TO POST-MODERNISM

'Au-delà du partage entre philosophie et littérature, peut se profiler [...] une [...] trace qui ne soit pas encore langage, ni parole, ni écriture, ni signe, ni même "le propre de l' Homme".'

(Jacques Derrida, Entretiens avec Le Monde, ed. C. Delacampagne, p.80.)

1. INTRODUCTION

So far, the present study has concentrated on the nature of Tournier's philosophy and its various expressions in his writing. In essence, therefore, my approach has been thematic: I have looked at the product of Tournier's engagement with philosophy. In this, the concluding section, the emphasis will shift towards an analysis which is concerned more with the method of production rather than with the product (1). Thus it may be understood that it is not the intention of the present chapter to offer a comparative study of the particular philosophies of Rousseau, Valéry, Sartre and Tournier, but rather to examine the ways in which these writers have found the co-efficient of their individual literary and philosophical voices.

By adding 'en route to post-modernism' to the chronological arrangement of names in the title of this chapter, I am aware that a spurious unity or sequentiality of method may be inferred. However, the only unity which informs
my selection is that, like Tournier's best works (2), Rousseau's *Emile*, Valéry's *Monsieur Teste* and Sartre's *La Nausée* are pre-eminent amongst those fictions which have challenged the existing models of philosophical expression and helped to reshape the role of the reader. Furthermore, Tournier's repeated affirmations of indebtedness to these three writers indicate their privileged status in Tournier's own development as a writer of philosophical fictions (3).

The aim of this chapter is to demonstrate the postmodernist quality of Tournier's philosophical expression. An examination of the three texts cited above affords an opportunity to see his endeavour in a wider context and to evaluate the - partial - precedents of his method of production.

It is necessary to provide a working definition of postmodernism before any further discussion. I am indeed indebted to Michael Worton in this matter for his enlightening lecture on 'The Emergence of Post-Modernism' at the South Bank, in October 1990 (4).

2. POST-MODERNISM

The term 'post-modern' was first employed in the vocabulary of architectural design. It designates a style which incorporates references to recognisable past models of architectural design, yet asserts its own modernity, thus evading the tag of being 'neo' - 'neo-classical', 'neo-
regency’, ‘neo-modern’ (5). However, post-modernist architecture has acquired an unfortunate reputation for less than subtle appropriations of the past. Richard MacCormac, currently president elect of the Royal Institute of British Architects, describes himself as a 'modern' architect and rejects architecture which has become known as Post-Modern:

> Architecture is rediscovering a sense of history, not by arbitrarily cobbling together bits and pieces of past style, in the manner of the worst practice of Post-Modernism, but by infusing and reflecting ideas of the past in present practice. (6)

One of the best examples of this new architecture, in MacCormac’s opinion, is James Stirling’s Staatsgallerie in Stuttgart, 'where the conventions of German neo-Classicism are transformed, perhaps turned inside-out, by a playfulness which comes straight out of the modernism of Ozenfant and Le Corbusier' (7).

Happily, this new architecture may serve as a more accurate introduction to post-modernist literature. One further example of the new architecture at its best should dispel any lingering opprobrium for a literary style which allies itself so unfortunately by its name to the Lloyd’s building in the City of London. The little oratory at Grange-over-Sands, designed by architects Benson and Forsyth, is, in part, a sensitive reference to Bramante’s Tempietto in Rome and also to the Roman Catholic tradition of depicting the Holy Sepulchre as a cylinder. MacCormac describes it as a
'tiny cylindrical space of opalescent glass, a concentration of order and calm [...] This little building [...] is one in which the spirit of Modernism — its asceticism, luminosity and lightness of material — is employed to express a much older, deeper experience.' (8)

In the same way, post-modernist literature consciously seeks to rehabilitate the past within the present. Whether in the form of allusion to anterior texts or cultural inheritance, or major pastiche of past styles of literary expression, post-modernist texts operate actively in the fourth dimension, that of time.

One consequence of the fluidity of these temporal dynamics is that the idea of the literary text as some kind of immovable icon, where concepts of author and authority go hand in hand, is challenged and subsequently destroyed. After Tournier’s *Vendredi*, for example, Defoe’s *Robinson Crusoe* ceases to operate as the authoritative model against which all later versions of the tale are measured (9).

However, Defoe’s text is not diminished by its loss of authority; freed from its iconic fastness it is augmented by its rehabilitation in late twentieth century consciousness.

The challenge to authority cannot exclude the author of the post-modern text. The author relinquishes the question of intention or meaning to the reader, who, consequently, will not find meaning by referring back to the author, but in the co-creative partnership he forms with the
text. As Worton says, post-modernism is a democratic - as opposed to an élitist - art: all readers need to do is to make themselves available to the personal, social and literary cultural reverberations of the word. For my own part, I am not sure that very many people can cope with (literary) democracy; it takes an educated confidence to dispense with the powerful figures of authority.

The writer too, must face up to the responsibility of no longer being more important than his or her text. Self-commentary and self-subversion frequently ensue; after all, there is no reason why the writer may not also be the reader of his or her own texts. At worst, a narcissistic self-absorption might develop, (on either the part of the reader or the writer) or else the reader might feel trapped in what A.S. Byatt describes as a 'self-referring, self-reflexive, inturned postmodernist mirror-game' (9). At best, however, the writer creates a dialectic of cynicism and romanticism, aggression and submission which binds him to his reader, each the correspondent of the other's desire for self-realisation.

As a final note, it would be useful, to avoid any possible confusion, to say briefly how post-modern writing differs from intertextual writing as they may appear to be practically synonymous (11).

All literary writing is intertextual to a greater or lesser degree but not all writing is post-modern. If intertextuality is possessed of an ideology it is one
which promotes aggression, erudition and narcissism. Laurent Jenny writes:

L’analyse du travail intertextuel montre assez que la redite n’existe pas, ou, en d’autres termes, que ce travail exerce une fonction critique sur la forme. Que l’intentionnalité soit explicitement critique [...] ou non. Si l’avant-gardisme intertextuel est volontiers savant, c’est qu’il est à la fois conscient de l’objet sur lequel il travaille et des souvenirs culturels qui le hantent [...] Redire pour cerner, clore dans un autre discours, plus puissant. Parler pour oblitérer. Ou bien, patiemment, dénier pour dépasser [...] (12)

Post-modernism does all this too. But as we have seen, post-modernism uses this aggressivity in order to promote its own subversion, thus creating a dialectic in which there can be no ‘strong’ and ‘weak’ texts, winners and losers, but an ironic anarchy in which all, rather than an educated minority, can participate.

3. ROUSSEAU, EMILE AND AUTHORITY

An early form of the post-modernist approach may be discerned in Emile because: (i) the past is always inscribed in the present, (ii) the authority of that past is always challenged, and (iii) the wholly new and creative relationship between the ‘master’ and his ‘pupil’ evinced in the narrative is textually reflected in the relationship available to, and possibly struck between, the writer and the reader.

Some further elaboration is required for the first two points, which will be dealt with jointly, but as it is the
intention of this chapter to focus upon the method of production, it is the last point to which greatest consideration will be given.

