

Roland Barthes' *Sollers Écrivain* and the
Problem of the Reception of Philippe Sollers'
L'écriture percurrente

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(*Ce qui vient vers vous...ne peut être réduit ou traduit*)

Philippe Sollers, *Nombres* (1968)

'*N'oublions pas Sollers*' - 'Let's not forget Sollers'. So Roland Barthes insists at the outset of '*Dialogue*', the short critical piece devoted to Sollers which appears first in his *Sollers Écrivain*. 'But you never hear about anyone else!', an unnamed interlocutor immediately replies.¹⁾ Barthes' intention in exhorting thus was to counter the superficial social imagery about Sollers which had been appearing in the French press in the late 1970s and to reassert against this reductionism the seemingly obvious fact 'that he's a writer, that he has written and does write'.²⁾

For his part, Barthes had written on a number of occasions about Sollers between 1965, the year of the publication of Sollers' *Drame*,³⁾ up to the

1) '*Dialogue*', in *Sollers Écrivain* (Paris : Éditions du Seuil, 1979). Translated and Introduced by Philip Thody as *Writer Sollers* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987/London: Athlone Press, 1987), p. 35. In my opinion the title of the English translation should be *Sollers Writer* to capture Barthes' insistence that Sollers is first and foremost *un écrivain*.

2) Ibid.

3) Philippe Sollers, *Drame* (Paris : Éditions du Seuil, coll. '*Tel Quel*', 1965). Barthes

publication of *Sollers Écrivain* in 1979 at which time Sollers was continuing to produce his second innovatory text of what he called *l'écriture peccurante*, *Paradis*.⁴⁾ Earlier in the 1970s Barthes had published twice on Sollers' first text of '*l'écriture peccurante*', *H*.⁵⁾ First in *Critique* he published '*Sur l'épaule*' in 1973 and second '*Situation*' in *Tel Quel* in 1974.⁶⁾ Five years previously, on the eve of the climatic events of May 68, Barthes had written a full-page review in *Le Nouvel Observateur* of Sollers' collection of essays *Logiques* and his 'novel' *Nombres*.⁷⁾ It is interesting to note that *Sollers Écrivain* did not appear in English translation until 1987 seven years after Barthes' death and eight years after its publication in France. During these dates all of Barthes' other works were translated into English.⁸⁾ The belated appearance in English of *Sollers Écrivain*

responded to this work in '*Drame, Poème, Roman*' published in *Critique*, 1965, and collected in *Sollers Écrivain*, pp. 40-67, with a brief note by Thody on the concept of *écriture*, pp. 39-40. *Drame* has been translated into English, along with Barthes' essay, as *Event* by Bruce Benderson and Ursula Molinaro (New York: Red Dust Incorporated, 1987). Philip Thody, the translator into English of *Sollers Écrivain*, was unaware that this American translation was forthcoming in 1987 when his translation of *Sollers Écrivain* appeared.

- 4) Philippe Sollers, *Paradis* (Paris : Éditions du Seuil, coll. 'Tel Quel', 1981). *Paradis II* was published by Éditions Gallimard in 1986.
- 5) Philippe Sollers, *H* (Paris : Éditions du Seuil, coll. 'Tel Quel', 1973).
- 6) Roland Barthes, '*Sur l'épaule*', *Critique*, No. 318, November, 1973 and '*Situation*', No. 57, 1974. Both of these texts are republished in *Writer Sollers* as 'Over the Shoulder', pp. 75-92 and 'Situation', pp. 93-95.
- 7) Roland Barthes, '*Le refus d'héritage*', *Le Nouvel Observateur*, No. 181, 30 April, 1968. This review is included in *Writer Sollers* as 'The Refusal to Inherit', pp. 69-74. Philippe Sollers, *Logiques* (Paris : Éditions du Seuil, coll. 'Tel Quel', 1967) and *Nombres* (Paris : Éditions du Seuil, coll. 'Tel Quel', 1967). For Sollers *post festum* views on May 68 see his '*Printemps rouge*', Preface to Jean Thibadeau, *Mai 1968 en France* (Paris : Éditions du Seuil, coll. 'Tel Quel', 1970), pp. 7-22.
- 8) Roland Barthes, *New Critical Essays*, trans. by Richard Howard (New York: Hill and Wang, 1980) [originally published as *Nouveaux essais critiques* along with *Le Degré zéro de l'écriture* (Paris : Éditions du Seuil, 1972)]; *Camera Lucida: Reflections on*

was symptomatic, at the time, of a lag in the reception in the English-speaking intellectual world of a controversial contemporary French writer. In order to account for this symptomatic lag it is useful to refer to a text published in the wake of May 68 in England by an English critic influenced by French intellectual culture, Colin MacCabe. In 1971, in a short polemical essay entitled, 'Situation', MacCabe wrote:

In England, we are, to a certain extent, cut off, removed from the mainstream of continental thought. To pretend that this isolation is a purely accidental, intellectual, one would be obviously untrue. The fact that we have yet to *read* Hegel, Husserl and Heidegger is not merely...that our leading philosophers chose a different philosophical approach — it stems from a different history — a different space of development — a different, to use Raymond Williams' term, *structure of feeling*. The difficulty we have in tracing ourselves in the texts offered here (those of Barthes, Sollers and Kristeva) is not, therefore, simply a matter of intellectual stance but reflects a different mode of being. The interrogation needed to enter these texts is a self-interrogation; a process very different from the usual *absorption* of new material. Ideas, however, if not the answer

Photography, trans. by Richard Howard (New York: Hill and Wang/London Jonathan Cape, 1982) [originally published as *La Chambre claire : note sur la photographie* (Paris : Éditions Gallimard and Éditions du Seuil, 1980)]; *The Empire of Signs*, trans. by Richard Howard (New York: Hill and Wang, 1982) [originally published as *L'Empire des signes* (Geneva : Éditions Skira, 1970)]; *The Fashion System*, trans. by Matthew Ward and Richard Howard (New York: Farrar, Strauss and Giroux, 1983) [originally published as *Système de la mode* (Paris : Éditions du Seuil, 1967)]; *The Grain of the Voice: Interviews 1962-80*, trans. by Linda Coverdale (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1985) [originally published as *Le Grain de la voix : Entretiens 1962-80* (Paris : Éditions du Seuil, 1981)]; *The Responsibility of Forms: Critical Essays on Music, Art and Representation*, trans. by Richard Howard (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1986) [originally published as *L'obvie et l'obtus : Essais critiques III* (Paris : Éditions du Seuil, 1982)]; *The Rustle of Language*, trans. by Richard Howard (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1986) [originally published as *Le bruissement de la langue : Essais critiques IV* (Paris : Éditions du Seuil, 1984)] and *Criticism and Truth*, trans. by Katrine Pilcher, Introduction by Philip Thody (London: Athlone Press, 1987) [originally published as *Critique et vérité* (Paris : Éditions du Seuil, 1966)].

to this problem of *difference* are, because of the relative ease of location, the easiest way to start the traverse of the distance between our thought and that of Barthes, Sollers, Kristeva.⁹⁾

Since MacCabe drew attention to the difference in intellectual situation between England and the 'continent', between modern German philosophy, French theoretical-modernist culture and a distinctly English 'structure of feeling', the works of Barthes and Kristeva have become available in English translation in the form of 'readers'.¹⁰⁾ At the end of his essay MacCabe wrote:

The effort now is to grasp the processes of the production of sense, to think through the work of Barthes, Sollers and Kristeva)...as well as that of Foucault and Lacan, the possibility of a theoretical perspective from which we may begin to question our history, to read, let us say, our situation.¹¹⁾

Again, a Foucault reader has appeared in English translation.¹²⁾ But, in contrast, the avant-garde critical and fictional writings of Sollers, have experienced neglect at the hand of British and American publishers. However, in 1983 a selection of Sollers' critical essays appeared in English translation, in America, with the title *Writing and the Experience of Limits*. This was a translation of *L'Écriture et*

9) Colin MacCabe, 'Situation', in Stephen Heath, Colin MacCabe and Christopher Prendergast (eds), *Signs of the Times* (Cambridge: Granta, 1971), p. 11.

