

THE PORTRAIT OF THE
PUBESCENT GIRL:

A Rite of Passage

NON

Jalal Toufic



Forthcoming Books

The Portrait of the Pubescent Girl: A Rite of Non-Passage

The Portrait of the Pubescent Girl: A Rite of Non-Passage

Jalal Toufic

Forthcoming Books

Toufic, Jalal.

The portrait of the pubescent girl: a rite of non-passage / Jalal
Toufic.

Includes bibliographical references.

ISBN 978-9953-0-2052-5

Forthcoming Books

© 2011 by Jalal Toufic

All rights reserved

Typesetting: Hatem Imam

Cover design: Hatem Imam and Jalal Toufic

Acknowledgments

“Reading, Rewriting Poe’s ‘The Oval Portrait’—In Your Dreams” was published as a bilingual (English/Arabic) booklet by Ashkal Alwan (Beirut, Lebanon: 2006); it was reprinted in *The Canary*, no. 6 (2006): 32–39. It is published here in a slightly abridged version.

“Reading, Rewriting Poe’s ‘The Oval Portrait’—Angelically” was published in dOCUMENTA (13)’s “100 Notes–100 Thoughts,” English/German (Ostfildern, Germany: Hatje Cantz, 2011).

Books by Jalal Toufic

- *What Is the Sum of Recurrently?* (Galeri Nev, 2010)
- *Graziella: The Corrected Edition* (Forthcoming Books, 2009)
- *The Withdrawal of Tradition Pašt a Surpassing Disaster* (Forthcoming Books, 2009)
- *Undeserving Lebanon* (Forthcoming Books, 2007)
- *‘Āshūrā’: This Blood Spilled in My Veins* (Forthcoming Books, 2005)
- *Two or Three Things I’m Dying to Tell You* (Post-Apollo, 2005)
- *Undying Love, or Love Dies* (Post-Apollo, 2002)
- *Forthcoming* (Atelos, 2000)
- *Over-Sensitivity* (Sun & Moon, 1996; 2nd edition, Forthcoming Books, 2009)
- *(Vampires): An Uneasy Essay on the Undead in Film* (Station Hill, 1993; revised and expanded edition, Post-Apollo, 2003)
- *Diſtracted* (Station Hill, 1991; 2nd edition, Tuumba, 2003)

* With the exception of *Forthcoming* and *Two or Three Things I’m Dying to Tell You*, these books are presently available for download as PDF files at:

<http://www.jalaltoufic.com/downloads.htm>

Contents

Reading, Rewriting Poe’s “The Oval Portrait”—In Your Dreams	11
Reading, Rewriting Poe’s “The Oval Portrait”—Angelically	21
Moving Pictures	33

Reading, Rewriting Poe's "The Oval Portrait" —In Your Dreams

Dedicated to William S. Burroughs, the author of *My Education: A Book of Dreams*, who turned into a writer, then a painter with a shotgun,¹ to deal with his murder—while possessed—of his wife²

The narrator of Edgar Allan Poe's "The Oval Portrait" arrives in a desperately wounded condition at a deserted chateau with his valet. How was the narrator mortally wounded? Neither Poe nor the narrator tells us about that. Given that we are not provided with a specific reason for the wound, it is appropriate to look for a general, anthropological one. Was the wound inflicted during a Hegelian fight to the death for recognition? "Anthropogenic Desire is different from animal Desire (which produces a natural being, merely living and having only a sentiment of its life) in that it is directed, not toward a real, 'positive,' given object, but toward another Desire.... Man 'feeds' on Desires as an animal feeds on real things.... For man to be truly human, for him to be essentially and really different from an animal, his human Desire must actually win out over his animal Desire.... Man's humanity 'comes to light' only in risking his life to satisfy his human Desire—that is, his Desire directed toward another Desire.... all human, anthropogenic Desire ... is, finally, a function of the desire for 'recognition.' ... Therefore, to speak of the 'origin' of Self-Consciousness is necessarily to speak of a fight to the death for 'recognition.' ... In order that the human reality come into being as 'recognized' reality, both adversaries must remain alive after the fight. Now,

this is possible only on the condition that they behave differently in this fight.... one ... must refuse to risk his life for the satisfaction of his desire for 'recognition.' He must ... 'recognize' the other without being 'recognized' by him. Now, 'to recognize' him thus is 'to recognize' him as his Master ..."³ Did the narrator continue the fight even after he was mortally wounded, while the other man, witnessing his foe's grave wound, was seized with fright, yielded and acknowledged the other man as his master? Now a valet, he forced for his master the gate of the deserted chateau they came upon. Bedridden, the latter soon starts to gaze at the numerous "very spirited" modern paintings hung on the walls as well as read a volume that discusses these paintings and their histories. At one point he comes across a picture he had not noticed before: it is the portrait of a young girl just ripening into womanhood. According to the volume, the painting was done by the model's husband, a passionate painter "having already a bride in his Art" and who became "lost in reveries." Are we to understand by "having already a bride in his Art" that the painter's art was his bride? I consider rather that it indicates that he thought to have his bride in his Art, in painting. Moreover, are we to understand by "lost in reveries": lost to his surroundings because in reveries? I understand by it rather that in order to manage to paint this kind of portrait he had to be lost in the reveries, i.e., taken by the reveries to a realm where one cannot but be lost (*reverie*: 1: Daydream. 2: the condition of being lost in thought. Etymology: French *rêverie*, from Middle French, delirium, from *resver*, *rever* to wander, be delirious), the labyrinthine realm of undeath. According to the volume, after weeks of posing meekly for the portrait in the Chateau's "dark

