

ANALYSIS AND PLURALITY:
MADNESS AND
SHEIKH HAMIDU KANE

THEORY OF THE PROBLEM

The five texts listed at the front of this edition of Diogenes are the work of the "Equipe de recherches en littérature africaine comparée" (ERLAC), which is headed by Mr. Thomas Melone, professor at the Federal University of Cameroon. They are part of a collection of studies carried out by this center, shortly to be published under the title: African Miscellany (Mélanges Africains).

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The body of research on the written word singles out at least two types of words: a pneumatological word which would correspond to "a natural, hieratic form of writing like the inner

Translated by Simon Pleasance.

path”¹; and a second grammatological word. The former is signified through the system of words which constitute the bulk of the text. If the co-existence of these two different groups within the elaboration of the text can give rise to the basis for the principal notion of the plurality of the text,² then it is no less true to say that the second, definitive word (or discourse) is only ever realised to the detriment of the first word (or discourse). The text lives from the way in which its essence has been violated by the requirements of syntax, vocabulary, grammar, fashion, ideology, and so on. This amputation of what is natural—and the stages of this “surgical” act are violent and full of conflict—should never disguise the fact that, in spite of its claims to encompass a certain order of management of the universe, the written text, in its inner essence, does contain certain marks, scars and traces of wounds which bear reference to the fate of the original (primordial) text. It is in this sense that any given text can be considered as an amputated presence. This is a system of present, demonstrated objects, which, in order to portray the most complete representation of life, presupposes an appreciable volume of absences and presences, the revelation of which is of prime importance here. “All works of art or literature are metaphors; they transpose: the visible statue, painting or written text is never examined for its own sake,

¹ Cf. on this subject the excellent work by Jacques Derrida, *De la Grammatologie*, Editions Minuit, 1967.

² In the study I am preparing on *Littérature africaine et analyse textuelle*, I describe the concept of plurality as follows:

A text... is only one possible among other possibles, one project among other projects, starting from a fertilizing dream that has emerged at the very birth of an ordaining adventure. The formation of the dream only ever leads to one possible form. The begetting text, as well as being contemporary with other texts, thus suggests, by the manner of its development, the co-existence, at least in the simultaneity of a text, of an infra, a meta-text, a language, an infra and a meta-language. We shall call this simultaneity of presences the plurality of the text. Now, one must distinguish the plurality of one text and the plurality, the multiplicity of those texts which, in the case of an author for example, enable one to establish in his work the different variants of one and the same essential concern, in order to articulate them, systematically, in order to single out—organically, aesthetically and even ideologically—a general determining direction, a theme. Such texts may be fairly lengthy, fairly numerous and varied. Their total constitution, their fullness, their plurality of particular directions are just as much adjuvants which enable one to discern the dimensions of the plurality of the total text.”

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but is examined by virtue of the fact that it always refers back to an absence”³

This amputated presence is also a sick presence. And, as from now, the text may be considered to be a clinical document; a reading of this document will be able to clear the path for the reader to discover deficiencies, what is missing, what is absent, with a view to an eventual therapy for the speaker (writer). We can go further than this. Namely that, long before he strikes up his relationship with the murderous act of writing, the speaker is already filled with the notion of the evil or ills of the world. As we have said, he starts off from this sensation of malaise, felt in the face of the upheaval of the world, or simply in the face of the incompleteness of the world.⁴ In order to carry on the creation, he introduces a supplement. The driving desire for supplementation, the sense of dissatisfaction, indeed anxiety, these are the indices of the malaise which drives the writer to flee his own unfinished universe and seek refuge in the dream; whence he can descend, having made his interpretations, and construct, by way of his work, a universe which is more idealised, and in addition, more finished. This series of movements which carries the writer away from life and towards the dream, then down from the dream towards a different life, is evidence of a profound discord within him with the present state of affairs or with what has immediately preceded it. It is this discord which inspires all the currents of statement, revival and revolution. Of course, the upheavals which may ensue can differ in their breadth and in their consequences, depending on the historical period and the structures implicit in it, but those who initiate any such changes must, *mutatis mutandis*, and by virtue of their disagreement with the world or its civilization, be considered as doubly sick, both in their discord with Society and in their conflict with the act of writing. The text as illustrated always secretes a monstrous substance. And textual analysis can only realise its full effectiveness if it does so as a total archeological study of the demonstrated and the monstrous.