(i) The past reinscribed and its authority challenged

Although Rousseau's indebtedness to a number of sources—pre-eminently Montaigne's 'De l'institution des enfans' and Locke's *De l'éducation des enfants*—is well known and well documented with regard to *Emile* (13), it is the revolutionary aspect of the theories expounded in this book which has most firmly and popularly imprinted itself on the history of educational practices. Tournier in particular emphasises that Rousseau does not merely challenge the pedagogic norm, but turns it back to front; he sees *Emile* not as a subversive model but rather as an inversion of the classical route to intellectual development:

> En un mot [...] pour l'esprit classique, la nature est mauvaise, et mauvais l'enfant qui représente en quelque sorte l'homme naturel, frais émoulu des mains de la nature. C'est à la société — source de toutes les valeurs — qu'il incombe de prendre en main le petit animal humain, pourri de mauvais instincts, afin d'en faire dans la patience et la douleur un homme digne de ce nom [...] Jean-Jacques Rousseau, préparé par plusieurs générations de penseurs et de critiques, renverse les termes de ce schéma : la nature est bonne, la société est mauvaise. Donc l'enfant est bon, l'adulte perverti par la vie sociale, est mauvais. (WW 169-70)

Inversion implies reinscription; the past is reflected in the present in reversed form. In Tournier's perception, Rousseau has not erased the past, he has reinscribed it in the
present. In the same way that Stirling's Staatsgallerie
startles us because its modernity is a (respectful) inversion
of a classical model, because the past is not absent but very
present, so also Emile presents not the shock of the new, but
the shock of the old - turned upside-down.

Rousseau is, perhaps, less subtle and respectful than
Stirling in his inversions. His 'rewriting' of La Fontaine's
'Le corbeau et le renard' is typical: the classic fable is
inscribed in the text together with the imagined commentary
of a child (14). The commentary subverts the text, line by
line, until, finally, a conclusion is reached which is the
exact opposite of the intended moral in which the fox is to
be despised for profiting from flattery; children, in
Rousseau's experience, 'se moquent du corbeau [et]
s'affectionnent tous au renard' (15). Whether we call this
kind of re-writing post-modern or not, its affinity with
Tournier's inversion and re-inscription is undeniable.
Furthermore, the challenge to the authority of La Fontaine is
made with humour - the crow's cheese must smell really strong
to attract the fox in his hole, etc. In a very similar
manner, Tournier's Vendredi humorously undermines the
authority of his two masters - Robinson Crusoé and Daniel
Defoe (16).

(ii) The master-pupil relationship restructured
The question of authority is central to Emile: the authority
of the classical pedagogic orthodoxy is continually held up to critical examination, as is the authority of the master with regard to his pupil. Close textual analysis discloses that Rousseau's style and method of presenting his case reflect this challenge to authority on the narrative level as well. It is the intention of this section to demonstrate that the new and creative relationship between Emile and his master may be textually available to the reader of *Emile* also.

One of the fundamental principles of Rousseau's model education is that the child should learn by active experience as opposed to passive reception of information:

> Qu'il ne sache rien parce que vous le lui avez dit, mais parce qu'il l'a compris lui-même. (17)

This is an argument familiar to the post-modern (post-Barthesian might be more accurate) reader (18) and to the reader of Tournier's *Le Vol du Vampire*; like Emile, he will find meaning only through active participation, for no authoritative voice will provide the answers for him.

How then are these preoccupations reflected textually in Rousseau's writing? It must be said at the outset that there are inconsistencies in the narrator's abdication of authority; passionate imperatives are weakly qualified by an insistence that they should not be taken 'pour règle'(19), but are merely offered for examination. Furthermore, the reader may feel all too firmly guided through the apparently disingenuous dialogues between master and pupil which lead to such satisfying conclusions as 'Ah! [...] l'astronomie est
bonne à quelque chose’(20), and which prove the author’s educational technique so assuredly vindicated.

Nevertheless, it is important to note that these dialogues constitute an irresistible, if somewhat crude, invitation to the reader to participate in Emile’s learning experience.

Deliberately misled in the forest, Emile is lost. But Rousseau has taken the precaution of fore-arming him - and consequently the reader - with the knowledge that (i) it is mid-day and (ii) the forest lies to the north of Montmorency. How may Emile find his way out? Rousseau’s method is not subtle, but the reader is drawn into the problem and participates in finding the solution, prompted by the narrator-guide. Arguably, this kind of presentation has more in common with the seductive type of reader involvement demanded by a detective novel than with post-modern literature; elsewhere in Emile, however, Rousseau’s invitation to co-creativity may be seen to be of a much more refined and sophisticated nature. A particular example may be found in the fourth book, in the section concerned with the teaching of the divinity.

In essence, the simplistic method of engagement by use of dialogue which involves the reader remains the same. Here, however, so many dialogues run concurrently that the reader is engaged on a number of levels. Let us begin by analysing the textual structure and strategy of the argument:
(i) Rousseau-the-narrator abdicates his authorial voice and by extension, his narrative dialogue with his reader (21). He claims to transcribe the words of an anonymous young man concerning his physical and moral destitution and subsequent rescue by a worthy 'vicaire savoyard'.

(ii) The dialogue now is between the anonymous author and Rousseau-the-narrator; the former is evidently appraised of the latter's educational project, for he notes that the destitute of his tale is possessed of an immaturity and availability to moral stimuli which match 'cette époque dans laquelle vous maintenez votre élève avec tant de soins' (22).

(iii) Rousseau-the-narrator admits that he is in fact the author of this tale for he was that destitute young man and thus resumes his dialogue with the reader: 'vous sentez bien [...] que ce malheureux fugitif c'est moi-même' (23).

(iv) A dialogue ensues between the priest and the narrator-whom-we-now-know-to-be-Rousseau which serves to introduce the 'Profession de Foi du Vicaire Savoyard'.

(v) At the heart of the priest's discourse a further dialogue is revealed: his conscience, alias the voice of God, speaks to him in 'la langue de la nature', a language destroyed by 'le monde et le bruit', but a
language which his soul nevertheless recognises and
to which it immediately responds:

Conscience ! conscience ! instinct divin, immortelle
et céleste voix [...] juge infaillible du bien et du
mal, qui rends l'homme semblable à Dieu, c'est toi qui
fais l'excellence de sa nature et la moralité de ses
actions [...] (24)

(v) Rousseau-the-narrator resumes the dialogue with the
reader by returning the priest to the third person :
'le bon prêtre avait parlé avec véhémence [...]'(25).

(vi) He subsequently resumes his dialogue with the priest,
who, in turn, imagines ...

(vii) ... a debate between a man whose conscience expresses
itself through his faculty of reason and another man,
'l'inspiré', who has abandoned reason for blind faith
in the supernaturel.

(viii) The 'raisonneur' has the final word and assumes the
identity of the priest who has resumed his dialogue
with Rousseau-the-narrator. The point at which this
happens is hard to establish. The 'raisonneur' is
evidently still speaking to his adversary, 'l'inspiré'
when he decries 'vos prétendues preuves surnaturelles,
vos miracles, vos prophéties' (26); yet in the next
paragraph, he addresses his interlocutor as 'mon
fils', and subsequently as 'mon enfant' and 'mon jeune
ami', terms in which he has previously addressed the
young Rousseau. It is clear, however, that by the
point at which the priest reveals that this is the
first occasion on which he has declared his
'profession de foi' that the 'inspiré' has disappeared
from the dialogue.

(x) Rousseau resumes his dialogue with the reader, and
returns to the narration of Emile's education:

J'ai transcrit cet écrit [...] comme un exemple de la
manière dont on peut raisonner avec son élève [...] et
c'est à quoi je me borne avec mon Emile. (27)

As Emile's name has not been mentioned for the past seventy
pages, the reader is brought back with a jolt to the
narrative; as a result of this jolt it is not difficult to be
disseasive of Rousseau's ability to merge his theosophical
and literary discourses.