10) See Susan Sontag (ed.), *A Barthes Reader* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1982/London: Jonathan Cape, 1982) and Toril Moi (ed.), *The Kristeva Reader* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1986).

11) Colin MacCabe, op. cit., p. 15.

12) Paul Rabinow (ed.), *The Foucault Reader* (New York: Random House, 1984/London: Penguin: 1986). No reader of Lacan's work has been published in English. The first English translation of his numerous *seminars* translated in English was *Écrits*, trans. by Alan Sheridan (New York: W.W Norton & Co, 1982) [originally published in French with the same title by Édition du Seuil, Paris, 1966]. Note: the English translator, Alan Sheridan (under the surname Sheridan-Smith) translated Sollers' *Le Parc* in 1968. See note 17 below for publishing details.

l'expérience des limites which had been published in 1971; and this latter paperback text was a selection of the essays which had already appeared in *Logiques* in 1968.¹³⁾ It was Sollers as critic, then, and not his practice of avant-garde writing which had stimulated translation. It was surely a sign of the times at the turn of the 1980s in the English-speaking intellectual world that critical readings of Sollers' work produced by now famous names in the pantheon of French post-structuralism as Derrida and Kristeva were translated but not the works of Sollers which were the objects of their critical attention: in the case of Derrida, *Nombres*; in the case of Kristeva, *H*.¹⁴⁾ Note should be made here that many of the poets/novelists-critics who inhabited the same Parisian intellectual milieu as Sollers have also not been sufficiently translated, or not translated at all, into English. To mention here some of the more well known: Marcelin Pleynet, Maurice Roche, Denis Roche, Jean-Louis Baudry, Jean Thibaudeau and Jacqueline Risset.¹⁵⁾

13) Philippe Sollers, *Writing and the Experience of Limits*, ed. by David Hayman, trans. by Philip Barnard with David Hayman (New York: Columbia University Press, 1982)[original French edition: *L'Écriture et l'expérience des limites* (Paris : Éditions du Seuil, coll. 'Points', 1971).] The latter is a selection of essays from Sollers' *Logiques*.

14) Cf. Jacques Derrida, *Dissemination*, trans. by Barbara Johnson (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1981/London: Athlone Press, 1981). [Originally published as *La Dissémination* (Paris : Éditions du Seuil, 1972).] And Julia Kristeva, 'The Novel as Polylogue', in Leon S. Roudiez (ed.), *Desire in Language: A Semiotic Approach to Literature and Art*, trans. by Thomas Gora, Alice Jardine and Leon S. Roudiez (New York: Columbia University Press, 1980/Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1981), pp. 159-209. [Originally published in *Polylogue* (Paris : Éditions du Seuil, 1977) and before that in *Tel Quel*, no. 57, spring 1974.]

15) Marcelin Pleynet's critical work, *Système de la peinture* has been translated into English as *Painting as System* by Sima Godfrey (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1984) [originally published in French as *Système de la peinture* (Paris : Éditions du Seuil, coll. 'Tel Quel', 1984)]. Works by Pleynet and Jean-Louis Baudry which appeared in *Tel Quel* are included in Patrick French and Roland-Françoise Lack (eds) recently published *The Tel Quel Reader* (London and New York: Routledge, 1998). See also

For Philip Thody, the translator of *Writer Sollers*, 'It is easy to see why *Sollers Écrivain* is the last of Barthes' works to appear in English translation. None of the works by Sollers which it discusses have so far been translated into English'.¹⁶⁾ At the time of the publication of the English translation of *Sollers Écrivain* in 1987 only one work of Sollers was listed in both American and British Books in Print as then being currently available: *The Park. Le Parc*, Sollers' second novel, was published in 1961 and translated into English in 1968.¹⁷⁾ Was this early work of Sollers, published when he was only twenty-five years old, translated into English because it had won the *Prix Médicis* in France and thus afforded Sollers some celebrity at a young age? After the publication in English translation of *Le Parc* by John Calder and Marion Boyars, the enterprising publishing duo who commissioned it parted company but, still, both have developed prestigious lists of foreign authors in English translation. Sollers, however, is not included on either of their lists. In this connection mention should be made that Sollers was even omitted from Calder's *The Nouveau Roman Reader* which appeared in 1986.¹⁸⁾ Although in his 'Introduction' to this Reader,

the 'Interview with Marcelin Pleynet' in *Parallax*, Vol. 4, No. 1, pp. 13-22 and, in the same issue, Stephen Bann, 'Marcelin Pleynet and the System of Painting', pp. 55-72. *Compact* by Maurice Roche has been translated by Mark Polizzati as *Compact* (Illinois University Press: Dalkey Archive Publishers, 1988). For Jacqueline Risset *The Translation Begins (Series d'Écriture, no. 10)* (New York: Burning Deck Books, 1996). I have translated some of the poetry of Jacqueline Risset: cf. *Seven Passages From the Life of a Woman, Heretic 1* (London, 1977) [originally published in French as *Sept passages de la vie d'une femme, Tel Quel* and then in book form by Flammarion, Paris, coll. 'théâtre poésie', 1985] and *The Small Mark on the Stomach: 9 Poems of Mnemosyne and En Voyage, Heretic 2* (London, 1982) [originally published in *Tel Quel*, No. 90, Winter 1981, pp. 69-73].

16) Philip Thody, 'Introduction' *Writer Sollers*, op. cit., p. 18.

17) Philippe Sollers, *The Park*, trans by Alan Sheridan-Smith (London: Calder and Boyars, 1968/New York: Red Dust, 1969) [originally published as *Le Parc* (Paris : Éditions du Seuil, 1961)].

entitled 'The Post-Modern Situation', Calder mentions Sollers and *Tel Quel* in passing, when discussing the political involvement of French writers, and although Sollers' *Logiques* is cited under a brief list of 'General Criticism' in the Bibliography, Calder and his fellow editor John Fletcher obviously did not consider Sollers an important enough representative of the French *nouveau roman* to be included in their Reader along with the pantheon of Nathalie Sarraute, Claude Simon, Marguerite Duras, Alain Robbe-Grillet, Claude Mauriac, Robert Pinget, Michel Butor and Jean Ricardou.

The absence of Sollers from this (note 'the') *nouveau roman* reader is interesting when compared to his inclusion in Stephen Heath's *The Nouveau Roman* which had been published fourteen years before *The Nouveau Roman Reader* came out.¹⁹⁾ In this critical work, which includes studies of Sarraute, Robbe-Grillet and Simon, Sollers is treated as developing beyond the respective approaches of this celebrated triumvirate of *nouveaux romanciers* towards the project of a 'materialist ('realist') practice of writing'. Given the title of Calder's 'Introduction', 'The Post-Modern Situation', it might have been expected that Sollers would have been considered a representative *exception* at least to the approaches of Sarraute, Robbe-Grillet and Simon. Unwittingly, but still significantly, Calder and Fletcher might have considered Sollers as unrepresentative of the French *nouveau roman* precisely because, unacknowledged by them, he has theorized various cases of literary exceptions and that his point of view is, so to speak, is applicable to himself.²⁰⁾

At the time of the publication, then, of the English translation of *Sollers*

18) John Fletcher and John Calder (eds), *The Nouveau Roman Reader* (London: John Calder, 1986/New York: Riverrun Press, 1986).

19) Stephen Heath, *The Nouveau Roman: A Study in the Practice of Writing* (London: Elek Books, 1972/Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1972), Chapter 5, 'Philippe Sollers'.

20) Cf. Philippe Sollers, *Théorie des exceptions* (Paris : Éditions Gallimard, coll. 'Tel Quel', 1985).