high turret-chamber," the health and the spirits of the painter's bride wasted away. Then came the moment of the outstanding final touch. And indeed "the brush was given, and then the tint was placed; and, for one moment, the painter stood entranced before the work which he had wrought; but in the next, while he yet gazed, he grew tremulous and very pallid, and aghast, and crying with a loud voice, 'This is indeed *Life* itself!' turned suddenly to regard his beloved:—*She was dead!*" The painting functions here as a sort of ancient Egyptian tomb in which the dead "lives"/LIVES. But while for ancient Egyptians bas-reliefs and statues could magically replace the (mummified) body, in case the latter was irremediably damaged, and be the site for the Ka's return, in Poe's story the painting can replace the living model only by draining her of life, killing her.⁴ How to preserve what is preserving her (at the price of her premature death!), the painting, where it cannot be destroyed? The painter hid this preservative painting where it cannot be found, where it is lost, "in" an unworldly, unnatural labyrinth, rather than in a trifling, all too mundane maze that's merely a more or less intricate spatial human arrangement. But where to find an unworldly, unnatural labyrinth? In the undeath realm; in order to see the portrait hidden there or to steal it or to damage it, one had to die. We encounter here a case where the cult value of artistic production and its resultant images—which, as Walter Benjamin pointed out, has been displaced by the exhibition value but which has found a last refuge in the cult of remembrance of loved ones, absent or dead⁵—displaces exhibition value all along the line, since unlike mundane pictures of loved ones, absent or dead, which continue to be exhibited, be it only in the privacy

of the family home, the picture of the painter's wife in "The Oval Portrait" is not exhibited at all as far as the world is concerned. Had the two living intruders searched for the painting of the dead woman in the chateau, they would not have found it—and not because of the chateau's "bizarre architecture." Are others ready to die to take their revenge on him by destroying the painting of his beloved concealed in the undeath realm? In case they are ready to do so, they would be answering affirmatively Shakespeare's "Can vengeance be pursued further than death?" (*Romeo and Juliet*).

Does the circumstance that the tale ends within the diegetic volume, without returning to the desperately wounded diegetic narrator, imply that the latter died just as he finished reading about the painter and his model? No. Given that I was not in a desperately wounded state when I first read "The Oval Portrait," I had the opportunity to reread it in order to track, like a detective, the signs of the narrator's untimely death early on in this tale by one of the first authors to write detective stories (*The Murders in the Rue Morgue*, *The Purloined Letter*, *The Mystery of Marie Rogêt*). "Long—long I read—and devoutly, devotedly I gazed. Rapidly and gloriously the hours flew by and the deep midnight came. The position of the candelabrum displeased me, and outreaching my hand with difficulty, rather than disturb my slumbering valet, I placed it so as to throw its rays more fully upon the book.... The rays of the numerous candles ... now fell within a niche of the room which had hitherto been thrown into deep shade by one of the bed-posts. I thus saw in vivid light a picture all unnoticed before." Was it really out of tact that he himself moved the candelabrum rather than awaken his valet to do so, or was it because he had

already died, so that he couldn't wake the valet?⁶ Did he move the candelabrum with difficulty because he was gravely wounded or because he was practicing moving his (subtle) body after the rigor mortis? Was it hyperbole on his part to say "rapidly and gloriously the hours flew by" or was he witnessing an unnatural time-lapse, the sort the dead undergo? It is the latter in the three alternatives. My diagnosis is that the occult shift from life to death occurred in "the dreamy stupor" the narrator underwent: "The first flashing of the candles upon that canvas had seemed to dissipate the dreamy stupor which was stealing over my senses, and to startle me ...". Are all the readers of Poe's "The Oval Portrait" who do not return in thought to the desperately wounded narrator when the tale ends on the painter and his "model wife" fickle? Not necessarily; some of them must somewhat surmise unconsciously that what would be considered the climax by people who are all too mundane, his physical death, had already happened by the time they reached the abrupt end of the tale. Did his valet abandon him by sleeping, like one of Brutus' servants in Shakespeare's *Julius Caesar*, or three of the disciples of Jesus at Gethsemane,⁷ so that he had to face his anguish alone? Did the master die, soon after that, solely as a result of his desperate wound? Or was it that having read about this painting and not finding it, he was tempted to yield to death to look for it in the undeath realm? Did his valet dream then that his master, whom he accompanied in the dream to a deserted city, which began furtively to be invaded by revenants, all of a sudden parted with him and was superimposed alongside the latter? Did the valet's sleep from then on turn dreamless, this other manner of shunning death? I have always preferred those who do not go all

the way in the Hegelian fight to the death for recognition but who later do not sleep dreamlessly when the undead shows up to tell them about the undeath realm.

“The Oval Portrait” is too short, ends in an untimely manner, if we believe that the gravely wounded narrator is still alive at its end; but it is rather the opposite, not a *short story*, if we consider that the narrator died before its end—the story continues for too long. By choosing to narrate the story through a desperately wounded man, Poe gave us the following possibilities for its outcome. Either the narrator’s condition gets better—or at least stabilizes—during his narration of the story. Or the narrator dies and explicitly tells us so (!), as happens to the moribund Valdemar of Poe’s story “The Facts in the Case of M. Valdemar,” who when asked by the doctor who had hypnotized him “if he still slept” answers at a delay: “Yes; —no; —I *have been* sleeping—and now—now—I *am dead*.”⁸ Or else, he dies but, as it is usually the case, is unaware of that and continues the narration (I consider this possibility to be the case in “The Oval Portrait”)—whoever said that *dead men tell no tales* and therefore that one must *live to tell the tale*? Given the latter two alarming ghastly possibilities, the apprehensive astute reader may opt, in one way or another, to discontinue reading this tale after its opening words: “The Chateau into which my valet had ventured to make forcible entrance, rather than permit me, in my desperately wounded condition, to pass a night in the open air ...”—among the millions of readers who have by now read “The Oval Portrait,” at least one reader must have felicitously fallen asleep when she reached the section “Long—long I read—”. On returning from the library’s media room after watching a video by Lina Saneh