However, it may be shown that Rousseau's strategy
is to dissolve the formal boundaries between himself as
author and his reader in a truly post-modern fashion. For
so many changes of interlocutor are there that, without
resorting to the kind of analysis shown above, it is
virtually impossible to identify the identity of the 'vous'
each time it is used. The dissimulation of Rousseau the
narrator as a third party at the outset of the dialogue
serves especially to break down the reader's passive
acceptance of who is talking to whom. A heuristic reading
simply registers the constancy of dialogue; the question of
who it is exactly that is being addressed becomes irrelevant:
the reader cannot help but become himself the object of the
'vous'. The result of this identification is that the reader
feels caught up in the learning process, or rather, that he has co-created the argument of the author. Certainly, like Emile, he should not feel himself to be the mere recipient of Rousseau's theory of the divinity.

A hermeneutic reading, however, registers the constancy of the dialectic (as opposed to mere dialogue) and the post-modern quality of that dialectic. The inscription of the reader, described above, may be seen both to privilege and yet to challenge not only the subjective nature of the argument, but subjectivity itself. The complex of dialogues which draw the reader into co-creating the hymn to conscience therefore simultaneously disclose the subjective status of that thesis.

A further 'meta-dialogue' within the text reinforces the post-modern quality of Emile; for, in addition to the dialectical engagement with the reader, this text operates as a commentary to, and a subversion of, an earlier text of Rousseau's: the second book of Confessions (28). The later text romanticises the somewhat sordid account of his flight from Geneva, his stay at the Hospice des Catachumènes in Turin and the spiritual assistance he received from the abbés Gaime and Gátier: the sources behind the fictitious 'vicaire savoyard'. From this earlier text it is clear that Rousseau did not 'escape' from the hospice but left of his own accord, after his Catholic baptism; it also illuminates the reason for the dismissal of the 'vicaire savoyard': the abbé Gátier
had been responsible for the pregnancy of an unmarried woman.

Cynicism, however, matches the romanticism of the rewritten history, just as theory is dialectically engaged with narrative: self-commentary underpins the romanticised version; a theory of the divinity is created from a history. The two texts simultaneously strengthen and destabilize the authority of each other; it is the function of the postmodern reader to see that they are never reconciled.

4. VALERY, MONSIEUR TESTE AND THE POSSIBILITY OF COHERENCE

It is clear from the preface to Monsieur Teste that in writing this text, Valéry has no wish to ally himself to any philosophy or to philosophy in general, rejecting it on the grounds that it belongs to the class of 'Choses Vagues' or 'Choses Impures' (29). However, the refusal appears to be semantic: Monsieur Teste is the expression of a mind which has acquired complete self-mastery - the work is committed to expressing the epistemological (and ontological) consequences of that cerebral control.

The next part of this chapter will determine the way in which Valéry produces that central thesis and show its relevance to the development of post-modern writing.

* At the opening of 'Une Soirée avec Monsieur Teste' the narrator advances his belief that the transmission of thought
into language diminishes and dissipates the genius of that idea or intuition. Consequently, 'les têtes les plus fortes' (30) are deemed to be those which choose to remain silent, 'qui meurent sans avouer' (31).

Thus, from the outset, a challenge to the authority of the writer, who, par excellence, commits thought into language, is established. Thus also, the reader of Monsieur Teste is provoked from the outset into questioning his position as collaborator in a second-rate endeavour, while nevertheless seeking, and possibly recognising, the authentic voice of an idea struggling to overcome the limitation of language. It seems to me that, as in Emile, a precocious form of the post-modern tension may be discerned in this text, in that the reader is encouraged, even manoeuvred, into a complicit dialectic of simultaneously accepting and rejecting both the cynicism and the romance, the theory and the narrative fiction of the text.

A closer examination of the text is required in order to demonstrate just how this dialectic operates.

(i) Incoherence

Monsieur Teste is not an 'easy read'. Emile, by comparison is warmly engaging; it exudes 'reader friendliness'. The apparent disingenuousness of Rousseau's textual strategies are endearing in their transparent desire to win the attention, the respect and the complicity of the reader. Valéry's text, however, seems calculated to repel intimacy: it is
fragmentary, held together by the barest thread of a
narrative, while the language is highly wrought and intense,
in that it is reduced to a density which defies immediate
comprehension and which barely avoids opacity (32). There are
also discernable silences within the text, as for example in
the response of the narrator to the unheard voice of Teste:

Nous marchions, et il lui échappait des phrases presque
incohérentes. Malgré mes efforts, je ne suivais ses
paroles qu’à grand’peine, me bornant enfin à les
retenir. L’incohérence d’un discours dépend de celui qui
l’écoute. L’esprit me paraît ainsi fait qu’il ne peut
être incohérent pour soi-même. [...] Nous allions dans les rues adoucies par la nuit, nous
tournions à des angles, dans le vide, trouvant
d’instinct notre voie, – plus large, plus étroite, plus
large. Son pas militaire se soumettait le mien...

"Pourtant, répondis-je, comment se soustraire à une
musique si puissante ! Et pourquoi ?" (33)

This ‘dialogue’ provides the model that the reader needs to
enter into a complicit relation with the text. If coherence
is in the possession of the mind which utters, then the co­
respondent must become that mind or remain forever excluded.
The reader, then, must make Monsieur Teste’s utterances – or
indeed those of the narrator – his own, if they are to have
meaning.

The alternative is suggested by Emilie Teste, who does
not pretend to understand her husband’s words, but finds in
them ‘un enchantement presque musical’. There is, she
continues, ‘une belle partie de l’âme qui peut jouir sans
comprendre’ (34). Similarly, the narrator is able to
surrender himself to ‘[la] musique inouïe’(35) of Teste’s
voice, without understanding what he is saying.

However, it is not for the reader to make a choice between two possible ways of reading. There is a simultaneous presence of incoherence and coherence, music and silence which emerge in a mutually self-opposing, self-reinforcing dialectic which adds a dynamic to the text which would fail to be realised if the reader were to opt for either a purely active or passive reaction to what he or she was reading.

(ii) Intertextual dialogues

As I have noted above, post-modern texts seek to decentre, to destabilize themselves and earlier works. Monsieur Teste fulfils this activity in a number of ways. Just as Rousseau uses a part of his Confessions in Emile, so Valéry takes his own log-book of 1896 (36) as the basis for the 'Extraits du Log-Book de Monsieur Teste'. The result of this is that the later text may be read as a narcissistic self-commentary, or indeed, the lier log-book may be seen as a subversion (subversion?) of the fictional creation. Again, the position of the author is challenged by the lack or instability of a strong antecedent or central figure of authority.

In addition to the collection of writings which make up the text of Monsieur Teste, there are numerous references to Teste in Valéry's later Cahiers, letters and other fragmentary pieces, such as the 'Journal d'Emma, nièce de Monsieur Teste' (37).
Explicit references to this fictional character, however, are overwhelmed by the sheer mass of an implicit continuum: there is little written by Valéry that could not have been said by Monsieur Teste and vice-versa. Valéry makes no distinction between his own epigrammatic mode of expression and very deliberate, precise use of language and that which he ascribes to the narrator of *Monsieur Teste* as well as Monsieur Teste himself. Why then, did he bother to create a fictional character, when he could have purveyed the same ideas in his 'non-fictional' writing?

Perhaps the answer is that in creating Teste, Valéry is able to establish a dialogue between himself and a 'himself-as-other'. Certainly this schema is appropriate to the subject matter; Teste is a mind that observes itself observing itself observing itself and so on, *ad infinitum*. The device of fiction provides the necessary romantic counterweight to the cynical self-subversion of the text.