³ This is the whole problem of the relation between the sign and what is signified.

⁴ Cf. in *Littérature africaine et analyse textuelle* the chapter: “Texte-Contexte-Hors-texte. Analyse textuelle et pluridisciplinarité,” *op. cit.* (to be published) Yaoundé, Editions EPAC, 1972.

The result of the whole not only informs us of the deficiencies, the wounds and the personal griefs of the dissatisfied party, but also of the aspect and topology of those places which represent the stage where the conflict is played out; the result of the whole also tells us of the profound nature of the forces which condition the scope and the dramatization of the conflict.

The hallmark of African literature lies precisely in the fact that its writers define themselves within the framework of this two-headed malaise⁵; the malaise which springs from a state of discord with the universe which disregards their contribution to the history of man and denies them the right to take part effectively in the enjoyment of the common patrimony, and the malaise which springs from a conflict with an official or literary language—which is alien to and runs counter to usage—which merely complicates the deficiencies already accumulated by the sense of malaise, in history. Discords such as this, and the complications they entail, often, if not always, excite a far-reaching disturbance in the personality and in its essential functions at the point when an analysis of the word becomes an ideal area for whoever might want to discover not only the personal problems of the speaker but also the apprehensions and upheavals in worldwide society.

THE AMBIGUOUS ADVENTURE (L'Aventure Ambiguë)

In order to illustrate our proposal, we have chosen to present a series of texts which relate to sickness and which will be analysed in the perspective of a study of the word. The author in question will be the Senegalese Sheikh Hamidu Kane and his book: "*The Ambiguous Adventure*" (L'Aventure Ambiguë). The novel is seldom considered for its initiative cinematic properties. Its greatest and deepest significance nevertheless lies here. A child finds itself involved in a lengthy pedagogic experiment. This includes cycles, stages and rituals. Despite the diversity of the schools and the claims of the various teachers, the search for wisdom fails to crystallize his existence around any totality which might be able to guide man. And this is the

⁵ Read on this subject T. Melone, *De la Négritude dans la littérature négro-africaine*, Paris, Editions Présence Africaine, 1962.

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final failure, the murderous gesture of the madman which corresponds with a profound and secret desire to put an end to these interminable wanderings which, each day, "set you up like some mongrel," by removing you each day from your own nature and your origins.

THIERNO

The novel minutely pinpoints an indissoluble community of sick people: Thierno, the Madman, and Samba Diallo. First of all there is Thierno, the master, at the center of the trio. In his descriptions of the relationship between the aged pedagogue and the young pupil, Sheikh Hamidu Kane himself constantly insists on the extraordinary sympathy which unites the two figures. Whereas—in the author's words—Maitre Thierno would always require bitter pleading for the admission of candidates to his Koranic school, Samba Diallo's admission, on the contrary, was achieved on his own insistence, as if, like some visionary, he had just perceived, just read in the child's nascent personality those talents and possibilities which would be capable of grandiose development, and which therefore corresponded to his own conception of sainthood; talents, in effect, which he would try to develop to the highest point possible for the service of God and the salvation of the Diallobé. The portrait of Thierno offered by his own disciple will give us some idea of the esoteric, almost teratological atmosphere of the Koranic school, and the opinion and image which Samba Diallo constructs of his teacher. We are told that the author of the account is an observer endowed with exceptional intelligence, but also with a certain charisma. At first encounter he penetrates the enigma surrounding Thierno and the short piece which sums up his observations is presented, essentially, as a precious piece of clinical information.

"Trembling and submissive, the child once again started reciting the impassioned psalmody of the incandescent verse. He repeated it until he was almost unconscious.

"Having recovered his composure, the teacher was plunged deep in prayer. The child had learnt his lesson that morning.