in which she relates what she describes as a dream she recently had,⁹ and just before starting to reread Rilke’s *Sonnets to Orpheus*, did I find Saneh, who is not fluent in English, reading the second installment of Baudelaire’s French translations of Poe’s stories? Did she feel drowsy by the time she reached the book’s last tale, “*Le Portrait ovale*,” which starts on page 248 of the Livre de Poche edition (how felicitous that Baudelaire placed “*Le Portrait ovale*” last in his [second] book of Poe translations!), then fall asleep by the time she reached “Long—long I read—” (the readers of “The Oval Portrait” should take their cue from its narrator and do their reading late at night), thus, unbeknownst to her, identifying with the sleeping valet? “I am sitting here [the *Bibliothèque Nationale*] reading a poet [Rilke? “She (almost a girl) slept the world. Singing god, how was that first / sleep so perfect that she had no desire / ever to wake? See: she got up sleeping” (*Sonnets to Orpheus*)¹⁰]. There are many people in the room, but they are all inconspicuous; they are inside the books [while one of these readers “yet gazed” at the page of Poe’s “The Oval Portrait” whose final words she had just read, she “grew tremulous and very pallid, and aghast,” thinking: “How am I to get out of the volume?”—the same question the bride turned model, the “model bride” of “The Oval Portrait” probably asked herself, at least half-heartedly: “How am I to get out of the painting?” Prior to the completion of the painting, she would have needed in her attempt to do so the sort of acrobatics one sees the figures in Francis Bacon’s paintings resort to in order to get out of the frame on the wall in which they find themselves already surreptitiously partially or fully sucked]. Sometimes they move among the pages [of Poe’s *Nouvelles histoires extraordinaires*?],

like sleepers who are turning over between two dreams. Ah, how pleasant it is to be among people who are reading. Why aren't they always like this? You can go up to one of them and touch him lightly: he feels nothing. And if, as you get up, you happen to bump against the person sitting next to you and you apologize, he nods in the direction your voice is coming from, his face turns toward you and doesn't see you, and his hair is like the hair of someone sleeping."¹¹ In case Saneh actually fell asleep while reading Poe's great tale, did she subsequently feel guilty on account of that? I presume that she didn't, since the reader of "The Oval Portrait" can identify, within the diegesis, with either another reader *but who is dead*, in which case he or she would be paradoxically identifying with someone with whom he or she cannot identify since the latter can no longer identify with "himself" ("I am Prado, I am also Prado's father, I venture to say that I am also Lesseps.... I am also Chambige ... every name in history is I"¹²—from a letter that Nietzsche wrote at the onset of his psychosis, of his dying before dying); or else with a sleeper:¹³ "I dreamt that my elder sister, Vivian, took me along with another member of my family—I no longer recall who (my mother? My other sister?)—to visit a city, one that she had already visited and that she liked a lot [*Vivian*: from an Old French form of the Latin name *Vivianus*, probably a derivative of *vivus*, "alive"—Vivian functions here as a good luck charm to assure oneself that the dream is merely a *little death* from which one will awaken and that one's ostensible companion there would not turn out insidiously to be dead, rather than, as one had assumed all along, alive].... We passed by a gallery where paintings were still hung on the walls. I entered the gallery to better contemplate them,

while my friends lingered outside next to a fountain ... All of a sudden I heard a female voice ask me if I wished for something. I turned, and I saw a woman dressed in black and veiled. [*—She was dead!* a ghost. I was suddenly *dead certain* that ... she died while being a model for her husband, a passionate painter.] At that moment, I was not surprised, and I answered her without marveling at her presence. I replied affirmatively and turned my head away to point out a painting that interested me [: *the oval portrait*]. I saw then something bizarre, which I do not remember very well or rather which I am unable to characterize: it was as if the painting had movement ... took on depth and the painted human figure changed, became disfigured.... I turned vivaciously toward the woman ... she had disappeared. Rapid, fleeting instants [in other words, and were I to put the matter poetically, *rapidly and gloriously the hours flew by and the deep midnight came*] ... I felt trepidation ... I realized that we had lingered too long ... Indices had forewarned me, like this woman who had appeared out of nowhere to ask me whether I needed something.... I left the gallery promptly, and I called my friends, enjoining them to quickly leave the city. In the streets, other tourists who had lingered were hastening to leave too.... Some tourists turned out to be revenants, who metamorphosed around us and before our eyes [those whom the living lose on the way to the encounter with the ghost and the undead in general—which encounter happens in a labyrinth—are living people, while those whom the living do not lose sooner or later—to be more precise, sooner *and* later—on the way to the encounter with the ghost and the undead in general are revealed to be ghosts/undead/vampires]. At a certain moment, I dared cast a

glance at the revenants. They appeared then not to be as scary as they seemed initially ... Why then this sentiment and this conviction that they were scary monsters, when, from the little I could see despite my fear and my fixation on the exit, these revenants gave the impression of being ordinary people returning from work? ... We succeeded to leave ...” By telling me this dream, is Lina Saneh taking me to the dream city? Or is she rather placing me in the position of someone awake, so I would listen to the dream and interpret it? But then what is the most basic interpretation, whether explicit or implicit, that we want to hear for any dream? Is it: “You are presently awake”? Or is it rather: “You aren’t awake yet (who is it then that’s awake?)—Dream on!”

Reading, Rewriting Poe’s “The Oval Portrait”— Angelically

A painter arrived in a desperately wounded condition in a network of galleries beneath Chaillot, Paris. Aboveground, in that city as in most of the world, everything was contaminated with radioactivity after the series of nuclear explosions that wiped out much of life during a lightning Third World War. He was promptly operated on. The prognosis of the doctor who examined him following the operation was that he had *only weeks, or at best months, to live*.¹⁴ As a result, he was selected to participate in a time-travel *experiment*.¹⁵ He soon learned that another man, a photographer, was also approved for undergoing the time-travel experiments. When he met him, he was taken aback on learning that the latter had volunteered to participate in the experiment. Why did he do it? As a boy, he used to be taken by his parents to the jetty at Orly airport to watch the departing planes on Sundays. There he developed a childhood crush on a woman who also visited the jetty every weekend. But one day he witnessed a traumatic scene. *The violent scene, whose meaning he would not grasp until much later, took place on the great jetty at Orly, a few years before the start of the Third World War: the sudden noise, the woman’s gesture, the crumpling body, the cries of the crowd. Later, he knew he had seen a man die*. As the boy grew up, he thought that with time he would forget her and, when a man, find another women he would love. This did not prove to be the case. His volunteering to time-travel to the past was partially due not only to the *repetition compulsion* induced by a trauma from his past but also to his wish to fulfill the

amorous desire he felt while a pubescent boy for the woman he used to see at the jetty. The scientists in charge decided to send both men to Paris in the same variant yet similar branch of the multiverse but at a twenty-year interval: the volunteer would be sent to meet the (almost identical version of the) woman he, while a child, saw at the jetty at Orly airport on the fateful day he witnessed a man's death, and the gravely wounded painter would be sent to meet her twenty years earlier, when she was still a pubescent girl.