It should not be concluded, however, that *Monsieur Teste* is entirely narcissistic or self-referential. It dialogues with past figures of authority, most notably Descartes, in what appears again to be a precursory post-modern way. The 'signpost' to Descartes is found in the epigraph to 'Une Soirée avec Monsieur Teste': *Vita Cartesii est simplicissima*... Having accepted this direction, the references to Descartes' *Discours de la méthode* then appear to proliferate to the
extent that 'Une soirée avec Monsieur Teste' may be taken for a rewriting of the first five parts (at least) of the Discours. To illustrate this point briefly we may compare Valéry’s opening statement, 'la bêtise n’est pas mon fort’ and his statement of preference for (as opposed to superiority of) his own intellect (38) with Descartes’ opening four paragraphs which, although a good deal less laconic and with a good deal more humility, say the same thing.

Similarly, both men then lay claim to have travelled extensively, to have observed the ways in which other people think and behave, to have read much. Yet both have strong doubts about the validity of what they have seen and read: Valéry writes 'Je rejetais non seulement les Lettres, mais encore la Philosophie presque toute entière, parmi les Choses Vagues et les Choses Impures' (39). Descartes’ reservations centre upon the element of fantasy and subsequent loss of truth in literature, and with regard to philosophy he writes:

[... voyant qu'elle a été cultivée par les plus excellents esprits qui aient vécu depuis plusieurs siècles, et que néanmoins il ne s'y trouve encore aucune chose dont on ne dispute, et par conséquent qui ne soit douteuse [...] et que, considérant combien il peut y avoir de diverses opinions, touchant une même matière, qui soit soutenues par des gens doctes, sans qu'il y en puisse avoir jamais plus d'une seule qui soit vraie, je réputais presque pour faux tout ce qui n'était que vraisemblable. (40)

For both men, these observations force them to interiorise their quest for truth. In Teste’s case, the result of such an
interiorisation leads the narrator to conclude that 'il était le maître de sa pensée' (41); for Descartes, this is one of the fundamental goals of his 'Method':

(...) tâcher toujours plutôt à me vaincre que la fortune, et à changer mes désirs que l'ordre du monde; et généralement, de m'accoutumer à croire qu'il n'y a rien qui soit entièrement en notre pouvoir [...] (42)

Teste's name is surely derived from the Latin testis, a witness; Teste-Testis is indeed a witness - a witness to Descartes' 'méthode pour bien conduire sa raison et chercher la vérité' (43).

However, it is important to note that Valéry has not explicitly inscribed Descartes within his text as a powerful figure of authority. For all the conceptual similarities that Teste witnesses, stylistically, he is a strong character (44) in his own right, inhabited by Valéry's laconic precision to the point of opacity which bears little resemblance to Descartes' generous prose which so keenly wants to be clear and comprehensible.

The implicit - as opposed to explicit - presence of Descartes in Monsieur Teste permits a strong reading of the text in the way that Valéry's reading of Descartes is strong. Had Valéry chosen to express the conceptual content of his work in a more explicit fashion with direct reference to Descartes the reader would be obliged to turn to the anterior text in order to understand the 'message' of the posterior one. The reader would consequently be put in a weak position
because faced with an authorative author who was dictating the terms on which he wished to be read. As it is, there can be no certainty that the analysis above is in any way 'right' or intended by the author, but what is certain is that the post-modern qualities of Monsieur Teste allow the reader to make that strong reading and to create his/her own coherence.

In a manner similar to Tournier, however, Valéry provides an intra-textual support to that coherence. A letter to Gide dated 25 August 1894, around which time Valéry conceived writing Monsieur Teste, illuminates the connection with Descartes:

J'ai relu le Discours de la Méthode tantôt, c'est bien le roman moderne, comme il pourrait être fait. A remarquer que la philosophie postérieure a rejété la part autobiographique. Cependant, c'est le point à reprendre et il faudra donc écrire la vie d'une théorie comme on a trop écrit celle d'une passion (couchage). Mais c'est un peu moins commode - car, puritain que je suis, je demande que la théorie soit mieux que du truquage comme dans Louis Lambert ...

This letter leaves little room to doubt that Monsieur Teste represents the realisation of that desire to 'écrire la vie d'une théorie'.

It is a desire that is identical to Tournier's own ambition as a novelist and accordingly, he acknowledges his debt to Valéry: 'les romans que je cherchais à écrire, il en a donne la définition et fourni le modèle avec Monsieur Teste' (VP 230). But in realisation, Tournier's writing exceeds Valéry's project; for if 'Valéry n'a mené à bien qu'une seule oeuvre répondant à cette définition' (46), that
oeuvre being Monsieur Teste, Tournier has, if the thesis of
the present study is accepted, dedicated almost his entire
literary output to reconstructing 'le destin de l'absolu'
(47).

Furthermore, as the concluding part of this chapter will
demonstrate, Tournier, unlike Valéry, unfolds the life of the
absolute in a manner that only the novel or conte can
discover.

5. SARTRE, LA NAUSEE AND DIFFERENCE

Of the texts which we are considering in this chapter, La
Nausée may be deemed the least post-modern. Certainly, the
work is founded upon several important anterior texts as
Tournier, amongst many other readers of Sartre has noted:

La parenté de Sartre et de Céline saute aux yeux et il
est clair que La Nausée (1938) découle directement du
Voyage au bout de la nuit (1932) et de Mort à crédit
(1936). C'est la même hargne, le même parti pris de ne
voir partout que laideur, bêtise, abjection. (V 301-2)

Furthermore, Tournier identifies the epigraph by
Céline which appears at the beginning of La Nausée as an
annunciatory statement of the three sentences with which Les
Mots closes (V 301).

In terms of literary style, however, Tournier observes
the indebtedness to Céline evaporate and the heritage of
writers such as Stendhal, Balzac, Maupassant and Zola
emerge, writers for whom 'l'écriture était un outil soumis à
la seule loi de l’efficacité’ (VV 303)

Where subject matter is concerned, Tournier recognises the influence of Heidegger’s Sein und Zeit (VV 308) and, equally, the influence of this work on Sarte’s l’Etre et le Néant, which appeared five years after La Nausée (48). Does Sartre aggress these earlier texts? A Bloomian reading would suggest that such an aggression is inevitable. However, it is difficult to detect this kind of Oedipal behaviour in close analysis of Sartre’s writing, and easier to accept the Tournierian view that La Nausée flows (découle) from Céline’s work; that Sartre has adopted the language of others (‘il a adopté [...] la langue de Stendhal [...]’ etc., that this work was created under the influence (influence) of Sein und Zeit. Tournier’s diction is deliberately non-aggressive, suggesting a process of natural evolution, a straightforward endeavour to build on past achievement within a continuum of concept and style (49). It is tempting to make a psycho-analytic point here and relate this to Sartre’s personal lack of a father and his belief that this liberated him from a crushing weight of authority to be both borne and contested (50).

Looking at La Nausée through Tournier’s eyes, it would appear that the post-modern challenge to the past is not met, although the indebtedness to the past is clear.

The Tournierian perspective reveals that La Nausée differs from Emile and Monsieur Teste in another important
way: whereas Rousseau and Valéry quite clearly identify themselves with the narrator in their respective works, there is little to suggest that Sartre intends to portray himself or his own condition in the narrator, Roquentin, or indeed in any of the other characters in the book. Tournier goes so far as to say that Sartre, more than any other writer, separates himself from all his characters (51), 'à une distance entretenue par une évidente antipathie'. For Roquentin is not, as Tournier points out, a projection of Sartre's physical or emotional self; Roquentin’s 'petite crise de folie' does not match any experience of Sartre's own. Rather, suggests Tournier, Roquentin may be seen to represent an aspect of a metaphysical thesis which finds its origins in Heidegger's Sein und Zeit and its subsequent theoretical expression in l'Être et le Néant.