“At a signal from the teacher he had tidied up his tablet. He did not move; he was absorbed in an examination of the teacher, whose profile he could now see. The man was old, thin and emaciated. Completely dried up by his fasting. He never laughed. The only moments of enthusiasm which showed themselves in him were those during which, when he was plunged in his mystic meditations or listening to the word of God being recited, he would stand up stiffly and appear to detach himself from the ground, as if levitated by some inner force. On the contrary, there were innumerable moments when, driven into a fury by the idleness or silliness of a disciple, he would unleash himself into acts of violence of an unimaginable brutality. It had been observed, however, that these violent outbursts were part and parcel of his concern for the disciple at fault. The higher his esteem for a boy, the more uncontrolled his fits of anger. In his fury candles and blazing logs, anything which came to hand, would serve to deal out the punishment. Samba Diallo recalled how one day, seized by a demented rage, the teacher had hurled him to the ground and kicked and stamped upon him furiously, as certain wild animals do with their prey.”⁶

Maître Thierno, in this important passage, appears as someone abnormal, a sick person who surrenders to practices which are incompatible with his years, and imposes on his body an excessively rigorous regimen (fasting) which gives him the appearance of a weird, skeletal man (withered, thin and emaciated), incapable of emotion (he never laughs), in other words, a totally dehumanized being. Although he is indifferent to everything around him, Thierno is subject to fits of fantastic rapture, and when he is gripped and possessed by mystic passion after the correct recitation of the “incandescent verse” something like an inner force seems to raise him up from the ground. His fits of rage—which occur decidedly too frequently—are lunatic (mad, demented or furious). They are violent and brutal, and go beyond the extent of a wild animal’s treatment of its prey; he punishes uncontrollably, and resorts to the most inhumane of implements (candles, blazing logs, anything...); he even goes

⁶ C. H. Kane, *L’Aventure Ambiguë*, Julliard, 1966, pp. 37-8.

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so far as to hurl (headlong) his puny victims to the ground and trample them underfoot—"furiously."

What therefore emerges from this portrait—whether it is a question of ascetic practices, the mystic life or character data—tells us that, whether observed in a state of relative equilibrium or in a state of crisis, the holy man, in all circumstances, reveals the clinical symptoms of an exacerbated neurosis, closely linked with an excessive form of physical constraint, and mental and mystic restraint: we are reminded here of the "hal" of Senegalese Sufism, which, when too prolonged, prepares the fatal way to a state of imbalance and above all insanity.

THE MADMAN

Now, curiously enough, as the novel gradually unfolds and his state of isolation becomes apparent, this same Maitre Thierno becomes deeply involved in the pervading friendship of a strange man nicknamed the madman, who refuses to leave his side and finally executes Samba Diallo, as if spurred secretly to do so by the bewitching personality of Thierno. But who is this madman? A basically instable character, escaped from the soil on which he was born, and since returned home after a sojourn in the West which was marked by his participation in the war, with its easily deducible subsequent traumas. From the time he makes his first appearance in the novel the madman is a person of "unusual aspect"; his eyes house "a ceaseless anxiety."

"You would have said the man knew some secret which would hurt the world, and, by constant effort, strove to prevent any outward manifestation of it. Then the restless changeable expressions on his face, reduced to something scarcely born, caused one to doubt that the brain of the man could contain so much as a lucid thought."

Such, then, is the madman, thus nicknamed by the people; a volubile word in other respects. His anecdotes are so "extravagant" that as he relates them he starts to "relive the circumstances of his story, as if in a state of delirium." As an example,

the following is one such anecdote which describes his first contact with the West.