Écrivain (1987) there was a definite irony which characterized the absence in English translation of Sollers' avant-garde texts. In essence it is this: his two early works which had been translated into English - 'The Challenge' (*Le Défi*) and *A Strange Solitude* (*Une curieuse solitude*)²¹⁾ - were out of print (apart from *The Parc*) and, significantly, Sollers had explicitly disowned both of them.²²⁾ In contrast, his later experimental texts, which Sollers himself considers best represent his activity as a 'romancier', have not been translated. At the moment of the appearance of the English translation of *Sollers Écrivain* the early novels of Sollers continued to be issued in France. *Une curieuse solitude* was republished by Éditions du Seuil in 1985 in their 'points' collection with the advertising blurb that 'This is the first novel of Philippe Sollers which we know straightaway placed its author in the first rank of his generation'. The same publisher had also earlier reissued *Le Parc* in the same 'points' collection in January 1981 emphasizing that it had been translated into six languages. It is another irony of the translation reception of the works of Sollers that, whereas *Le Parc*, the existence of which Sollers places a question mark against, had been translated, *Sollers Écrivain*, which deals with all the post-*Le Parc* 'novels' (but which does not mention this early novel once), had by 1987 only been translated into one language - Italian.²³⁾ This was in 1979 within only a few months of the appearance of *Sollers Écrivain* in March in France. But the rapid production of this translation only typifies the speedy reception in Italy, of Sollers' work from

21) Philippe Sollers, *The Challenge*, trans. by Jean Stewart in Pamela Lyon (ed.), *French Short Stories 1* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1966), pp. 215-65 [originally published as 'Le Défi', *Ecrire* 4 (Paris : Éditions du Seuil, 1957), pp. 3-29]. And *A Strange Solitude*, trans. by Richard Howard (New York: Grove Press, 1959/London: Eyre & Spottiswood, 1961) [originally published as *Une curieuse solitude* (Paris : Éditions du Seuil, 1958)].

22) Cf. Sollers interview with Jean-Louis de Rambure in *Le Monde*, 29 November 1979.

23) Roland Barthes, *Sollers scrittore: La dissidenza della scrittura* (Milano : Sugarco, 1979).

Drame onwards²⁴⁾

The fact that Sollers rejected the fictional works he had written before *Drame* (1965) is revealing when considering the reception of his *oeuvre* in Britain and America. For example, the biographical note on Sollers which appears in *French Short Stories 1* (1966) refers to *Drame* as 'the latest "New New Novel"'.²⁵⁾ The editor, Pamela Lyon, even went so far as to lump *Le Parc* and *Drame* together when she wrote: 'Perhaps, inevitably, Sollers came under the influence of the "nouveau roman" and both *Le Parc* and *Drame*...show a marked change of style.'²⁶⁾ In an anthology of eight short stories Sollers' '*Le Défi*' (for which he had been awarded the *Prix Fénelon de la littérature* in 1957) is placed last according to the criterion that this selection of short stories is arranged according to their approximate order of difficulty.²⁷⁾ Thus '*La Plage*' ('The Beach'), by Robbe Grillet, is placed first and the subsequent stories show, according to the editor, a wide range of novelistic writing ranging 'from the stylized wit of Queneau to the beautifully written ambiguities of Sollers'.²⁸⁾

Two years after the publication of *French Short Stories 1* the editor of another anthology, *French Writing Today*, Simon Watson Taylor, stated in his biographical

24) Philippe Sollers, *Dramma*, trans. by Jacqueline Risset (Turino: Einaudi, 1972); *Numeri*, trans. by E. Filippini (Turino: Einaud, 1973); *Paradisio*, trans. by G. Ernesti and F. Saba (Milano: Spirali, 1981); *Sul materialismo*, trans. by P. A. Rovati (Milano: Feltrinelli, 1974) [originally published as *Sur le matérialisme: de l'atomisme à la dialectique révolutionnaire* (Paris : Editions du Seuil, 1974).]; *Visione a New York: Conversazione con David Hayman* (Milano : Spirali, 1981). [originally published as *Visions à New York : Entretiens David Hayman* (Paris : Bernard Grasset, 1981).]

25) Pamela Lyon (ed.), *French Short Stories 1*, op. cit., p. 274.

26) Ibid.

27) The other seven authors, apart from Sollers, represented in this anthology mid-1960s anthology of modern French short stories in the order of appearance of their work are Alain Robbe-Grillet, Marcel Aymé, Jean Ferry, Henri Thomas, Marcel Jouhandeau, Raymond Queneau and Pierre Gascar.

28) Pamela Lyon, 'Introduction', *French Short Stories 1*, op. cit., p. 9.

note on Sollers that he had disowned both '*Le Défi*' and *Une curieuse solitude*.²⁹⁾ The year of the publication of this anthology, 1968, saw the publication of Sollers' *Logiques* and *Nombres*. Both texts, critical and fictive respectively, announced a break with the dominant literary ideology of realism and both confirmed Sollers' distance from the *nouveau roman* at precisely the moment when his reputation in France as a difficult writer and iconoclastic young critic was being confirmed.³⁰⁾ In this connection, and with hindsight, a noticeable feature of Sollers' career can be discerned. '*Le Défi*', which Sollers eventually came to disown, was considered the most difficult of the short stories anthologized in *French Short Stories 1* by its editor. In comparison how much more difficult to read and make critical sense of are Sollers' texts from *Drame* onwards. Especially, except for non-virtuosi readers of French, Sollers' texts of *l'écriture percurrente*, *H* and *Paradis*, are inexorably unreadable; and even for the reader fluent in French unacquainted with Sollers' theoretical aesthetics these texts no doubt appear as defiantly unreadable if not pretentious nonsense. If *H* and *Paradis* were available in English translation the same confused and perplexed response would no doubt be provoked on the part of the educated monolingual English reader.³¹⁾ The perplexing factor regarding Sollers' practice of *l'écriture*

29) Simon Watson Taylor (ed.), *French Writing Today* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1968/New York: Grove Press, 1969), p. 351. This anthology contains 'Background' by Sollers, pp. 250-55 [originally published as 'Background' in *L'Intermédiaire* (Paris : Éditions du Seuil, coll. 'Tel Quel', 1963), pp. 137-47].

30) For an early study in English of the reception of Sollers' work up to the early 1970s see the doctoral study by Roland Champagne, *The Texts and Readers of Sollers' Creative Works from 1957-1973* (Ohio State University, 1974).

31) Only one 3pp extract from *Paradis* has been published in English translation. Cf. Carl Lovitt's translation in *Triquarterly* 38, January 1977, pp. 101-6. This short extract from *Paradis* was reprinted in *Tel Quel*, No. 70, Summer 1977, pp. 7-10 and in David Hayman and Elliot Anderson (eds), *In the Wake of the Wake* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1978), pp. 101-6. Recently it has been anthologized in Patrick French

percurrente is this then: in the early 1980s, when he reverted to the writing of seemingly 'realist' novels *Femmes* (1983) and *Portrait du joueur* (1984), at the same time he continued to compose his on-going *Paradis*.³² Now it is not surprising that *Femmes* has been translated into English given both its accessibility to readers accustomed to the conventions of the realist novel and its interest in feminist themes.³³ The translatability factor here certainly turns upon the amenability of Sollers' novelistic writing in *Femmes* to recuperation by the dominant literary ideology of realism. The fact that Sollers was engaged in a double practice of novelistic writing is not, as it may easily seem, a sign of ideological duplicity. Rather this double textual strategy expresses a singular fictional praxis of challenging the novel form by way of exploiting it whilst going beyond it. The difference of Sollers' project from orthodox novelistic practice resides in its deconstruction or metamorphic exploitation of the conventions which regulate realistic discourse: apparently real characters, with proper names, involved in more or less complex human relationships, living a story, which has a plot, in identifiable situations, societies, which have determinable histories. It is in the extreme semantically indeterminate form of his *l'écriture percurrente*, however, that the undecidable character of Sollers' practice of writing can be witnessed. Here is a lengthy extract from *Paradis* to illustrate the argument.

and Roland-François Lack (eds), *The Tel Quel Reader* (London and New York: Routledge, 1998), pp. 238-41. Lovitt's translation is of the extract of *Paradis* which appeared in *Tel Quel*, No. 62, Summer 1975, pp. 3-6. Similarly, only a short extract from Sollers' *H* has appeared in English translation. Cf. Inez Hege's translation in *The Iowa Review*, Vol. 5, No. 4, Fall 1974, pp. 102-5.

32) Philippe Sollers, *Femmes* (Paris : Éditions Gallimard, 1983) and *Portrait du joueur* (Paris : Éditions Gallimard, 1984). *Paradis II* was published by Éditions Gallimard in 1986.