However, there is a considerable difference between the 'réflexion métaphysique' (Vv 308) which inspires La Nausée and its emergence in Roquentin’s narrative. Tournier is sensitive to this difference, yet withholds any further consideration as to why this should be, save to remark that everyday life has neither the language nor wit to understand or communicate profound metaphysical intuition:

[...] Roquentin n'est ni un penseur ni un mystique. Il ne lui reste donc qu'un seul statut, celui de malade mental, et ce sera donc comme une brève crise de folie qu'il ressentira la nausée. C'est ici que Sartre et son personnage divergent le plus nettement. Car pour l'auteur de l'Être et le Néant, la nausée n'est rien moins qu'une crise de folie. C'est l'intuition profonde du fond authentique des choses. [...] En d'autres
termes, le romancier cryptométaphysicien, tenu de remplacer ses théories par des personnages et ses démonstrations par des péripéties, découvre que la folie et la déchéance sociale sont les seules réponses que la vie quotidienne - muette par faiblesse mentale - peut donner aux problèmes métaphysiques. (VV 308-9)

The first point to be made in opposition to Tournier's reading is that Roquentin is a thinker and that he does bear witness to mystical intuitions. Roquentin is constantly pondering the nature of reality and its relation to language in a manner that would be immediately comprehensible to Locke, Hume, Wittgenstein or indeed any philosopher, professional or amateur. The fact that Roquentin wonders if his new perception is a sign of madness (52) is countered by his desire and ability to translate his experience into language, to wrestle with its inadequacies; certainly Roquentin shows no signs of being forced into muteness because of any 'faiblesse mentale'.

A further question raised by this analysis - and one which Tournier leaves unanswered - is how the reader is then able to replace the feeble inadequacy of everyday expression - which for all his literary training is all Roquentin has at his disposal - with the densely metaphysical experience undergone by Roquentin, and by what means the author enables the reader to perform that operation.

The answer lies in Roquentin's own experience as an individual committed to language, and more precisely as a writer, an experience which is deeply rooted in Sartre's own intellectual commitments of that period. As we shall see,
Roquentin and Sartre have far more in common than Tournier would have us believe.

Sartre writes; Roquentin writes. Both are seduced by the act of writing, both are aware of its traps and limitations; both raise the question of why they write and for whom. Roquentin states that he writes 'pour tirer au clair certaines circonstances' (53); elsewhere he admits that he writes because writing appears to stave off his experience of nausea (54). In *Qu’est-ce que la littérature ?* Sartre similarly explores the idea that writing can be either 'un moyen de conquérir' or 'une fuite' (55).

In the same essay, Sartre posits that for poets, a word can be the object rather than an external name applied to it, whereas for prose writers, writing is an act which changes the world it describes (56). In this analysis, Roquentin's writing is both (or rather, a dialectic of) poetry and prose. From the outset, Roquentin is determined to pursue the kind of writing that does not alter the truth of objects or life as he experiences them:

> Je pense que c’est le danger si l’on tient un journal : on s’exagère tout, on est aux aguets, on force continuellement la vérité. (57)

His language is to be that which it describes, by being 'au courant de la plume; sans chercher les mots' (58). This desire reaches its ultimate expression in the famous chestnut tree scene which commences with the unbidden appearance of the word 'absurdité' beneath Roquentin's pen and goes on to
describe the experience of a mind which has lost the use of language as a rational overlay on the world: 'je pensais sans mots', writes Roquentin, 'sur les choses, avec les choses.' (59)

However, Roquentin does not write poetry (60). He, like Sartre, writes prose. And although it is not his intention, his writing alters the world; both for himself, and for his reader. As Sartre points out in his essay, 'La Psychologie de l'Imagination', the spectator or reader cannot inhabit the world of the artistic or literary creation and vice-versa - but he can be affected by it (61).

Roquentin's final desire to write a novel 'qui serait au-dessus de l'existence' (62), in the sense that the singer's voice is remote from the tarnished surface of a vinyl disc, may be seen to summarise the dialectic of the prose and the poetic form in Sartre's schema. For, on the one hand, the novel is to change the way people perceive themselves and the world they inhabit; it should 'fasse honte aux gens de leur existence' (63). Furthermore the words he will use are to speak of 'quelque chose qui n'existerait pas' (64) - that is to say, they will create a space of their own, discontinuous with that of the reader. In effect, the novel has already been written: it is La Nausée.

On the other hand, however, the poetic commitment to language (in the Sartrean construct) is evinced in this same
idea of creating something 'beyond existence'. Roquentin's journal has demonstrated that the world around him is ontologically separate from his subjective self; yet his words are able to annul that gap: at the beginning, in the 'Feuillet sans Date', Roquentin prefers to leave a blank space rather than choose a word which would seem absurd or irrational when describing his loss of subjective selfhood in front of a small cardboard box:

Par exemple, voici un étui de carton qui contient ma bouteille d'encre. Il faudrait essayer de dire comment je le voyais avant et comment à présent je le

(65)

The word he cannot recognise he must write is suis. Nor will the reader know this in an heuristic reading. But, by the time of the chestnut tree episode, both Roquentin and the reader have become sufficiently aware of the ontological drift of the former's experiences to accept the 'sense' of Roquentin's words: 'J'étais la racine de marronnier' (66). Roquentin has chosen language, not silence, to convey the impossible to a ratiocinatory world.

*  

It was noted earlier that Sartre is the least post-modern in relation to Rousseau and Valéry, in that although the philosophical content of La Nausée is, in some ways novel, it is solidly constructed upon the previous philosophy of Hume, Husserl and Heidegger and itself serves as an introduction to the theory of l'Être et le Néant, without introducing the challenge of parody or pastiche. Yet, in
terms of dialectical engagement with the reader, where
cynicism and romance, theory and narrative are self-opposed
and mutually self-reinforcing, Sartre emerges as singularly
post-modern.

Tournier noted the parentage of Stendhal, Balzac and
Zola in Sartre’s literary style. It is not Sartre’s aim, he
writes, to produce ‘des contes philosophiques à la Voltaire’,
but to create ‘des romans humains et sociaux’ (W 303).
Indeed, by comparison, Emile and even Monsieur Teste look
somewhat Voltairean in their thin narratives which are barely
able to clothe their philosophical contents. It may be argued
that La Nausée, however, is a satisfyingly complete novel,
even if its philosophical content is ignored by, or
inaccessible to the reader. Thus reduced, La Nausée is the
bleak, though enthralling tale of a man who has travelled the
world yet seen nothing, who is unable to form a stable
relationship either with other people or his surroundings and
who suffers hallucinatory moments of heightened perception.

Emile and Monsieur Teste would not stand such a
stripping; that is not to say that their respective narrative
contents function as mere fig-leaves - but that they do not
stand up on their own, without the support of their
theoretical substance.

What is post-modern about this? Simply that the
increased strength of the narrative simultaneously diminishes
and heightens the impact of the theory; by choosing to write
what may be termed a fiction if not a novel (67), Sartre challenges the authority of his philosophical voice. By writing a philosophical fiction, Sartre challenges the authority of his literary voice. A tension, familiar to the post-modern voice, thus emerges, founded upon a dialectic of self-subversion and self-promotion. It is in these unreconciled differences that La Nausée gives best expression to the predicament of the pour-soi and the en-soi: forever alienated, forever inseparable.