The painter found himself in Paris around twenty years earlier. He spotted a girl on the verge of "ripening into womanhood." He was soon to learn, as he befriended her, that she intuited a catastrophic difference between herself as a girl and the woman who will one not so distant day assume her name. Considering their centeredness on getting a portrait, certain pubescent girls are model creatures for writers, artists, filmmakers, and video makers. Of the 231 million girls between the ages of ten and thirteen in 2008,¹⁶ how many were mostly preoccupied with having a portrait? A very small percentage. Intuiting that while a boy of her age can love her, it is almost certain that he would not be able to draw her portrait (Rimbaud, an extremely rare exception, was, unfortunately for the pubescent girls of his time, very soon interested instead in men), the pubescent girl intent on having a portrait has a few years, usually between the ages of ten and thirteen (following menarche a girl is in principle replaceable, in around ten months, by her daughter and, if she had failed to get a successful portrait of herself, by the woman she will be mistaken to have grown into and who will assume her name and lay claim to her memories), to find a man who can make a portrait of her. Unfortunately, most

of these pubescent girls fall for pretentious mediocre writers or photographers or filmmakers or artists, who will botch their portraits. What about the extremely small percentage of pubescent girls who are mostly preoccupied with having a portrait and who find the men who are able to draw their portraits? Unlike in the case of the painter of Poe's "The Oval Portrait" (1845), who lived in a period when a man could somewhat easily approach a pubescent girl to paint her portrait, indeed could marry her (in 1835, the twenty-six-year-old Edgar Allan Poe married his thirteen-year-old cousin)—in order to paint her portrait?—most thinkers, writers, and artists who are interested in doing portraits of these pubescent girls are being dissuaded by the current "mass hysteria" concerning pedophilia from approaching them, with the consequence that most of these exceptional pubescent girls not only disappear with neither mourning nor a portrait but also get (mis)represented soon enough by women who "naturally" lay claim to their memories and usurp their names. In recent decades, it is in Japan that most of the exceptional portraits of pubescent girls have been made; and it is Japan that has provided the most intense effort to be worthy of the pubescent girl, for the most part in a perverse manner. The successful portrait of a pubescent girl is not a rite of passage but a rite of non-passage; what needs a rite is not passage, which is the natural state (at least for historical societies), but non-passage, the radical differentiation between the before, in this case a pubescent girl, and the after, a woman. In this era, initiation, which, with rare exceptions, no longer happens in the world, has, with all the dangers it entails, to happen through the portrait. Unlike so many other pubescent girls who could not wait

to become young women, early on imitating their mothers or elder sisters in mannerisms and makeup, she intuited that for her not to be falsely replaced by an imposter claiming to be her at an older age, she had to get a valid portrait or else to commit suicide—the risk was that both would happen together, that in the process of the making of the portrait she would die (Poe’s “The Oval Portrait”) because the portrait was being made through a transference of her life to it. Through her portrait, the pubescent girl resists her (mis) representation by the woman who will otherwise assume her name and lay claim to her memories in a few years, for the pubescent girl’s portrait differentiates her not only from other people but also, radically, from that woman. The successful portrait of the pubescent girl must be recognizable to her and unrecognizable to the woman who would otherwise assume her name, must resist oblivion regarding her and produce oblivion for the woman who would otherwise lay claim to her memories. While in the process of making the pubescent girl’s portrait, the painter, writer, thinker, video maker, and/or photographer may require to hear some of her memories, the finished portrait should affect the woman who would otherwise “naturally” lay claim to the pubescent model’s puberty with a *pubescent amnesia* (modeled on *infantile amnesia*—yet, unlike in the case of the latter, no psychoanalysis of the woman would lead to an anamnesis of this period); or else make her feel that her memories are inserts (as in *thought insertions*); or induce in the keen witness who saw both the woman and the portrait of the pubescent girl she claims she was the sort of incredulous reaction one encounters in the Capgras syndrome: this woman is an imposter! The portrait of the pubescent girl should force the aforementioned

woman, if she does not wish to feel she’s an imposter, to change her name, since the latter becomes, from the completion of the successful portrait and the initiation of being exposed to the portrait, a pseudonym in the etymological, literal sense (French *pseudonyme*, from Greek *pseudōnumon*, neuter of *pseudōnumos*, falsely named: *pseudēs*, false; see *pseudo-* + *onuma*, name).¹⁷ The time-traveling painter made a portrait of the pubescent girl. She, who, through the portrait, will not grow into and thus will not be the past of any woman, induced in him an untimely child who did not belong to the past but was contemporaneous with him. He, unlike his sister, remembered very little from his childhood; the only times when he not so much remembered as relived childhood, a childhood that was “a fragment of time in the pure state,”¹⁸ was when he came across, encountered, certain entrancing pubescent girls. Rather than his memory or for that matter his sister’s memory, it was these pubescent girls, who were not yet born by the time he was already an adult, who were his surest link now to “his” childhood! They were in passing a medium for him to relive childhood *without remembering it*—a childhood unknown to his companions of that period, including to his beloved sister. Such little girls are, unlike most other little girls, not interested in boys their age or slightly older, and are, unlike Lolitas,¹⁹ not interested in men; they are rather interested in the little boy they can invoke in some men, the *becoming-child* (to use a Deleuze and Guattari term) of the latter.²⁰ The associated *childhood block* (to use a related Deleuze and Guattari term) is usually an impetuous yet subtle and, unfortunately, tenuous sensation. This sensation cannot be triggered by a Lolita—by a girl who is seductive not only

to the boys her age or slightly older but even to men, indeed mostly to men. Can he betray a lover and beloved through an interest in such a pubescent girl? No, for even were he to become enamored of the pubescent girl and/or sensually or sexually attracted to her, it would be as a boy of ten or twelve who is “real without being actual.”²¹ But much more than a sensual or sexual experience, his encounter with the pubescent girl was a temporal experience par excellence, that of being *between* ages.