“And here is what the madman said:

I disembarked one morning. As soon as I set foot in the street I could feel an unutterable anguish. It seemed to me that my heart and body were shrivelling up. I shuddered and came back into the vast hall on the quayside. My legs felt weak and trembling. I felt a huge desire to sit myself down. All around me the tile-flooring stretched out like a shining mirror and echoed with the click-clack of shoes. In the middle of the vast hall I saw a collection of padded armchairs. But hardly had my glance fallen on them than I felt a new surge of shrivelling, as if my whole body were undergoing some unmistakable upheaval. I put my suitcases on the floor and sat down on the cold tiles. The passers-by around me stopped in their tracks. A woman came up to me. She said something to me. I thought I heard her asking me if I felt all right. The upheaval in my body slowed down, in spite of the chill of the floor which seemed to touch my very bones. I flattened my hands on the shiny tiling. At the same time I felt like taking off my shoes and letting my feet touch the cold, pale-green, shiny mirror. But I was vaguely aware of some incongruousness. I stretched out my legs, and felt them come in contact, all the way down to my toes, with the block of ice.”⁷

The main point of this passage is the act of recording. We know absolutely nothing of the identity, personality and previous facts about the recorder. To us he seems to be describing his mental and psychic state, and his behavior, by giving his own observations on the identity of the speaker. The speaker, he says, is a sick person, a madman, a man from a world which is different from ours, from the normal world; a world which is set in a different order.

We shall perceive the nature of this difference in the course of a narration which is studded with quite chatty symptomatic scars and traces, enabling us to determine fairly precisely the extent of the remove which separates the behavior of the madman from so-called normal behavior. The passage, in this

⁷ C. H. Kane, *op. cit.* p. 110.

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instance, which will serve as a clinical document—that is, if it is the direct and totally unaltered transmission of the madman's words—presents a determining characteristic: it is a narrative. The madman relates, today, something which took place at an earlier date. This transfer of a past event into the present time—need one in fact underline this?—calls upon the power of the memory—the essential adjuvant of the intelligent person—to achieve the most faithful rendering possible. Memory of sensations, sounds, colors, positions, relationships, forms, configuration and so on. To produce the greatest effect, memory is always well assisted by attentive observation which will record details: this is another index of integral intelligence, which gives rise to coherence and organisation.

What strikes one about the madman's address is an obvious spirit of sequel. The sequences are presented to us in a strict succession: the disembarkation (I disembarked), the tentative exit (set foot in the street), the return inside (I came back into the vast hall), the identification and reconnaissance of places (I saw, my glance fell upon...), the search for a comfortable position (put down my suitcases), and finally the right position (the sitting position...) Towards the end we meet an intermediary, whose initiative is outside the madman: the intervention of the woman. No apparent detail is missing; all the episodes, which have an everyday, banal atmosphere to them, devolve in slow motion. The eye can record them more easily and the memory can preserve them more faithfully.

The topology of the places in question is observed with a significant precision. The positions of the objects are situated with a very exact awareness of the distribution of physical spaces: under me, in the center, round about, around me. This roving eye enables the sequences to be recounted in strict succession. The country is developed (quayside, hall) and seems to be geometrically organised (street). Life is felt to have an immediate dimension (vast hall, vast room, collection of armchairs), with a marked tendency to luxury and comfort (the shining mirror of the flooring, the padded armchairs, luggage). Similarly the form which the nature of the places takes on to realise a function of collective service, the beneficiaries of which are indicated either metonymically (click-clack of shoes) or anonymously (passers-by, a woman). Finally the reference to the climate

(shudder in the street, icy floor, cold tiles, cold, pale-green shining mirror, block of ice) suggests to us a cold temperate climate to which the African is unaccustomed and in which he finds himself, automatically, ill at ease.

The alliance of the form, nature and function of the physical spaces suggests an intelligence which masters the work of this material construction in order to react to the rigors of the climate. This is what is known as Western civilization: enormity, comfort, service. Nevertheless, the madman does not appear to appreciate the effectiveness of these things. The division of the universe into something outwardly hostile and cold and something inwardly warm and human has not done away with the chill of the tile-flooring and the more or less general indifference of the people around. The madman is capable not only of identifying the places and establishing certain elementary relations with them (hall-refuge, suitcase-ground); but the higher relations are completely beyond him. He is well aware of the chill of the tile-flooring and the click-clack of the shoes which might also indicate the movement of people who are keeping moving so as not to have cold feet. But he is not really surprised that it is cold in the hall and, *a fortiori*, does not conclude that this might be because the central-heating is out of order. The only noise he is aware of is the sound of the shoes; at no stage does he mention the absence of communication between travellers; he does not establish any connection between the climatic coldness and the human coldness. If he can perfectly grasp the special links, he is not capable of making any major link-up, or any determining reference, or any significant connection. His memory, the internal coherence of his narrative, and his spirit of sequel all remain at an elementary level; they are at the level of a different order. It is this difference which defines and explains his solitude, his malaise over joining the crowd, his incongruousness, but if he indicates that he is aware of this, it is, self-avowedly, nothing more than a vague awareness.