33) Philippe Sollers, *Women*, trans. by Barbara Bray (New York: Columbia University Press, 1990).

that it sunder flounder your death coma grossly inverted placenta cancer aureola from where i sit i see them drip drop by drop bazooka siphoned typhoon i'm back on the track bascule mask crackled states from forbears' portraits galleries pupils starred waxed flash foundation of aspiration trumpet pup passing on the quotient tidbit idiot famishing flashflood chromos of men sorrel bellows smith whalebone spit nostrils bit jawbones velvet it's the state of quarantine fortified with fever they feel putrid inside blacked-out whence this green slime slick and clotted disrupted duct blowgun of farts for the roast in reality is roasted on void it sounds the vesicle and lover to make sure we're there quick a wink at this masked androgyn ball incubus succubus patched up settings they enter under their limboid lighting scarves of fog sashes of smog pleats of pus flabbied lamella fuzzy medusa look at this flood of lymph in globules narine sockets pinched upper lip in still pout possessing some say the ultimate extract of sperm boiled in ovule leucorrhoea wastes flowering basic wetting forever forgotten manna mob viscerated crust and crunch now they're packed tails plaited rats from plugged holes lead-coated molten shirt well then in the beginning was the waltz absurd gay harmonious java samba or bossa nova but god was jealous and especially his shegod and she took soldering dildo and he swallowed he bromide potion and they froze cakes in the ice screaming and since then sutured vagina bulbed divining rod they speak fraught with sex as if sex submitted to thought and that's that our lives faint away odors sounds colors and touch glycines havens of hazeltrees sap autumn winter shores of summer embrace me better yes there lower now lower still cherry lips hay hair in the cellar rustle of willows in the silo winds winnowing pillows of wheat come tomorrow morn to my room wake me i want to be awakened by you or else sweltering days meeting in the shelter look her hyping on the leaves orangetrees laureltrees lemontrees what can it mean to her my hot turgid cock what is it hangs her up these each she's done smearing it on her lips her breasts she's never done filling up her mouth there aspirating the base balls figs tongue flickering length and breadth tell me when it comes make it come from even further down from the base of your bones³⁴⁾

34) Cf. The beginning of the extract from *Paradis* translated by Carl R. Lovitt referred to in note 29 above. The French original reads as follows:

c'est ça croulez sombrez votre mort coma grossé à l'envers placenta cancer auréole d'où je suis je les vois chutergoutte à goutte bazooka typhon siphonné j'ai de nouveau l'enfilade masque à bascule regards craquelés des portraits d'ancêtres galeries prunelles leur circe entoîlée fond d'aspiration pompe à trompe transmissions du quotient crétin au fretin affamant torrent chromos d'hommes cheval soufflité forge baleine bave naseaux mors habines velours c'est l'état quarantaine

For the reader unacquainted with Sollers' *Paradis* (and *H*) some guidance from Sollers himself regarding the nature of his *l'écriture percurrente* will be helpful.

I speak of *percurrent* writing: that which is capable of retelling under the form of redoubled utterance what is said at every moment. Diversion, integrated aphorism, effaced publicity, automatism, cut-up, routines, nursery rhymes, epiphanies, sequences-hinges in several disjunctive or contradictory space, reversed metrical fables, injected ellipses, rhetoric as far as the eye can see, saturated numberless stories.³⁵⁾

allumé de fièvre il se sentent pourris dedans caviardés d'où ce grouillis vert étroit et caillé tube révolté sarbacane en pet car le rot en réalité se rôtit de vide il sonde la vésicule et le foie pour savoir si l'on est bien là vite un clin d'oeil sur ce bal masqué d'androgynes incubes succubes décors rapécés ils entrent dans leur éclairage limbique écharpes de brume foulards de brouillard plis de pus lamelles flasquées flous méduses regardez ce flot de lymphe en globules narines orbites pincées lèvre supérieur en moue rassurée possédant paraît-il l'extrait ultime de sperme bouille en ovule leucorrhée pertes fleurs blanches mouillure de base toujours oubliée manne tourbe croûton viscéral et crountch les violà tastés queues tressées rats de trous en hutoir plombé fondu merde or donc au commencement était las valse absurde gaie harmonieuse java samba ou bossa nova mais dieu fut jaloux et surtout sa dieue et elle prit son gode à souder et il avala sa potion bromure et ils se figèrent gâteaux dans la glace et depuis vagin suturé zizi ampoulé ils parlent en étant sexés comme si le sexe se laissait penser et violà nos vies s'évanouissent odeurs sons couleurs et touchers glycines coins de noisetiers séve automne hiver bords d'été embrasse-moi mieux oui là plus bus non plus lèvres cerises foin cheveux dans la cave froissement d'osier au grenier tapis plancher viens demain matin dans ma chambre réveille-moi je veux être réveillé par toi ou encore soirs d'orage rendez-vous ou garage tiens ici couchés sur les feuilles orangers lauriers citronniers qu'est-ce que ça peut être pour elle ma queue durcie chaude qu'est-ce qui peut l'accrocher là chaque fois elle n'en finit pas de s'en barbouiller les joues les seins elle n'en finit pas d'y bloquer sa bouche aspirant le fond couilles figues frôillant la langue longuer et larguer dis-moi quand ça vient fais-le venir encore de plus loin depuis ton fond d'os

35) Philippe Sollers, 'Deux interventions aux Etats-Unis', *Tel Quel*, No. 69, spring 1977, p. 8.

As thus characterized by Sollers himself what is this if it is not a veritable polymorphously perverse postmodern gallumaufray!..perhaps only comparable with Joyce's incomparable poplymorphous paranomasia in *Finnegans Wake*.

'Percurrent' writing, which Sollers first used in composing *H* (1973) and which he continued to develop in *Paradis* (1981) and *Paradis II* (1986), is not a 'technique' of writing as such but rather a radically different approach to the production and on-going reflexive and reflective interpretation of fictive sense. The dynamic of *l'écriture percurrente* is, for Sollers, one in which 'the eye gives way to what the ear remembers'.³⁶⁾ Thus initiation into *l'écriture percurrente* requires a special kind of mimetic identificatory reading. The use of the intellectual imagination asked for, Sollers states, is to that 'One must mime the flight of ideas in order to make the ideas flee before thought'.³⁷⁾ Hence the reader who is able to surrender to this mode of reading will realize that *l'écriture percurrente* is no mechanical process. That is it cannot be reduced to automatism, collage or cutting-up as if the textual material pre-exists the process of textual production. For Sollers the *form* of *l'écriture percurrente* is characterized by two simple principles: the absence of all 'visible' punctuation and a rigorously repetitive metric with rhymes. First and foremost Sollers wants to foreground and emphasize the *sound* of his 'percurrent' language thereby producing what he refers to as a certain kind of fictional 'body', whilst at the same time ejecting everything apparently corporeal. The clinical consequence of this gesture is to be carried out by bodily sex in its forbidden dimension. For Sollers this sexual *délire* is transgressive in the following way:

36) '*Vers la notion de Paradis*'. *Tel Quel*, No. 68, Winter 1976, p. 102. Republished in *Théorie des exceptions*, op. cit., p. 196. In a footnote Sollers writes: '*Courir à travers : per omnes civitates percurrat oratio mea...(la crainte se glissant tous les coeurs)*' ['to run across: through all communities runs my discourse (fear penetrates all hearts)']. See also '*Vers la notion de Paradis (2)*', *Tel Quel*, No. 75, Spring 1978, pp. 92-99.