The photographer too found himself in Paris, shortly before the start of the Third World War. The city seemed uncanny to him; this was partly because it was, unbeknownst to him, the Paris in a variant although similar branch of the multiverse, thus familiar though seen for the first time. He espied at the end of the jetty at Orly airport a woman who appeared to be the same one with whom he had been infatuated as a child. He spoke to her and then they went for a walk. “They shall go like this, in countless walks, in which an unspoken trust, an unadulterated trust will grow between them. No memories, no plans.” Did he not ask her about her past so as not to induce her to ask him about his? He must also have sensed that she too, albeit for a different reason, had no past, no memories (this was so in her case as a result of a combination of infantile amnesia [caused by a repression of infantile sexuality and, by associative extension, of almost all infantile memories] and pubescent amnesia [an outcome of an inexistent past, itself a consequence of the portrait of the pubescent]). How well they fit each other: in the branch of the multiverse he reached through time travel, he was always an adult (hence the time-travel experiment was an initiation), and, as a result of the successful portrait of the

pubescent girl, the woman who had replaced the latter was also always an adult—at least was never a pubescent girl. When he told her, “I want to do a portrait of you,” she exclaimed, “Oh, no! I am traumatized by portraits.” Disregarding her objection, one day he took advantage of her sleep to take her photographic portrait. By the eleventh attempt, he grew *very pallid, and aghast*, for he sensed a presence that *serenely disdains to annihilate* him, an angel.²² He looked at the photograph. *While he yet gazed, he grew tremulous and cried with a loud voice, “This is indeed Life itself!”* as he saw her eyes open in the photographic portrait—then he exclaimed again, correcting himself, “It’s alive.” I can well envision a version of “The Oval Portrait” where the model wife does not die while posing for the portrait but is saved by her guardian angel, whose presence prior to the transference of her life to the absolutely lifelike portrait *startles* the latter *into life*—awakening the passionate painter “lost in reveries”—in which he sees himself as an angel? I recommend as a title for the eleven stills of the sleeping woman in *La Jetée: Portrayed Beauty Unconsciously Waiting for the Angel*—to be *startled into life* by him. In the eye of which angelic beholder is the life her companion sees as the woman moves her eyes in *La Jetée*? It is in the eyes of the highly advanced beings who hail from the distant future,²³ across the “technological singularity,” and who were not waiting to be contacted by those who are far less advanced and cosmopolitan but instead actually facilitated the contact, for “they too traveled in time and more easily.” In Chris Marker’s film, the spectator does not witness life as the woman’s eyes move in the previously still shots, but *an absolute life-likeness of expression*; for him or her to witness life

when looking at the woman moving her eyes, an angel has to be in the cinema. Chris Marker's *La Jetée: Ciné-roman*, published by Zone Books, was not a second best for the benefit of those who had no access to the film, which at that point was not available on DVD or VHS; it is the primary work (this is confirmed by the quote of Chris Marker on the jacket of the book: "This book version of *La Jetée* is ... not a film's book, but a book in its own right—the real ciné-roman announced in the film's credits"²⁴), and it is addressed to angels. Had Chris Marker's *La Jetée: Ciné-roman* been published not in 1992, but prior to 1987, I can well envision in the library scene of Wim Wenders' *Wings of Desire* (1987) one of the two angels seated beside somebody reading Marker's book and both witnessing the woman open her eyes (when one of the two angels tells the other, "An old man told a story to a child and the child moved his eyelids!" he could very well be referring not to a child in the physical world but to an image of the child in a book)—were he, following his human embodiment, to come again across the book, he would no longer encounter this effect and would have to watch Marker's film (1962) to see what cinema can provide those who are not angelic: not life but *an absolute life-likeness of expression*. The subject of the portrait is Life itself; therefore Jesus Christ, "the life" (John 11:25), was, irrespective of any painter, a portrait, the portrait (hence in part the frame of the halo around him?). The angel, in whose presence humans usually exclaim about a portrait that has *an absolute life-likeness of expression*, "It's alive!" himself exclaims in the presence of Jesus Christ in Mary during (and as?) the Annunciation: "This is indeed *Life* itself!" A portraitist should not attempt to make an alive portrait of humans

and for them, which would be tantamount to a criminal (Poe's "The Oval Portrait"), even demonic activity, but should do for the angel²⁵ a portrait that has *an absolute life-likeness of expression* (Did any of Jesus Christ's "contemporaries" make a portrait of him? If they did, then their efforts would have been misdirected: since he was already a portrait, they should have made portraits not of him but for him. Notwithstanding the incarnation and then occultation of the Son of God, Christian artists should have either continued to make portraits with *an absolute life-likeness of expression* of others for him—to *startle into life* on his Second Coming; or given the impression in their paintings in which he was represented that these were not portraits but paintings of a portrait!). The final touch, which is to *startle into life*²⁶ the portrait, should be added by the angel, by the eye of the angel; regarding any portrait other than Jesus Christ, life is in the eye of the angelic beholder (and in the eye [and/or breath?]²⁷ of Jesus Christ, "the life"). I assume that in the presence of the angel Gabriel, that is, in the presence of the one who startles into life what has *an absolute life-likeness of expression* or reveals life, it was clear to the prophet Muhammad that Quraysh's idols had no life in them, and so, as he set out to touch them with "the hammer as with a tuning fork" (Nietzsche), he knew in advance that he would "receive for answer that famous hollow sound" and proceeded to produce a *twilight of the idols*. May Aleksandr Sokurov do (with a different cinematographer) a remake of or a sequel to his *Russian Ark* (2002), which takes place in St. Petersburg's State Hermitage Museum, in which the companion of the protagonist would be an angel; Sokurov would thus achieve what has remained outstanding