Perhaps we should refer back to his psychological state of mind in order to explain this type of extinction of co-ordinating intelligence. The first contact with the West entails, over and above the first steps taken, an almost total loss of physical control of the body. This physical loss of control is as if imposed on him from without by a sort of fatality, whose origin or force

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he cannot possibly locate. The crystallization of the *I*, the mind which is still lucid and aware of its sickness and, from time to time, capable of some initiative, even if only fragmentary, this gives even greater relief to the attacks of the sickness, the clinical signs of which are borne out by an obvious physical dis-adjustment: simultaneous weakness and trembling of the legs, bodily upheaval, unmistakable agitation throughout the body, the new surge of contraction. A physical dis-adjustment of this kind, starting gradually and reaching the level of paroxysm, destroys the organism and its classical functions, and as a result of the effects of excessive psychosomatic tension provokes a "huge desire to be seated" in the traumatised party.

From now on the functions of his organs are perturbed and reduced. Only the traumatising emotions of the sickness are perceived with pain (*I* felt). The intelligent perception of the universe is made by approximation (it seemed to me). In this atmosphere of uncertain visibility, nature becomes transformed, even poeticised, by a qualifying use of adjectives or an almost systematic use of adjectives which opens out into the dream, into something else: first steps, unutterable anguish, vast hall, weak and trembling legs, huge desire, shining mirror, vast room, padded armchairs, unmistakable upheaval, my whole body, cold flooring, cold, pale-green, shining mirror. This transformation of the world is often effected excessively by the effect of multiplication or hyperbolization: unutterable anguish, vastness of the hall, collection of armchairs, shrivelling, upheaval, total agitation of the body, heart and body together. The retention of the only strong (shining mirror) or accumulated (pale-green and shining mirror) colors corresponds to this hyperbolization of the universe, as does the almost instinctive quest for the only emotions strong enough to counter-balance the excessive agitation of his body.

In this narrative by the madman there are, in effect, two clearly distinct moments. A first moment in which the forces of nature—the cold, the sickness and their substitutes—perceived by way of their huge power, drive the traveller back into the refuge (toward the hall), almost to the point of crushing his whole body. Then, secondly, having identified the physical spaces and decided where he might be best off, the madman takes his initiatives—struggle, riposte, resistance. He takes some action:

puts down his suitcases, sits himself down, takes off his shoes, stretches out his legs.

Here we find ourselves having to make a detailed analysis of his behavior. The suitcase is put on the ground (normal), the madman sits down on the floor (abnormal: the armchairs are a "collection"), he feels like taking off his shoes (abnormal by the rules of hygiene, decency and prudence), he stretches out his legs (abnormal, this is not prudent when it is cold in Europe). However, seen from the inner viewpoint of the madman, there is a faultless logical scheme in the sequel of his actions. The suitcase is set down in the right place, the madman sits down in the right place because he is in the habit of sitting on the ground. As a good Senegalese Moslem he feels like taking off his shoes and stretching out his legs. And it is a fact that he is in no doubt of the effectiveness of his various actions: the upheaval in his body slows down.