37) *Ibid.*

it is a matter of *seeing* through the bodies the way in which these bodies prevent themselves from seeing themselves as bodies, the way in which they squat on their body-hampered thinking, the terrible irony which swamps them in their sex, to which they cling as to the principle of mystification. Which is not to say more than that bodily sex forbids it to the body which clings to its sex: men one side, women on the other. There they are, they think they can see one another, each on his or her side, they hate one another mortally, they call life, thought, history, politics, events, love, the circulation of this death in death.³⁸⁾

Thus from the tremulous sexual human body to a planetary optic Sollers does not so much mix languages in *Paradis*; instead he 'gestures' (mimes/mimics) with them. His aim is to catalyze, to elicit, to provoke the thought which shows up the dissimulatory nature of all thought insofar as it is thought *in language*. Thus, for Sollers, we, the living, speak to disguise our thought but our thought disguises us even as we speak. For Sollers all human communication, then, involves power, secrecy, a 'whirlwind of hilarity and horror' and, if we appreciate the comedy in human intercourse through language, the salutary insight that we are subject in our experience to the endless transition of sensation which thought, through language, endeavours to catch but which it can never do so once and for all with certainty. Thus there is a tendentiousness in Sollers' practice of *l'écriture percurrente* in *Paradis* which concentrates on the continual passage of fragments of experience which are never ever experienced as such. Rather, to repeat, they have to be — can only be — mimed or mimicked. For Sollers, his 'paradise' is tragic precisely because it is comic according to the paradoxical Sadean formula that 'everything is paradise in this hell'.

It is another irony of Sollers' project of *l'écriture percurrente* that the quotation which he used as the epigraph for '*Le Défi*', taken from André Breton's *Nadja*, can help to throw light on the dilemma the uninitiated reader has to negotiate

38) Ibid.

when trying to make sense of this apparently unreadable (because) unclassifiable mode of avant-garde writing. The quotation reads, in translation: 'It is by an extreme power of defiance that certain very rare beings, who have everything to expect and everything to fear from one another, can always recognize each other.'³⁹⁾ Perhaps, then, it is only a certain kind of *defiant* reader who is able to 'enter' the Sollersian text? And, to state the obvious, such a reader is not one who rejects or says 'no' to Sollers' *l'écriture percurrente* because of its seeming difficulty. The defiant reader is rather one who reads Sollers in a different *situation* and with a different attitude from the reader who expects an immediate ideological recognition effect on encountering any fictional text - including even a difficult one. The defiant reader is patently not a *reactive* reader; that is, the half-knowing one who resents being faced with a seemingly obscure endless stream of writing with no punctuation. The defiant reader is one who does not succumb to resentment when confronted with experimental avant-garde writing. Indeed, the defiant reader is the reader who goes against the reaction and reductionism of the ideology of reading which, again, is based on the expectation of a more or less immediate recognition effect. The defiant reader resists the latter expectation and is able to engage in a transaction with the Sollersian text which is composed from a situation of writing which defies the comprehension of the reactive reader. The Sollersian text, comprising as it does an open and plural intertextual field, invites a mode of appropriation quite different from the imaginary one which characterizes the conventional mode of entry to the nineteenth-century classical realist text and its experimental progeny in the twentieth century. Sollers, thus, in Barthes' phrase, 'refuses to inherit'.⁴⁰⁾ Sollers characterizes this refusal like this:

39) André Breton, *Nadja* (Paris : Éditions Gallimard, 1928), p, 201, note 1.

40) Roland Barthes, 'The Refusal to Inherit', in *Writer Sollers*, op. cit., pp. 69-74.

I only know what I know because I write. A writer is someone who sometimes succeeds in putting himself in the impossible situation of undoing all family ties. This undoing of family ties is only experience consuming the fundamental belief in the possibility of incest.

...

The undoing of all family ties, which also includes the dissolution of all imaginary groupings and, thus, of identifications, introduces the writer...to a radical solitude of language, a sexual solitude...the two solitudes being equivalent and irreducible.⁴¹⁾

For Barthes, Sollers' refusal to inherit the past of French classical and realist writing 'is an act of denial, aimed at casting off the natural right of the old texts. It renders out of date the concepts of *subject, reality, expression, description, story, meaning*, according to which these texts were constructed and read'.⁴²⁾ Sollers' denial has two main aspects: the rejection of the *readability* of the inherited selective tradition of French literature and the dismissal of *representation* as the *raison d'être* of literary writing. To understand the Sollersian text, then, demands that the reader approach it from a social position, marked by a radical solitude of language, which is commensurate with but irreducible to Sollers' changing positions as a writer. This is the stance indeed of Barthes *vis-à-vis* the work of Sollers throughout his *Sollers Écrivain*. For Barthes, as Sollers' avowed *compagnon de route*, is adamant: the writer in contemporary society is abandoned by both the old social classes and is unknown by new ones. Hence he is more and more alone. In 'Dialogue' (the last short piece which Barthes devoted to Sollers but which is published first in *Sollers Écrivain*) Barthes says:

...the writer is alone, abandoned...His fall is all the more serious since he lives today in a society in which solitude itself, in itself, is considered a fault. We accept particularisms, but not singularities; types but not individuals.⁴³⁾

41) Philippe Sollers, 'Je sais pourquoi je jouis', *Tel Quel*, No. 90, Winter 1981, p. 7.

42) Roland Barthes, 'The Refusal to Inherit', op. cit., p. 71.

For Barthes the interpretation and judgement of Sollers' work is fraught with difficulties and risks, the very evaluative enterprise itself being a testimony to the necessity to change the norms of criticism in and through the actual process of critical writing. Barthes holds to this position because he was well aware that there is no constituted critical metalanguage waiting to be put to use on Sollers' texts. Faced with the puzzle and challenge of the Sollersian text the critic needs to dissent from the traditional norms and expectations of criticism. It is surely not a coincidence in this connection to note that the Italian translation of *Sollers Écrivain* has the subtitle '*la dissidenza della scrittura*' (see note 22 above).

At the end of his 'Introduction' to the translation of Sollers' *L'Écriture et l'expérience des limites* the American critic David Hayman writes that 'Sollers, like Derrida, like Barthes, and even Kristeva, to say nothing of Stephen Heath writing on Sollers, is writing *through* his subject towards facets of his own project. The reader is now free to turn back to the originals for a post-Sollersian reading, a *logic-al* one'.⁴⁴⁾ Similarly, Barthes in *Sollers Écrivain* is writing through his subject, Sollers, and the Sollersian texts post-*Drame*, towards his own

43) Roland Barthes, 'Dialogue', in *Writer Sollers*, op. cit., p. 37.

44) David Hayman, 'Introduction' to *Writing and the Experience of Limits*, op. cit. p. xxviii. Hayman has also written on Sollers *H* in 'Nodality or Plot Displaced: The Dynamics of Sollers' *H*', in *Sub-Stance*, No. 43, Vol. XIII, No. 2, 1984, pp. 54-65. Hayman has also conducted substantial interviews with Sollers. See 'An Interview with Philippe Sollers', *The Iowa Review*, Vol 5, No. 4, Fall, 1974, pp. 25-54. This interview was reprinted in *TriQuarterly* 38, Winter, 1977, pp. 54-72 and in David Hayman and Elliot Anderson (eds), *In the Wake of the Wake*, op. cit., p. 122-41. This interview has also been translated into French by Philippe Mikriamos with the title 'Flashback: Premier entretien' (1975) and appear as chapter VI in the lengthy interviews Hayman conducted with Sollers published in *Visions à New York*, op. cit. For another interview with Sollers in English see Shushi Kao, 'Paradise Lost? An Interview with Philippe Sollers', in *Sub-Stance*, No. 30, Vol X, No. 1, 1981, pp. 31-50. See an interview which Sollers gave with Catherine Francblin on the subject of twentieth-century painting in *Flash Art*, No. 129, Summer 1986, pp. 64-5.

project as critic *qua* being Sollers' *compagnon de route*.⁴⁵⁾ But the difference between the reader reading Hayman's translation of *L'Écriture et l'expérience des limites* and the same reader faced with the English translation of *Sollers Écrivain*, is that, in the case of the latter, s/he is not 'free' to turn to a reading of Sollers' avant-garde texts from *Drame* onwards because these works are still not available in English translation. There is a major problem here regarding the reception of Sollers' work in the English-speaking world. The problem is that since the texts of *l'écriture percurrente - H* (1973), *Paradis* (1981) and *Paradis II* (1986) - Sollers has continued to add substantially to his *oeuvre*⁴⁶⁾ only one of which works has

45) For studies of Barthes in English published up to the appearance in English translation of *Sollers Écrivain* see Philip Thody, *Roland Barthes: A Conservative Estimate* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1977); George R. Wasserman, *Roland Barthes* (Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1981); Annette Lavers, *Roland Barthes: Structuralism and After* (London: Methuen, 1982/Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1982); Jonathan Culler, *Barthes* (London: Fontana, 1983); and J. G. Merquior, *From Prague to Paris: A Critique of Structuralist and Post-Structuralist Thought* (London: Verso, 1986), Chapter 4.