for too long: a tour of a museum with an angel for guide. During such a guided tour, the portraits that have an *absolute life-likeness of expression* would *startle into life* as the angel passes them. But is a portraitist and his or her work at all needed in the presence of the angel? No! Nietzsche writes, “Around the hero everything becomes a tragedy, around the demi-god a satyr-play ... around God everything becomes—what? Perhaps a ‘world’?”²⁸—and around, in the presence of the angel everything—with the exception of a bad “portrait”—becomes a portrait, one about which one cannot but exclaim: “It’s alive!” After visiting the museum, the time-traveling painter and his companion went to the jetty at Orly airport. He was mistaken for another man, someone called James Cole, and fatally shot. As he lay dying, he grasped that those conducting the time-travel experiment had sent him to the past not in the same universe but in another branch of the multiverse, and he intuited that he had volunteered to time-travel not only to have an amorous relationship with his soul mate across their initially different generations, but also to witness “his” death,²⁹ yet he realized that “the haunted moment, given him to see as a child,” was not the moment of his *own* death; that the man he as a child saw die was not himself, but his version from another branch of the multiverse who, similarly, had time-traveled to the past in another branch of the multiverse, the one *he* had originated from (thus, fittingly, in his case too the pubescent and the adult did not have the same identity though not as a result of the portrait—which, among pubescents, is almost the prerogative of the girl—but because of time travel in the multiverse, to a different branch of the latter); and consequently that what he witnessed as a child was

“his” death as another. (In Chris Marker’s *La Jetée*, when the time traveler to the past is fatally shot, we are told in voice-over that he “understood ... that this moment he had been granted to watch as a child, which had never ceased to obsess him, was the moment of his own death.” How mistaken is Chris Marker here! He misrecognizes his protagonist.) Through time travel, one can watch “oneself” die *but as another*, “one’s version” in another, largely similar branch of the multiverse. He came to the conclusion that while seemingly making possible a situation in which one can witness one’s own death, time travel actually provides an exoteric version of what awaits each one of us esoterically at his or her physical death. In Hitchcock’s *Vertigo* (a film that is referenced in Marker’s *La Jetée* and that I treat as a time-travel one in the section “Vertiginous Eyes” of the revised and expanded edition of my book (*Vampires*): *An Uneasy Essay on the Undead in Film* [2003]), a man, Gavin Elster, devises a scheme to murder his wife, Madeleine, and inherit her fortune. He persuades a detective suffering from acrophobia, Scottie, to follow his wife, who appears to be possessed by her great-grandmother Carlotta Valdés, who was unjustly separated from her daughter, went mad as a result and committed suicide. He hires a woman, Judy, who looks like his wife to impersonate her. The plan requires that while impersonating Madeleine, Judy would run up the stairs of a church tower seemingly to commit suicide and the detective would, however much he tried, fail to follow her all the way up and would see her fall to her death soon after, ending up the unwitting witness to a suicide. That’s indeed what takes place. But what did Judy see when she reached the top of the tower? She witnessed Elster throw

a woman who looked very much like her to the ground way below. Judy's death was stolen from her; she died as Madeleine. Soon after Scottie comes across her in the street and they become a couple, she asks him to help her put on a necklace—a gift to her from Elster. Scottie quickly remembers having already seen this necklace, first in a painting, where it was worn by Carlotta, and then on Madeleine's neck. Consequently, he strongly suspects that Madeleine's death was a murder in which Judy was implicated. Through her parapraxis, Judy was unconsciously hoping that this obsessed melancholic man, who had remade her as Madeleine (making her wear the same clothes and shoes, have the same hair color and hairdo . . .), would take her back to the scene of the crime. Her seemingly accidental final mortal fall from the same church tower on being taken aback by the sudden appearance of a nun was a manner of reclaiming *her* death. She seems not to have suspected the following while succeeding in exoterically reclaiming her death: esoterically, “there is always someone else,” in the lapse we undergo at the furtive extreme moment of death, “to strip us of our own” death. The other can never die in my place (Heidegger: “Dying . . . is essentially mine in such a way that no one can be my representative”³⁰), but, unless I am a yoga or Sufi or Zen master, he or she “always” “robs” me of my place (in “his” dying before dying [“This autumn, as lightly clad as possible, I twice attended my funeral, first as Count Robilant (no, he is my son, insofar as I am Carlo Alberto, my nature below), but I was Antonelli myself”], Nietzsche writes: “I am Prado, I am also Prado's father, I venture to say that I am also Lesseps.... I am also Chambige . . . every name in history is I”³¹).

Moving Pictures³²

“What is the use of a book,” thought Alice, “without pictures or conversations?”

Lewis Carroll, *Alice's Adventure in Wonderland*









































Notes

- 1 “I am forced to the appalling conclusion that I would never have become a writer but for Joan’s death, and to a realization of the extent to which this event has motivated and formulated my writing. I live with the constant threat of possession, and a constant need to escape from possession, from Control. So the death of Joan brought me in contact with the invader, the Ugly Spirit, and maneuvered me into a lifelong struggle, in which I have had no choice except to write my way out.” William S. Burroughs, *Queer* (New York: Penguin Books, 1987), xxii.
- 2 William Burroughs, for whom painting, like writing, was to create magical effects, painted with the same instrument with which he killed his wife, a shotgun. Many of his “Shotgun Paintings” were produced by placing a can of spray paint in front of a piece of plywood and shooting it so that the paint would get splattered over the wood.
- 3 Alexandre Kojève, *Introduction to the Reading of Hegel: Lectures on the Phenomenology of Spirit*, assembled by Raymond Queneau; edited by Allan Bloom; translated from the French by James H. Nichols, Jr. (New York: Basic Books, 1969), 6–8.
- 4 I can well envision a contemporary version of “The Oval Portrait,” whose author also wrote the cosmological essay *Eureka*, in which the original’s painter, who imprisons the model in his Chateau’s dark high turret-chamber and makes a preservative portrait of her at the price of her physical death, is replaced by a scientist who sends his wife to a black hole to preserve her as an image at the event horizon while she speeds to her doom as she approaches the singularity of the

black hole.