6. TOURNIER AND IRONY

In L'Art du Roman Milan Kundera supports the idea of the German novelist, Hermann Broch, that there are certain things - not least 'l'être de l'homme' - that 'seul un roman peut découvrir' (68). Broch/Kundera's theory turns on the idea that the novel reflects the fundamental unknowability of the world in that it refuses interpretations of an either/or type:


Dans ce "ou bien-ou bien" est contenue l'incapacité de [...] regarder en face l'absence du Juge suprême. A cause de cette incapacité, la sagesse du roman (la sagesse de l'incertitude) est difficile à accepter et à comprendre. (70)
For Kundera, irony is the best expression of this 'sagesse de l'incertitude'; irony mocks the quest for 'truth' and irritates the ratiocinator 'parce qu'elle nous prive des certitudes en dévoilant le monde comme ambiguïté' (71). However, Kundera is sceptical about philosophers who have essayed the novel as a medium for expression of an ideology; in such cases he sees dogma prevailing over doubt, the apodictic triumphing over the ambiguous. In French literature, Kundera marks but one exception to this rule: Diderot's *Jacques le Fataliste*.

Après avoir franchi la frontière du roman, cet encyclopédiste se transforme en penseur ludique : aucune phrase de son roman n'est sérieuse, tout y est jeu. C'est pourquoi en France ce livre est scandaleusement sous-estimé. En effet, ce livre concentre tout ce que la France a perdu et refuse de retrouver. On préfère aujourd'hui les idées aux œuvres. *Jacques le Fataliste* est intraduisible dans le langage des idées. (72)

Kundera has a point. Rousseau's *Emile*, Valéry's *Monsieur Teste* and Sartre's *La Nausée* are all undoubtedly admirable both for their theoretical content and for the literacy with which that theory is expressed. However, I do not think it can be said that the medium of expression which each writer has chosen is necessarily the only way in which they could have voiced their respective ideologies. Each would translate without great difficulty into the 'langage des idées': *Emile* would be much less entertaining and engaging if delivered as an educational tract, but the ideology could remain unaltered; *Monsieur Teste* would similarly lose none of its intellectual content if expressed as a letter to a friend; *La
Nausée would lose two of the most vividly pathetic characters ever created in literature, but the philosophical content moves without loss into the densely theoretical L’Étre et le Néant.

'Découvrir ce que seul un roman peut découvrir, c’est la seule raison d’être un roman' (73): Broch’s dictum cannot be applied to the works we have so far examined, but it can, I think, be applied with some justification to some, if not all, of the works of Michel Tournier.

Post-modernist writing is ironic. It is because Tournier is a thoroughly post-modern writer that he is an ironist; it is because he is innately an ironist that he succeeds as a post-modern writer. It is the intention of this, the concluding section of the present study, to show that it is precisely because of Tournier’s ironism that he supersedes the idea of combining philosophy and fiction, by making his most powerful philosophical statements available to disclosure by the novel/short story alone.

Firstly, then, it should be demonstrated what it is that identifies Tournier’s writing as post-modern in the literary sense described above.

Tournier’s incorporation of anterior philosophical writing into his own body of work needs no further elaboration, having been thoroughly discussed in the second chapter of this thesis. What makes this reinscription of the
past post-modern is the changes that have been wrought upon these influential texts which suggest a challenge to the authority or immutability of such recognised philosophical icons as St Anselm's Ontological Argument, Descartes' Cogito or Sartre's existentialism. Under Tournier's pen, these lose the authority of the original yet regain the force and shock of the new in their changed appearance and unfamiliar surroundings. In *Vendredi*, for example, it is not hard to see Roquentin's existential predicament being replayed by Crusoe (74); both characters experience the crisis of inhabiting a world in which the 'réseau relationnel' - the desire to rationalise expressed in the subject-object relationship - breaks down and disappears.

Both characters resort to recording their experiences in a 'log-book' and both use the term 'nausée' to describe their crisis (75). However, Roquentin and Crusoe part company in their ultimate responses to the same metaphysical condition. Roquentin hopes to find salvation in a language authentic enough to deliver him from contingency; Robinson abandons language in giving up his log-book and is able to enjoy a silent oneness with a subjectless world.

Secondly, Tournier discernably applies the same challenge to the authority of his own texts, rewriting phrases, stories, anecdotes over and over again, yet never repeating himself. It was shown above (76), how in all the retellings of the Creation myth, no two versions were
identical. Self-subversion acts as self-commentary, simultaneously denying authorial authority and privileging the freedom of the text, and consequently, the freedom of the reader.

Certainty is thus removed from Tournier’s writing. Just as on a narrative level the reader is faced with the kind of uncertainty of which Kundera speaks, such as: is Thomas Koussek an inspired metaphysician or a raving pervert?; or, does Le Roi des Aulnes support or condemn the education of children in Hitler’s military schools? So, on a textual level, the reader is unable to know if Tournier’s specular strategies operate subversively or supportively.

Some readers, of course, do react unambiguously to the text: Tournier tells of a reader who reacted violently against Les Météores on the grounds that it was degenerate rubbish (77); at a recent conference on Tournier at Cerisy-la-Salle (78) Le Roi des Aulnes was angrily denounced by one Jewish reader as pro-Nazi propaganda. Indeed, very few participants at this same conference were prepared to admit to any uncertainty in their response to Tournier’s writing (79).

The irony of such ‘strong’ reading is that it misses Tournierian irony, which, I believe, (inasmuch as an ironist can say such a thing), is the key to his philosophy of the absolute. There is a lithograph by Escher which shows a tower containing a square staircase; little men are moving up and
down the steps, yet who is travelling up and who is moving down is impossible to tell: the stairs are continuous and the spectator’s desire for ‘truth’ is confounded by the artist’s ingenuity. The spectator is forced to accept the ambiguity of the image. The spectator’s uncertainty makes the image ironic. What is more, that irony is disclosed only by that image: it will not readily translate into the ‘langage des idées’. Similarly, readers of Tournier’s fictions may find themselves confronted by that same irony.

7. THE IRONIC ABSOLUTE

‘L’Impersonnalisme’, written in 1946, belongs to the ‘langage des idées’. The delivery of its message is unambiguous, without irony. In dismantling the Cogito, Tournier identifies what I have termed a ‘primary absolute’: the absolute of a world without consciousness. In reconstructing the Cogito, however, Tournier arrives at a more authentic absolute: ‘création continue’ or the dynamic dialectic of autrui participating in a world which he is and where he is, simultaneously.

I do not think it is possible for a writer who has arrived at this absolute dialectic or dialectical absolute to remain satisfied with the ‘langage des idées’. Tournier’s essay proclaims him to be an ironist, yet his philosopher’s voice, precisely because it lacks textual irony, opposes the very subject of the essay. Another voice and language must be found which will be more compatible with the dialectical
absolute.

Hence Vendredi ou les limbes du Pacifique. However, as Tournier readily admits, his philosopher’s voice penetrates too often. As I have noted above (80), there are large sections of 'L’Impersonnalisme' which have been transposed with only the slightest of alteration into Vendredi. And yet, in writing the novel, it can be seen that Tournier has discovered something which could never have emerged from 'L’Impersonnalisme': uncertainty. Crusoé’s attempts to govern his island authoritatively, largely by the imposition of what Richard Rorty would term a 'final vocabulary' belonging to his imperialist cultural past, are pervaded by doubt. 'Il me vient des doutes', writes Crusoé at the height of the period known as the île administrée, 'sur le sens des mots qui ne désignent pas des choses concrètes' (V 68).