46) Works of Sollers not already mentioned either in the main text or in footnotes above are: *Portrait du joueur* (Paris : Éditions Gallimard, coll. 'folio', 1987); *Le Coeur absolu* (Paris : Éditions Gallimard, 1987); *Les Surprises de Fragonard* (Paris : Éditions Gallimard, 1987); *Les Folie Françaises* (Paris : Éditions Gallimard, coll. 'Blanche', 1988); *Les Ambassadeurs* (Paris: La Différence, coll. 'Hors collection', 1989); *Rodin: dessins érotiques, en coll ; avec A. Kirili* (Paris : Éditions Gallimard); *Les Folies françaises* (Paris : Éditions Gallimard, 1988); *De Kooning, vite*, 2 vols (Paris : La Différence); *Le Lys d'or* (Paris : Éditions Gallimard, 1989); *Carnets de nuit* (Paris : Plon, coll. 'Carnets', 1989); *Sade contre L'Être suprême* (Paris : Quai Voltaire, 1989 and 1992); *Face aux ténèbres : Chronique de la folie de William Styron* (Paris : Gallimard, 1990); *(Photos licencieuses de la Belle Époque* (Paris : Éditions Gallimard, 1990); *La Fête à Venise* (Paris: Éditions Gallimard, coll. 'Blanche', 1991); *Improvisations* (Paris: Éditions Gallimard, coll. 'folio', 1991); *Louis Cane : Catalogue raisonné de la sculpture VI* (Paris : La Différence, coll. 'Hors collection', 1991); *Le Rire de Rome : entretiens avec Frans de Haes* (Paris : Éditions Gallimard, coll. 'L'Infini', 1992); *Le Secret* (Paris : Éditions Gallimard, 1993); *La Guerre de goût* (Paris : Éditions Gallimard coll.

been translated into English, *La Fête à Venise*⁴⁷⁾ Not surprisingly, as with *Femmes*, this work was undoubtedly selected for translation because it exploits realist literary discourse and therefore is *readable* and so a translation would for no other reason than this find an audience.

Also in recent years Sollers has received a higher profile in the English-speaking intellectual world on account of a number of studies which have been published on the history of *Tel Quel* through to *L'Infini*.⁴⁸⁾ Since the turn of the

'Blanche', 1994); *Le Secret* (Paris : Éditions Gallimard, coll. 'folio', 1995); *Cesar à Venise* (Paris : Éditions du Regard, 1995); *La cavalier du Louvre : Vivant Denon* (Paris : Éditions Plon, 1995); *Le paradis de Cézanne* (Paris : Éditions Gallimard, coll. 'L'Art et l'écrivain', 1995); *Les passions de Francis Bacon* (Paris : Éditions Gallimard, coll. 'Monographies', 1996); *Picasso, le héros* (Paris : Cercle d'Art, coll. 'Repères contemporain', 1996); *Sade contre l'être suprême précède de Sade dans le temps* (Paris : Éditions Gallimard, coll. 'Blanche', 1996); *Studio* (Paris : Éditions Gallimard, coll. 'Beaux papiers', 1997); *Casanova l'admirable* (Paris : Éditions Plon, 1999); *L'année du Tigre : journal de l'année 1988* (Paris : Editions du Seuil, 1999); *Le dessins de Marcel Proust* (Paris : Stock, 1999). *Un Amour Américain* (Paris : Mille et Une Nuit, coll. 'La petite collection', 1999) *Passion fixe* (Paris : Éditions Gallimard, coll. 'Blanche', 2000); *La Divine Comédie* (Paris : Desclée de Brouwer, 2000); *Francis Ponge* (Paris : Seghers, coll. 'Poètes d'aujourd'hui', 2001); *Eloge de L'Infini* (Paris : Éditions Gallimard, coll. 'Blanche', 2001); *Etoile des Amants* (Paris : Éditions Gallimard, coll. 'Blanche', 2002); *Liberté au XIII siècle* (Paris : Éditions Gallimard, coll. 'folio', 2002); and *Le Divine Comédie* (Paris : Éditions Gallimard, coll. 'Blanche', 2002)

47) Philippe Sollers, *Watteau in Venice: A Novel*, trans. by Alberto Manguel (New York: Charles Scribner's and Sons, 1994).

48) Articles in journals on *Tel Quel*: Mary Ann Caws, 'Tel Quel: Text and Revolution', *Diacritics*, Spring 1973, pp. 2-8; Veronica Forrest-Thomson, 'Necessary Artifice: Form and Theory in the Poetry of Tel Quel', *Language and Style*, Vol. 6, No. 1, pp. 3-26; Leon S. Roudiez, 'Twelve Points from Tel Quel', *L'Esprit créateur*, Vol. XIV, No. 4, Winter 1974, pp. 291-303; Robert Hefner, 'The Tel Quel Ideology: Material Practice upon Material Practice', *Sub-Stance*, No. 8, Winter 1974, pp. 127-38; Lawrence Kritzman, 'The Changing Political Ideology of Tel Quel', *French Civilization*, Vol. 3, 1978, pp. 405-21; Stephen Bann, 'The Career of Tel Quel: Tel Quel becomes L'Infini', *Comparative Criticism*, Vol. 4, No. 1, 1984, pp. 327-39; Danielle Marx-Scouras, 'The

1970s the academic literature on Sollers in English has also increased.⁴⁹⁾ But an

Dissident Politics of *Tel Quel*, *L'Esprit créateur*, Vol. XXVII, No. 2, Summer 1987, pp. 101-8; See also the Ph.D study by Danielle Marx-Scouras, *Toward a 'New Culture': Il Politecnico, Tel Quel and Cultural Renewal* (Columbia University, 1981). *Parallax: a journal of metadiscursive theory and cultural practices* devoted a whole issue to *Tel Quel/L'Infini*: cf. Vol 4, No. 1 'The avant-garde and after: from *Tel Quel* to *L'Infini*', January 1998. In this issue see, especially, Philippe Sollers, 'On *Tel Quel*', pp. 2-6; Julia Kristeva, 'The Samurais *tel quels*', pp. 7-11; Philippe Forest, 'From *Tel Quel* to *L'Infini*', pp. 75-82; Patrick Ffrench, 'Terror or How to have Relations with *Tel Quel*', pp. 83-7. Books on *Tel Quel*: Niilo Kauppi, *The Making of an Avant-Garde: Tel Quel* (Berlin and New York: Mouton de Gruyter, 1994); Patrick Ffrench, *The Time of Theory: A History of Tel Quel [1960-1983]* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995); Danielle Marx-Scouras, *The Cultural Politics of Tel Quel: Literature and the Left in the Wake of Engagement* (University Park, Pennsylvania: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1996). Reader: Patrick Ffrench and Roland-François Lack (eds), *The Tel Quel Reader* op. cit.