In the light of the situation his behavior violates hygiene, decency, prudence and is evidence of an astonishing degree of masochism. Already a victim of the cold, the madman is looking for even greater cold; he flees the outside, but not in order to protect himself inside; his gestures of imprudence and dysfunctioning are pushed to the limit. The remove between himself and the others is, in the first instance, of a physiological order. He puts up with more than is conceivable, and even feels better for it. In the second, it is of a cultural order: he does not know how to take advantage of the comfort put at the disposal of any and everybody, in order to combat the rigors of nature. This is an original person, an eccentric. But he is also a man coming from another culture, and his conduct remains faithful to it. This essential fidelity conditions his personality, his character, his habits, his wonts, and explains the violence of his encounter with the cold and the dissidence of his contact with civilization. The madman is also a man alone, at variance with the crowd, having no contacts, faced with a sickness and with death, and only able to reckon on his own resources, never on the assistance of anyone else. And confronted by this general hostility from the universe he develops a heroic energy, which is a tribute to his endurance and to his culture.

Contact, however, is offered him from the exterior. A woman says something to him: why a woman? Faced with this general

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indifference and this wretchedness, the helplessness of the foreigner, the woman's gesture, the spring of pity, sympathy, sensitivity, this is the gesture of the mother, source of consolation and fecundity. But this woman is also the symbol of humility, of discreetness in the very midst of all this insolent pride which issues from the preying creatures with their "click-clacking shoes." The woman's sympathy clearly recalls—a Marxist reminiscence or a memory of the army?—the universal solidarity of the disinherited and their common tongue which lies beyond any linguistic communication. The madman interprets the woman's words and attributes to them the sense of benevolence; and, as if by chance, this solicitude from the woman comes at a moment when the tension in his body has begun noticeably to uncoil.

But this solidarity at the level of the meeting of consciousnesses is surmised rather than spoken and communicated. The incomunicability is total. If the madman attempts to interpret for himself the words of the woman, he makes no response; he says nothing, and he does not smile; nor does he protest. He remains indifferent, in the pursuit of his own train of thought; closed in his own culture. Here the remove is a total one. It explains the unaccustomedness of his body to the change in climate, and the incongruousness of his behavior in the face of a new, novel environment, even just the strangeness of the trappings. The madman is only mad in relation to a certain cultural order which is alien to his way of life, his way of feeling, living, and being at ease, at one. And it is significant that in order to put himself at ease he should set down his suitcases, and his shoes symbolize the encumbrance with which civilization violates the nature, the originality of man, without managing to achieve a state of happiness in the person it claimed to be setting free.

There is thus a whole cultural, even ideological system running beneath the supposed dysfunctioning of the behavioral attitudes of the madman. In him there is something like a coherent will to emphasize his different-ness by multiplying the violations of the code of civilized people, and at the same time to proclaim his fidelity, his faith in an African custom, which, whatever one thinks or says, continues to give him happiness. The madman is only at ease—organised and happy—in the universe of his

madness, in the order of the nature and origins of this universe. Is he really mad? Our reply would be less categorical, and less suspect too if a recorder, acquired by the form, nature and function of the physical places, had not taken pains to warn us—on what right?—that this “madman” is really mad.

SAMBA DIALLO.

So between Thierno and the madman lies the fate of Samba Diallo. If he owes his initiation to the one, he dies a victim of the other. In the name of the same principles in each instance... Megalomaniac, visionary, Maître Thierno teaches a rather special conception of sainthood. He instructs his pupils how to recite the word of God in the way in which God himself pronounced it, and God help anyone who doesn't give a good performance at recital!

The word which comes from God, he said, must be spoken precisely in the manner in which it pleased Him to fashion it. Any person who obliterates it deserves to die!!!

From the moment when Samba Diallo shows that he is not qualified to recite his prayer correctly, his death seems to fit perfectly into the logic of discipline inspired by Maître Thierno, and the joy which he shows at the moment of foundering testifies—over and above a clear-cut case of masochism—to a deep harmony between the doctrinaire and accusatory omnipresence of the Maître, the criminal gesture of the madman, and desire of the dying party to accept his present destiny so that he may continue this initiatory pilgrimage into a meta-universe; the pilgrimage was a failure on earth, but in the following stage he holds out the hope that it will be positive and bright. By one's allegation of this remarkable community of mystic participation, can one thus, in respect of the “Ambiguous Adventure” (*L'Aventure Ambiguë*), also speak of an eventual kinsman-like community between the famous Maître of the Koranic school, and this Samba Diallo, his former pupil, who, at the conclusion of this painful and many-staged itinerary, founders in a sort of ecstatic madness (craziness) when he is

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struck by the madman and, delirious with joy, approaches the fatidic moment of the end?