Vendredi’s arrival and subversive behaviour reinforces his doubt as much as his desire to dominate:

Et si en cet instant précis il découvre par hasard la beauté anatomique stupéfiante de l’oeil de Vendredi, ne doit-il pas honnêtement se demander si l’Araucan n’est pas tout entier une addition de choses également admirables qu’il n’ignore que par aveuglement ? (V 181)

Crusoé’s gradual relinquishment of his past 'final vocabulary' and acceptance of a new language game may be seen as an expression of Tournier’s attempt to release himself from his old, academic vocabulary and discover the uncertainty of the dialectician’s voice. Crusoé’s prayer to be granted the gift of expressing himself with irony may then
be read as Tournier's own wish to leave behind his lingering philosopher's voice and find his novelist's vocabulary:

Soleil, délivre-moi de la gravité [...] Enseigne-moi l'ironie [...]. Donne-moi le visage de Vendredi [...] Cet œil toujours allumé par la dérision, fendu par l'ironie, chaviré par la drôlerie de tout ce qu'il voit.

(V 217)

The prayer appears to have been granted: Tournier's critics are generally agreed, and Tournier himself is satisfied that his subsequent fictions are purged of the intrusive philosophical vocabulary.

Irony is what ensures that this philosophical vocabulary is purged while the philosophical content remains intact. This is what surely differentiates him from Rousseau, Valéry, Sartre and all those writers who do not change their final vocabulary no matter the medium of expression they choose.

The endings of *Le Roi des Aulnes*, *Les Météores*, *Gaspard*, *Melchior et Balthazar* and *Gilles et Jeanne* (82) are resonant with such irony. At the close of each of these novels the reader's only certainty is his uncertainty. The more he or she asks the text what has 'really' happened to Tiffauges, Paul, Taor or Gilles, the less the text replies. Irony ridicules the quest for such answers; as the post-modern writer's most devastating tool, it cuts away all question of textual authority. To show that this is consistent with a philosophy that seeks not to locate an ulterior reality or truth, but to encourage a creative dialectic in which the ephemeral and the eternal are mutually opposed and
supportive, has been the chief objective of the present study. It has also been posited that, although Tournier formed an awareness that this was to be his main philosophical preoccupation at a very early age, his early non-fictional expression (‘L’Impersonnalisme’) was a demonstration of an ideology, whereas his fiction writing is a discovery of that same, yet expanded and exceeded by the presence of irony in the novel. Absence of textual irony in *Emile, Monsieur Teste* and *La Nausée* proclaims the philosopher’s voice at the expense of uncertainty.

Richard Rorty argues that there are writers: Proust and Joyce on the literary side; Derrida above all in the philosopher’s camp, who have, in *A la Recherche du Temps Perdu, Finnegans Wake* and ‘Envois’ respectively, displayed the ironist’s proper contempt for other peoples’ ‘language games’ and displayed a correspondent dialectical assault on what I have termed the ‘primary absolute’.

I differ from Rorty who thinks that it is proper to this endeavour to expand the boundaries of literary expression with ever more original forms of writing. I tend to agree with Kundera that the novel remains the best tool of the ironist, precisely because we need to have ‘criteria in hand’ for the alienated half of the dialectic to operate (83). ‘Envois’ certainly does not ‘[fit] within any conceptual scheme previously used to evaluate novels or philosophy’ (84), and as such loses - on a textual level -
much of its dialectical impact. It is a source of discovery and not dogma, but chiefly for its a tiny, élite readership (as Rorty admits) (85). Tournier's fictions however, do not experiment with literary form; unlike Derrida he wants to be understood by as broad a readership as possible. By choosing to write within a tradition of conventional literary expression Tournier increases his power as a dialectician and justifies his rejection of the 'langage des idées'; by writing for as young and as wide an audience as possible he democratises metaphysics and thereby realises the destiny of the absolute.

NOTES

1. The phrase 'method of production' is intended to recall Pierre Machery's concept of 'production littéraire' in Pour une Théorie de la Production Littéraire and Michael Riffaterre's response to the question 'what makes a text literary?' in La Production du Texte; I am indebted to both these works for providing models of close textual analysis for my own preoccupation with Tournier's philosophical / literary discourse.

2. This is, perhaps, an invidious phrase, but I cannot include Tournier's François Mitterand and various articles written for newspapers and magazines.

3. Of Rousseau, Tournier writes that 'il faut toujours revenir à Jean-Jacques' (VV 189); of Valéry, that 'Les romans que je cherchais à écrire, il en a donné la définition et fourni le modèle avec Monsieur Teste' (VP 230); of Sartre, that 'il reste pour moi l'homme vivant le plus important de la planète' (VV 301).

4. This lecture was part of a symposium entitled 'Brave New Worlds': Festival of Post-Modernism in European Literature and Music, 27th October 1990.
It has not so far been published.

5. 'Neo-'architecture suppresses its modernity as much as possible without necessarily resorting to authentic building materials.


7. *Ibid*.

8. *Ibid*.

9. See M.Worton, 'Ecrire et ré-écrire : Le projet de Tournier'.


11. I am indebted to Laurent Jenny's description of the intertextual process 'Stratégie de la forme' published in *Poétique*. He is particularly helpful in his critique of the critical attitudes of the most significant contributors to the theory of intertextuality: Bakhtin, Bloom and Kristeva. For a more recent and comprehensive critical survey of intertextual theory, see Worton and Still's introduction to *Intertextuality, Theories and Practices*.


14. *Emile* pp. 110-114

15. *Opus cit.*, p.114

16. The subversive power of the child and humour are examined in Chapter 5 of the present study.

17. *Opus cit.*, p.186

18. See in particular *Essais Criques IV*, 'Le Bruissement de la Langue', where Barthes definitively posits the active role of the reader in the creation of meaning.

19. *Opus cit.*, p.387

20. *Opus cit.*, p. 207

21. This technique undoubtedly derives from Plato, whose
process rather than delivering a theory outright. Like Emile, Socrates' interlocutors inevitably end up exclaiming how very true or right their master is, while he continues to profess his own ignorance.

22. In theory, this is the 'tendre et prévoyante mère' cited in the first book of Emile, p.5; by the act of publication however, the object of the dialogue is extended to include all readers of the text.

23. Opus cit., p. 316

24. Opus cit., p.317


26. Opus cit., p.359

27. Opus cit., p.371

28. See Rousseau, Oeuvres Complètes I, 'Les Confessions', p.42 (escape from Geneva), pp.46-7 (changes his religion so as not to starve), pp.60 sq. (at the hospice in Turin), p.90 (the influence of the abbé Gaime).

29. Valéry, Oeuvres II, p.12

30. Opus cit., p.16

31. C.f. VV p.9, 19. Tournier rejects this idea without apparently giving it any serious consideration: 'On lui opposera qu'il n'y a de grande oeuvre que divulguée, reçue, ayant fécondé un nombre indéfini d'esprits'(VV 19). While this response by itself is rather unsatisfactory, it is better explained by the argument of 'L'Impersonnalisme' in which Tournier's argument in support of a dialectic of participation and alienation - and by extension, language and silence, makes his position clear. It may be adduced that, for Tournier, Valéry's idea suggests that the pre-verbal (second movement of the 'drame cartésien') is privileged.