- 49) Reference should be made again here to the chapter on Sollers in Stephen Heath's *The Nouveau Roman*, op. cit. and the essays in translation by Derrida on *Nombres* and Kristeva on *H* (see note 14 above). Sollers was been treated as a significant writer in twentieth-century French literature by Leon S. Roudiez in his *French Fiction Today* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1972), Chapter 14, but also in Chapter 15 on Jean Ricardou.. Roudiez has also discussed Sollers in relation to *Tel Quel* in 'Twelve Points from *Tel Quel*', op. cit. Sollers' *Nombres* is considered by Roland A. Champagne in his 'Un Déclenchement: The Revolutionary Implications of Philippe Sollers' *Nombres* for Logocentric Western Culture', *Sub-Stance*, No. 7, Fall 1973, pp. 101-11. See also Champagne's doctoral dissertation on the reception of Sollers' works up to the early 1970s (already referred to in note 28 above): *The Texts and Readers of Philippe Sollers' Creative Works from 1957-1973* (Ohio State University 1974). Champagne published an essay derived from his doctoral study entitled 'The Evolving Art of Literary Criticism: Reading the Texts of Philippe Sollers from 1957-1973', in Philip Grant (ed.), *French Literary Criticism* (South Carolina, 1978), pp. 187-96. Another doctoral study on Sollers from the end of the 1970s is Katherine Kurk's *Consummation of the Text: A Study of Philippe Sollers* (University of Kentucky, 1979). See also Betty McCraw, 'Philippe Sollers and the Scene of Writing', *American Journal of Semiotics*, Vol. III, No. 2, 1984, pp. 97-107. *Paradis* was considered by Hilary Clark in her Ph.D. study *The Idea of a Fictional Encyclopaedia: Finnegans Wake*,

English translation of Philippe Forest's critical study in French of Sollers has yet to appear (duly updated) in English.⁵⁰ Even with this higher intellectual profile the monolingual English-speaking reader of *Sollers Écrivain* is still confined to a *pre-Sollersian* reading. The logic of this situation for the reader who does not know French sufficiently to engage with Sollers' avant-garde texts is that *Sollers Écrivain* has the status of a *pre-text*, that is a text of criticism which assumes the reader is acquainted with the fictional texts, their author, and the conditions of production and reception which the critical text is about. But, as the reader is not, then the critical text takes on a life of its own at the same time that it invites the reader to engage with its object-texts. This was the case with Stephen Heath's pioneering study of the *nouvea roman* at the beginning of the 1970s, which has been symptomatically characterized then as a 'pre-text in Frenglais'.

Mention of Heath's book on the *nouveau roman* returns us to the moment

Paradis, The Cantos (University of British Columbia, 1985). Malcolm Charles Pollard, *The Novels of Philippe Sollers: Narrative and the Visual* (Amsterdam: Editions Rodopi, 1994). More recently see Pollard's 'Philippe Sollers: contract and counter-contract', *Parallax*, Vol 4, No. 1, 1998, pp. 35-46.

50) Philippe Forest, *Philippe Sollers* (Paris : Éditions du Seuil, coll. 'Les Contemporains', 1992). Forest's study concludes with a brief chapter on *La Fête à Venise*, pp. 329-37. Forest has also published a major study of the history of *Tel Quel: Histoire de Tel Quel 1960-82* (Paris : Éditions du Seuil, 1995). See also Nina Zivancevic, *Recherche Philippe Sollers* (Paris : Blandin Neol, 1992); Catherine Clement, *Philippe Sollers: Biographie* (Paris : Juillard, 1995); Pascal Louvrier, *Philippe Sollers : mode d'emploi* (Paris : Éditions du Rocher, coll. 'Littérature', 1996; and Gérard Cortanze, *Philippe Sollers : Vérités and legendes* (Paris: Éditions du Chêne, 2000). In German see Beeke Dummer, *Von der Narration Zur Description: Generative Textkonstitution bei Jean Ricardou, Claude Simon und Philippe Sollers* (Gruner, B.R. Publishing Co, 1988); Beate Sprenger, *Neoavantgardistische Theorienbildung in Italien und Frankreich: Das Emanzipatorische Literaturenconcept von Edoardo Sanguineti und Philippe Sollers*; Ilana Hammerman, *Formen des Erzählens in der Prosa der Gegenwart: Am Beispiel von Philippe Sollers, Robert Pinget und Claude Simon* and Brigitte Chardin, *Sollers, Moravia*.

when Colin MacCabe (*a compagnon de route* of Heath at the time at Cambridge University) wrote his 'Situation' text in which, to repeat, he emphasized that, 'The interrogation needed to enter these texts (those of Barthes, Sollers and Kristeva) is a self-interrogation'.⁵¹⁾ This is also what Hayman means when he speaks of the critic 'writing *through* his subject towards facets of his own project'. It is also and crucially what Barthes' means by insisting on Sollers being a writer in the affirmative association 'Sollers Writer' – that is one who practices this form of self-interrogation and writing through his elected topics towards composing, decomposing and recomposing his own writerly identity. *L'écriture percurrente* is the practice of writerly self-interrogation at the limits of virtual writerly experience. As Barthes was able to identify, the solitude involved in this percurrent practice of writing is far removed from the lazy consumption of socially reductive images of Sollers circulating in the mass media. This is why, Barthes exhorted in the late 1980s *vis-à-vis* Sollers, '...a time comes when social images must be *called back to order*'.⁵²⁾ This reordering of the socially reductive images of Sollers is again necessary in the face of the devastating critical striptease job carried out on Sollers in the public sphere by the late Pierre Bourdieu, himself the erstwhile controversial doyen of French sociology.

In a deliberate exposure of Sollers published in *Liberation* in January 1995 entitled '*Sollers tel quel*' Bourdieu accuses Sollers of being a pseudo-writer who has only produced the simulacrum of literature worth the name.⁵³⁾ For Bourdieu, Sollers bears a false air of culture and, being a latter-day Tartuffe-like figure without scruples, only *mimes* the gestures of great writers. Far from Sollers'

51) Colin MacCabe, 'Situation', op. cit.

52) Roland Barthes, *Writer Sollers*, op. cit., p. 37.

53) Pierre Bourdieu, '*Sollers tel quel*', *Liberation*, 27 January 1995 republished in *Contre-feux: Propos pour servir à la résistance contre l'invasion néo-libérale* (Paris : Éditions LIBRE-RAISONS D'AGIR, 1998), pp. 18-20.

refusal to inherit the past of French classical, romantic, realist and even twentieth-century avant-garde literature being given the status of the ultimate transgressive act, Bourdieu accuses him of prostituting two centuries of struggle for the autonomy of serious literature. In promulgating a cult of transgression Sollers, Bourdieu says, has cynically reduced literary libertinage to its erotic dimension. Bourdieu's Sollers is really only a laughable media star who has compromised a truly radical political critique of the society of the spectacle. The image of Sollers, a *vedette* of the Parisian literary and media scenes, seems to be captured in what Philip Roth says about him in a review of the English translation of *Femmes*:

Anybody out for a good time should read Philippe Sollers. He's the sort of intellectual clown we don't breed in America — urbane, bestial, candid, effervescent, an irrepressible ejaculator of farcical wisdom, a master of good-natured malice, a kind of happy, lively, benign, Celine. (cf. the back cover of the dust-jacket)

But, contrary to Roth's rather ingratiating and mischievous image of Sollers, Bourdieu insists that he is the victim of all the illusions and disillusiones of the French intellectual scene and political life. The reality of Sollers' presenting himself as an *exception*, for Bourdieu, is that he is only the most banal example of the statistically average because 'he is the idealtypic incarnation of the individual and collective history of the ambitions of a whole generation of writers'⁵⁴⁾ who have sold out in one way or other to the system. Sollers' originality — for Bourdieu still thinks Sollers has one — is to have made himself into the theoretician of the virtue of the denial of intellectual treason.

In defence of Sollers it can be said that Bourdieu's acid delegitimation of Sollers is an outright caricature because he fails to deal, at all, with Sollers' *writings*. Against Bourdieu's superficial imagism in a Parisian left-wing daily there

54) Ibid.

is Barthes' assertion — which again needs reasserted — of 'Sollers Writer'. It is surprising that such a master of ideology-critique as Bourdieu commits himself the ideological fallacy of dealing in images at the expense of conceding any apparent meaningful dimension to Sollers' practice as a creative writer and critic. Bourdieu's act of critical *ressentiment* directed against Sollers bears out the view that 'Despised or admired, Sollers is...a target for those who contest his image for want of having read his works'.⁵⁵⁾ Indirectly Sollers offers his own defence when he says that 'a good biography requires, at the same time, distance and precision'.⁵⁶⁾ Likewise any practice of criticism which has integrity requires knowledge of text and context, the writer and his works. In the case of Sollers this means Sollers *qua* *écrivain-scripteur*; that is Sollers the writer, '*Sollers Écrivain*' indeed, who is produced in and through the practice of writing. Bourdieu's scornful attitude towards Sollers can be countered noting what Adorno said about the undialectical trait of all cultural practices cut off from the experience of their object:

Topological thinking, which know the place of every phenomenon and the essence of none, is secretly related to the paranoid system of delusions which is cut off from experience of the object...No theory, not even that which is true, is safe from perversion into delusion once it has renounced a spontaneous relation to the object. Dialectics must guard against this no less than against enthrallment in the cultural object...The dialectical critic must both participate in culture and not participate.⁵⁷⁾

There are implications of this understanding for the translator of Sollers' works. To his credit Philip Thody is aware of the key problem which the translator

55) Gregory Park, '*Le point de vue de Philippe Sollers*', <http://www.mvgale.org/gregfran/Sollers5.html> '*Méprisé ou admiré. Sollers...est une cible pour ceux qui lui contestent son image, à défaut de savoir lire ses livres*'.