- 5 Walter Benjamin: "Artistic production begins with ceremonial objects destined to serve in a cult.... In photography, exhibition value begins to displace cult value all along the line. But cult value does not give way without resistance.... The cult of remembrance of loved ones, absent or dead, offers a last refuge for the cult value of the picture," "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction," in *Video Culture: A Critical Investigation*, ed. John Hanhardt (Rochester, New York: Visual Studies Workshop Press, 1986), 33–34.
- 6 Who could then wake him? Himself: "I woke myself when the / ghost came in / Actually I spoke to myself / saying, 'Wake up, you (I) / are afraid of ghosts'" (Lyn Hejinian, *The Cell* [Los Angeles: Sun & Moon Press, 1992], 100).
- 7 Leaving his other disciples at Gethsemane, Jesus went in the company of Peter, James and John to pray. He asked these three: "Stay here and watch with Me." He then moved the distance of a "stone's throw" and prayed. When he came back, the three were sleeping: "What? Could you not watch with Me one hour?" Three times did he leave them to pray, each time finding them sleeping upon returning. "Are you still sleeping and resting? Behold, the hour is at hand, and the Son of Man is being betrayed ..." (Matthew 26:36–45). Finishing his words, he sees the traitor Judas coming toward him. Similarly, in Shakespeare's *Julius Caesar* (4.3), to Brutus' offer that he sleep, the response of Lucius, one of his servants, is: "I have slept, my lord, already." Brutus: "... And thou shalt sleep again; / I will not hold thee long ..." Lucius plays music for a short time and falls asleep; it is then that the ominous ghost of Caesar appears to Brutus.
- 8 See my objection to this locution in (*Vampires*): *An Uneasy Essay*

on the Undead in Film, revised and expanded edition (Sausalito, CA: The Post-Apollo Press, 2003), 168–169.

- 9 Lebanese theatre artist Lina Saneh gave me in 2006 a VHS tape in which she relates what she describes as a dream she had recently, and she asked me (as well as three other people to whom she also told the dream, whether in person [her mother] or through a video [a psychoanalyst and a "political writer"]) for a response—one she could possibly use in an artwork she was preparing, which ended up being the video *I Had a Dream, Mom ...* I can very well envision a present-day version of *The Thousand and One Nights* that omits part of the frame story, the traumatic discovery by the king of his wife's betrayal, and where we would be dealing not with the relationship between an insomniac and a storyteller, but with that between a Buñuelian compulsive dream narrator and a psychoanalyst, the king nightly threatening Shahrazād, now a psychoanalyst, with "the absolute master, death" (Lacan), were she to refuse to listen to his dreams of the previous night and to try to interpret them, the analysis revealing first the trauma of his betrayal by his wife, and then, after hundreds of narrated dreams as well as free associations to them, the more basic trauma whose symptom was his infertility (this symptom itself played a part in his betrayal by his wife)—with the result that the king ends up having one or more children.
- 10 Translated by Stephen Mitchell/Robert Bly.
- 11 Rainer Maria Rilke, *The Notebooks of Malte Laurids Brigge*, trans. Stephen Mitchell (New York: Vintage International, 1990), 38.
- 12 From Friedrich Nietzsche's 5 January 1889 letter to Jacob Burckhardt, in *Selected Letters of Friedrich Nietzsche*, edited and translated by Christopher Middleton (Indianapolis, Indiana: Hackett Publishing

- Company, 1996), 347.
- 13 Did she continue the story the next day? I hope she didn't, having identified with the diegetic sleeper—in this sense, “The Oval Portrait,” this story most of which is about a narrator who is reading, is, from “Long—long I read—” on, unreadable for the living.
 - 14 Thomas Bernhard, *Wittgenstein's Nephew: A Friendship*, trans. David McLintock (New York: Knopf, 1989), 3.
 - 15 Will there still be physical death by the time when, if ever, time travel becomes feasible? If the answer is “no,” then the *grandfather paradox*—some man travels to the past and kills his grandfather before the latter has any children, with the consequence that the time traveler could not have been born and therefore could not have traveled to the past and killed his grandfather—would have to be reformulated. Since, if at all possible, time travel, as a number of physicists have noted, can be only to periods that already have a time “machine,” the time travel to the pre-Third World War period in Marker's *La Jetée* would most probably have to be considered a thought experiment.
 - 16 “World Midyear Population by Age and Sex for 2009,” www.census.gov/ipc/www/idb/region.php; see also www.statistics.gov.uk/populationestimates/flash_pyramid/UK-pyramid/pyramid6_30.html and www.destatis.de/bevoelkerungspyramide.
 - 17 *American Heritage Dictionary*, 4th ed. (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 2002).
 - 18 Marcel Proust, *In Search of Lost Time*, vol. VI: *Time Regained*, trans. Andreas Mayor and Terence Kilmartin, rev. D. J. Enright; and *A Guide to Proust*, compiled by Terence Kilmartin, rev. Joanna Kilmartin (London: Vintage Books, 2000), 224.
 - 19 “Between the age limits of nine and fourteen there occur maidens

who, to certain bewitched travelers, twice or many times older than they, reveal their true nature which is not human, but nymphic (that is, demoniac); and these chosen creatures I propose to designate as ‘nymphets’” (Vladimir Nabokov, *Lolita* [London: Penguin Books, 2006], 15).