32. This is not because of a desire on Valéry's part to be 'difficult'; indeed, he writes: 'Idéal d'écritain: Si vous voulez dire qu'il pleut, mettez: "il pleut". (Opus cit., p.898). It is precisely this attitude, however, that gives Monsieur Teste its opacity; Valéry will not compromise his idea by using a more intelligible style of writing to convey it. This attitude conforms to his thesis, noted above, that
genius is dissipated by transmission into an intelligible form. Consequently, Valéry recognises the creative value of difficulty for the reader and has said on several occasions that it is important that poetry should be difficult. See also Tzvetan Todorov, 'la "Poétique" de Valéry', in Cahiers Paul Valéry I, 1975.

33. Oeuvres II, p.22
34. Opus cit., p. 26
35. Opus cit., p. 23
36. Opus cit., n. p.1394
38. For reasons of economy, I have abbreviated the full title of Descartes's *Discours de la méthode pour bien conduire sa raison et chercher la vérité dans les sciences* to the *Discours de la Méthode*.
40. Discours, p.576
41. Oeuvres II, p.18
42. Discours, pp.595-6
43. In a more general sense, Teste is also a witness to (as opposed to a participant in ) the world. C.f. 'Pour un Portrait de Monsieur Teste' : 'Monsieur Teste est le témoin [...] Conscious - Teste, Testis. Suppose un observateur "éternel" dont le rôle se borne à répéter et à remontrer le système dont le Moi est cette partie instantanée qui se croit le Tout.' (Oeuvres II p.64)
44. I use the term 'strong' in the Bloomian sense of the word. See *The Anxiety of Influence*, passim.
45. Oeuvres II, p.1381
46. VP 231
47. See note 2.
48. *La Nausée* was first published in 1938; *L'Étre et le Néant* in 1943. See VP 159-61.
49. C.f Sartre's admission in *Les Mots* that he lacks the
will to dominate: 'De ma vie je n'ai donné un ordre sans rire, sans faire rire; c'est que je ne suis pas rongé par le chancre du pouvoir [...]’ p.13

50. C.f. Opus cit., p.11, 'Eût-il vécu mon père se fût couché sur moi de tout son long et m'eût écrasé [...] Au milieu des Enées qui portent sur leur dos leurs Anchises, je passe d'une rive à l'autre, seul et détestant ces géniteurs invisibles à cheval sur leurs fils pour toute la vie [...]'

51. VV 308
52. La Nausée, p.14
53. Opus cit., p.84
54. Opus cit., p.236
55. Qu'est-ce que la littérature? in Situations II, p.89
56. Opus cit., p.73: 'le prosateur est un homme qui a choisi un certain mode d'action [...] [il] sait que la parole est action: il sait que dévoiler c'est changer.' Opus cit., pp.67-8: 'le poète [...] crée un objet. Les mots-chooses se groupent par associations magiques [...] et leur association compose la véritable unité poétique qu'est la phrase-objet.'
57. La Nausée, p.13
58. Opus cit., p.84
59. Opus cit., p.178
60. Some passages in La Nausée could be argued to be poetic, for example, Roquentin’s most vivid descriptions of his nausea, opus cit., pp. 179-84.
61. 'La vie imaginaire' pp.239-340, passim.
62. La Nausée, p.242
63. Opus cit., p.243
64. Opus cit., p.242
65. Opus cit., p.13
66. Opus cit., pp.181-2
67. I use the term 'fiction' because the terms 'novel' or
'roman' are inappropriate in this context. (See Marthe Robert, Roman des Origines et Origine du Roman, 19-22). If any, Milan Kundera's definition would be most appropriate here: 'ROMAN. La grande forme de la prose où l'auteur, à travers des égos expérimentaux (personnages), examine jusqu'au bout quelques grands thèmes de l'existence.' (L'Art du Roman, p.178)

68. L'Art du Roman, p.27
69. Opus cit., p.163
70. Opus cit., p.22
71. Opus cit., p.163
72. Opus cit., p.102
73. Opus cit., p.20
74. See Davis, Michel Tournier, Philosophy and Fiction, pp.22-26
75. See Davis, opus cit., p.25
76. See Chapter seven of the present study (pp. 281-2)
77. W10
79. A particular exception is Mireille Rosello; see note 78 above.
80. See Chapter one of the present study, pp. 30-31
81. This useful term is borrowed from Richard Rorty, 'It is "final" in the sense that if doubt is cast on the worth of these words, their user has no non-circular argumentative recourse. Those words are as far as he can go with language [...]’ Contingency, Irony and Solidarity, p. 73.
81. These are the most obvious examples; in fact all Tournier's fictions end on an ironic note of uncertainty.
82. Kundera, opus cit., p.164
83. Rorty, opus cit., p.137
84. 'Anybody who has read little of philosophy will get little from "Envois", but for a certain small audience it may be a very important book' (opus cit., 133-4).
CONCLUDING REMARKS

It would be both invidious and unnecessary to attempt a summary of the foregoing chapters by way of a conclusion. There are, however, a number of points which I should like to re-emphasize and re-align.

Firstly, the extended use which I have made throughout this study of 'L'Impersonnalisme', a work which has so far received no critical attention, responds directly to Tournier's statement that it represents 'la base cachée sur laquelle j'édifie toutes mes petites histoires' (VV 300). I am drawn to conclude that, although I first read this statement and consequently approached this study with some scepticism, Tournier does not deceive himself or his reader. I should emphasize that I did not set out to prove the truth of Tournier's words, and I hope to have remained critically alert to this temptation throughout this investigation.

My second point issues again from the extended use I have made of 'L'Impersonnalisme'. This essay, together with its later, literary manifestations, should be, and have been throughout this study, regarded as the work of a philosopher. Too often, Tournier is spoken of as a former student of philosophy, for the simple reason that he never acquired his agrégation. I would contend that Tournier ceased to be a student of philosophy and emerged as a philosopher in his own right in the course of writing his maîtrise and, most
significantly, in the preparation and writing of his article for *Espace*. I have demonstrated both the influences upon, and the originality of, his particular philosophy of the absolute as well as his development (in terms of its humanization) of his argument in his later writing. I hope to have shown also that Tournier's literary and philosophical voices are merged in a way not previously achieved by other philosopher-writers, and that this independent voice is consistent with the individuality of its philosophical content.

Thirdly, the ironic quality of Tournier's thought and writing should be underlined. I have demonstrated how Tournier constantly subverts the concepts of authority and authenticity by creating a discourse which is justifiably described as intertextual, but which I prefer, ultimately, to describes as post-modern, in that post-modernity, as I have defined it, operates on a dialectical basis, whereas intertextuality functions as dialogue - because aggression is never fully transcended. The richest irony (which permeates all Tournier's writing) is that his commitment as an ironist is indissolubly wedded to his 'recherche de l'absolu'; if this study has (unintentionally) suggested that Tournier is a 'totalitarian' writer, in that his work submits itself to a 'conceptual analytic grid', let it be understood that any such analysis is immediately subverted by that irony.

Looking back over what I have written, it seems that I have conducted a hostile campaign against my colleague, Colin
Davis. If this appears so, it is because Davis has written the only serious long study on Tournier's philosophy that has so far been published and thus stands alone in my firing-line. I should like to add that I find much of his work admirable and am grateful to have had such a fine example against which to pit my own argument.

Lastly, I should like to emphasize that the 'recherche de l'absolu' in Tournier's writing is such a fertile and multi-faceted subject that I make no claims to have said the final word on it. On the contrary, if I have shown that the philosophical and literary concerns raised by his work are worth further consideration by 'Tournierlogues', then to my mind this study will have served its purpose.
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