56) Philippe Sollers quoted in Gregory Park, *ibid*: '*Une bonne biographie nécessite à la fois de la distance et de la précision*'.

57) Theodor W. Adorno, 'Cultural Criticism', in *Prisms*, trans. by Samuel and Shierry Weber (London: Neville Spearman, 1967), p. 31.

faces when approaching the texts of Sollers - and indeed of the French intellectuals who were associated with *Tel Quel*. The translator confronts a dilemma, a stark choice: either to produce a *semantic* translation which attempts to reproduce the sense and syntax (or apparent non-sense and deviant syntax) of the source text in the target text or s/he endeavours to render a *communicative* translation of the source text placing the emphasis in the translation on the readability of the final target text.⁵⁸⁾ Thody understands that with a semantic (that is more or less literal) translation 'the English version tends to present the uninitiated reader with a text that is almost as difficult as the original French'.⁵⁹⁾ The danger of the alternative for Thody is that the translator, in aiming to produce a text which says what s/he thinks the French means, traduces the meaning of the original for the sake of the communicative clarity of the English translation. There is no rule of thumb solution to this dilemma. The actual practice of translation involves a complex negotiation between semantic detail and precision and communicative clarity and intelligibility, between placing the emphasis on the meaning of the source text or the readability of the target translation. What is certain, for Thody, is that 'It would - and this is the problem...be misleading to translate Barthes into ordinary language. For this would presuppose that you can separate the thing said from the way of saying; and this is an idea which the whole of Barthes' thinking about literature...sought to reject'.⁶⁰⁾ Aware of the difficulties involved in

58) On this distinction see Peter Newmark, *Approaches to Translation* (Oxford: Pergamon Press, Language and Teaching Methodology Series, 1981), especially 'Communicative and Semantic Translation (I)'; Thought, Speech and Translation; and 'Communicative and Semantic Translation (II)', pp. 38-56, 57-61 and 62-79 respectively. See also his *A Textbook of Translation* (New York: Prentice Hall, 1988), Chapter 5 and passim.

59) Philip Thody, 'Introduction' to *Writer Sollers*, op. cit., p. 5. Thody's lengthy 'Introduction' to his translation of *Sollers Écrivain* greatly aids the reader unacquainted with the avant-garde texts of Sollers which Barthes engages with in this work. (Note: Thody's 'Introduction' is 30 pp with 2 pp of notes; the six essays of Barthes make up a total of 64 pp.)

producing a felicitous rendering, which is both cognizant of the meaning of *Sollers Écrivain* and sensitive to the need to communicate Barthes' ideas in as clear readable English as possible, Thody's *modus vivendi* is to have endeavoured to produce, as he puts it, a 'creative tension' between the two approaches. His preference, though, is towards the communicative pole of the translation spectrum.

The aim of this paper has been to consider the question why is it that *Sollers Écrivain* took so long to appear in English translation after Barthes' death in March 1980? A second question implicated in the first is why is that, still, Sollers' texts of *l'écriture percurrent* have not been translated into English? My purpose, in answering these two questions, has been threefold: (1) to offer a critical response to Sollers' avant-garde writings; (2) to consider the mode of reading pertinent to engaging with Sollers' radical apparently non-expressive texts of 'percurrent writing'; and (3) also to give attention to the problems involved in translating them.

60) Ibid, p. 29.

《ABSTRACT》

Roland Barthes의 Sollers *Écrivain*에 관한 논의 및 Phillippe Sollers의 *l'écriture percurrent*의 문학적 수용의 문제*

Alec Gordon

본 논고를 통해 필자는 프랑스의 아방가르드 작가인 Phillippe Sollers(Phillipe Joyaux의 필명, 1936~)에 대한 Roland Barthes의 짧은 평론, *Sollers Écrivain* (1979)의 영역본 출판이 Barthes의 사후에 이루어질 정도로 긴 시간이 걸린 이유에 대해서 고찰해보고자 한다. 아울러 이 문제와 관련하여 본 논고에서는 *H*(1984), *Paradise I*(1981), *Paradise II*(1986)와 같이 *l'écriture percurrent* (percurrent writing : 비종결 형식의 글쓰기) 형식으로 쓰여진 Sollers의 작품들에 대한 영역 작업이 아직 이루어지지 못하고 있는 이유에 대한 논의도 이루어질 것이다.

언급한 논제들에 대한 답변을 위해서는 영역 작업이 이루어진 몇 안되는 Sollers의 작품들—*The Challenge*(1957/66), *A Strange Solitude*(1959/61), *The Park* (1961/68), *Women*(1983/90), *Watteau in Venice*(1991/94)—의 문학적 수용에 대한 고찰과 그의 후기 아방가르드 텍스트들에 대한 영역이 아직 이루어지지 않은 이유에 대한 설명이 필요할 것으로 판단된다.

이 두 논제들에 대한 답변을 제시하는 과정에서의 필자의 목적은 세 가지로 나누어 볼 수 있다. 첫째로 Sollers의 아방가르드 작품들에 대한 비평적 관점을 제시하고자 하며, 두 번째로 구체적 의미를 내포하지 않는 과격한 ‘비종결 형식의 글쓰기’로 쓰여진 Sollers의 텍스트를 다루는 데 있어 필요한 독법을 고찰해보고자 하며, 그리고 마지막으로 Sollers의 작품들을 번역하는 과정

* 영문초록을 국문으로 번역해 준 학생 조교 김용기에게 고마움을 전합니다.

에서 적면하게 되는 여러 문제들에 대한 주의를 환기시키고자 한다.

Sollers의 아방가르드 텍스트를 비평적 관점에서 살펴보았을 때 그의 '비중' 클 해석의 큰쓰기는 '사각적' 구두점의 생략과 엄격하게 반복되는 공용이라는 두가지 원리를 특징으로 한다. '비중' 클 해석의 큰쓰기는 무의식적 큰쓰기, 단어의 분리, 자장가 운용, 에피페니, 수사적 기교, 생략, 운용적 선평법, 언어의 성질(性質), 격언 사용, 문에 띄지 않게 하기, 철학적 빈백 및 운상적 전환을 파 관은 형태의 여러 작문법이 혼합된 형태로 Sollers 자신이 '강화된 선평법'이라고 부르는 형태의 큰쓰기이다.

Sollers의 작품 읽기와 관련된 필자의 입장은 비판적이거나 쉽게 흥분하지 않을 수 있는 데만한 독자뿐만이 그의 텍스트를 가까이 반어들일 수 있다는 것이다. Sollers의 자유로운 글쓰기는 추상적인 의식적 효과를 기대하는 형태의 의 독법은 거부하고 있기 때문이다.

끝 논고는 '비중' 클 해석의 큰쓰기에 따른 Sollers의 텍스트를 영어로 옮기려는 번역가들이 치면할 수 있는 틈에마에 대한 논의로 마무리된다. 논의의 요점은 번역가들은 이 경우 뚜렷한 선평의 문제를 대하게 되는데, 이는 해당 텍스트의 의미와 구문 형태 다시 관해, 텍스트의 단색스적인 부분과 비정상적인 구문 형태를 파악(把握) 언어의 텍스트로 재생하는 의미론적 번역 분석을 때를 것이기, 아니면 최종 번역 텍스트가 그 언어로 제대로 읽히지 않을 것이냐에 중점을 두는 의사 소통 중심의 번역 방식에 관한 문제이다.