- 20 One and the same man may be attracted to two little girls for two radically different reasons: to one girl because she invokes in him a child, a boy, and to another girl because she, a Lolita, seduces him as a man.
- 21 Proust, *In Search of Lost Time*, vol. VI, *Time Regained*, 224.
- 22 “Who, if I cried out, would hear me among the angels’ / hierarchies? And even if one of them pressed me / suddenly against his heart: I would be consumed / in that overwhelming existence. For beauty is nothing / but the beginning of terror, which we still are just able to endure, / and we are so awed because it serenely disdains / to annihilate us. Every angel is terrifying” (*Duino Elegies*, in *The Selected Poetry of Rainer Maria Rilke*, ed. and trans. Stephen Mitchell [New York: Vintage Books, 1982], 151). Given that, as Rilke tells his readers, “every angel is terrifying,” and that “beauty is nothing / but the beginning of terror, which we still are just able to endure,” it is felicitous that when the angel Gabriel visited the prophet Muhammad, he took the form of the beautiful Dihyā al-Kalbī: “Abū ‘Uthmān told us: ‘I was informed that Gabriel came to the Prophet, may God’s blessing be upon him, while Umm Salama was with him. Gabriel started talking (to the Prophet). The Prophet asked Umm Salama, ‘Who is this?’ She replied, ‘He is Dihyā [al-Kalbī].’ When Gabriel had left, Umm Salama said, ‘By Allāh, I did not take him for anybody other than him (i.e., Dihyā) till I heard the

- sermon of the Prophet, may God's blessing be upon him, wherein he informed about the news of Gabriel'" ("Virtues of the Qur'ān," *Sahīh al-Bukhārī*, tradition no. 4980).
- 23 Cf. Jalal Toufic, *Two or Three Things I'm Dying to Tell You* (Sausalito, CA: The Post-Apollo Press, 2005), 20: "Did not an angel appear to counter the gaze of David [the robotic boy of Steven Spielberg's *AI*]? Yes—not one angel but several angels. Unlike in Rilke's poem, the angel in this case was not already present, but was yet to appear historically in the form of a member of an ultra-advanced future civilization."
- 24 What are we watching in *La Jetée*? Are we watching the snapshots of a relativistic universe, one that allows time travel? Aren't we, like the Qur'ān, (*inscribed*) in a *Tablet Preserved* (Qur'ān 85:22) and alive in the eye of *al-Hayy* (Qur'ān 20:111; 40:65), the Living, and *al-Muhyī* (Qur'ān 2:28), the Life-Giver?
- 25 Or for a Zen master in the tradition of Dōgen, the author of "Painting of a Rice-cake (*Gabyō*)" in *Shōbōgenzō*: "An ancient buddha said, 'A painting of a rice-cake does not satisfy hunger.' The phrase 'does not satisfy hunger' means this hunger—not the ordinary matter of the twelve hours—never encounters a painted rice-cake.... all painted buddhas are actual buddhas.... Because the entire world and all phenomena are a painting, human existence appears from a painting, and Buddha ancestors are actualized from a painting. Since this is so, there is no remedy for satisfying hunger other than a painted rice-cake. Without painted hunger you never become a true person. There is no understanding other than painted satisfaction." *Moon in a Dewdrop: Writings of Zen Master Dōgen*, ed. Kazuaki Tanahashi, trans. Robert Aitken et al. (San Francisco: North Point Press, 1985), 134–138.
- 26 "Am I not right / to feel as if I *mušt* stay seated, must / wait before the puppet stage, or, rather, / gaze at it so intensely that at last, / to balance my gaze, an angel has to come and / make the stuffed skins startle into life." Rilke, *Duino Elegies*, 169–171.
- 27 "(And remember) when the angels said: O Mary! Lo! Allāh giveth thee glad tidings of a word from Him, whose name is the Messiah, Jesus, son of Mary ... [Allāh] ... will make him a messenger unto the Children of Israel, (saying): Lo! I come unto you with a sign from your Lord. Lo! I fashion for you out of clay the likeness of a bird, and I breathe into it and it is a bird, by Allāh's leave" (Qur'ān 3:45–49, trans. Pickthall)—is this not what Jesus did all the time, breathe? Having finished his portrait of a bird, the final touch was his breathing, naturally.
- 28 Friedrich Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil: Prelude to a Philosophy of the Future*, trans. R. J. Hollingdale (London: Penguin Books, 2003), 102.
- 29 The following are some of the paradigmatic (conscious or unconscious) reasons to travel in time: to witness one's birth (at least this used to be the case before the advent of film and video recording); to witness one's death—and to be one of one's mourners (!) and to get the out-of-this-world confirmation that the world does not depend on us for its continued existence, that the world does not end with our physical end; to be initiated into countless recurrence until one wills the eternal recurrence of at least one event and thus makes possible the origination of the general, epochal will; to make possible the actualization of an amorous relationship between two people who would otherwise continue to be of starkly different

generations, for example an adult and a child or a young man or woman and a very old man or woman—it should be obvious that this does not apply to the passion of some adult man for a Lolita; and to be in the present, in terms of one's perception of some of the objects in one's environment, for example, taking into account the finiteness of the speed of light, through time-traveling eight minutes into the future in order to perceive the sun as it was actually when one looked at it just prior to one's travel.

- 30 Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, trans. John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson (New York: HarperPerennial/Modern Thought, 2008), 297.
- 31 *Selected Letters of Friedrich Nietzsche*, 347.
- 32 That is, pictures one was moved to take manually at the rate of “24” per second. These moving pictures are not portraits, were not meant to be portraits in the first place.

Jalal Toufic is a thinker and a mortal to death. He is the author of *Diſtracted* (1991; 2nd ed., 2003), *(Vampires): An Uneasy Essay on the Undead in Film* (1993; 2nd ed., 2003), *Over-Sensitivity* (1996; 2nd ed., 2009), *Forthcoming* (2000), *Undying Love, or Love Dies* (2002), *Two or Three Things I'm Dying to Tell You* (2005), *‘Āshūrā’: This Blood Spilled in My Veins* (2005), *Undeserving Lebanon* (2007), *The Withdrawal of Tradition Paſt a Surpassing Diſaſter* (2009), *Graziella: The Corrected Edition* (2009), and *What Is the Sum of Recurrently?* (2010). Most of his books are available for download as PDF files at his website: <http://www.jalaltoufic.com>. He taught at San Francisco State University, the University of California at Berkeley, California Institute of the Arts, the University of Southern California, Holy Spirit University in Lebanon, and Kadir Has University in Istanbul. He is a guest for the year 2011 of the Artists-in-Berlin Program of the DAAD (German Academic Exchange Service).

ISBN 978-9953-0-2052-5