The text which describes this concluding episode is a solemn hymn which, in the most classical tradition of Western mysticism—Plotinian as well as Christian—celebrates the de-alienating beauty of this instant in which man, formerly crushed by the weight of existence, waits to be ultimately able to liberate himself by dissolving in the cosmos. Admitting his own failure in the history of the world, this world, and desperately awaiting the liberating quietude of another paradise, the experience of which he proclaims as being the most complete of all, Samba Diallo writes the finest poem of his life at this moment:

The instant is the riverbed of my thought. The pulsations of instants have the same rhythm as the pulsations of thought; the breath and inspiration of thought flows in the blow-tube of the instant. In the sea of time the instant bears the image of the profile of man, like the reflection of the kail citron tree on the shining surface of the lake. In the fortress of the instant, man is truly king, for his thought is omnipotence, when his thought is. Wherever it has passed across the pure blue crystallizes into forms. Life of the instant, ageless life of the instant which lasts, in the flight of your transport man is created indefinitely. At the heart of the instant, this is where man is immortal, for the instant is infinite, when the instant is. The purity of the instant is fashioned from the absence of time. Life of the instant, ageless life of the reigning instant, man displays his infinite self in the bright arena of your never-endingness! The sea! Here's the sea! Hail to thee, sea, wisdom refound, my victory. The limpid beauty of your surge waits on my glance. I am looking at you, and you harden into Being. I have no limits. O sea, the limpid beauty of your surge waits on my glance. I am looking at you, and you glow back at me, limitless, I want you, for eternity.⁸

Now the preceding text also has a quality of crazedness. But in this instance one should no longer proceed from the point of departure of an examination of conducts and behaviors, but

⁸ C. H. Kane, *ibid.*, pp. 208-9.

from an analysis of the proposals, considered in the light of their coherence, in their conformity with a certain structure of what is normal. Here too the impression one gets is that of an abnormal figure, gripped in the nebulous moment of agony. The discourse is pervaded by an unsettling obsession: the obsession of the lapse of time considered in its simultaneity and the upheaval of the instant, contrary to this succession of episodes, whose composition gives birth to time, in an historical sense. Possessed by the mirage of this new and atomic dimension of the world to which he aspires, the speaker, by using eleven different and collectively enhancing metaphors, tries to translate for us, as if they were a perceptible reality, the vision-filled and traumatizing qualities of this meta-universe which is the antithesis to our own.

Evoked in this way, the new reality—or is it a surreality?—appears as if it is endowed with an extraordinary polymorphism. At once a place (bed, blow-tube, fortress, heart, arena), a vital movement alive with pulsations and rhythms, the instant is also a vitalizing structure, just as it is absence (the absence of time) and presence (in as much as it lasts). The esoteric nature of the whole—a very beautiful prose poem—immediately places us in the being of the ecstatic person; this is also made clear by the double existence of a language linked to historicity and a meta-language allied to the proclaimed destiny of a meta-universe.

For at every moment Samba Diallo is referring to two realities, one of which, the old reality (river, time and history) is denied in favor of the other (sea, instant and death); and he strives to have us accept the meta-historicity of this.

The historic quality is signified by a symptomatic vocabulary which is extremely revealing, suggesting as it does the flow of time (river), the fullness of the lapse of time (sea), the government of men (fortress, king, omnipotence, reign, arena), man's ambition to shape his destiny (crystallizes into forms, life, is created, transport, displays, immortal). The data of the language thus allow for reconstitution of a history—that of Samba Diallo—from the time of its origins in the bosom of the reigning dynasty of the Diallobé right up to its tumultuously disputed passage to the heart of the materialistic West, through the stages of the long and extensive heuristic adventure (pulsations, rhythms of thought) aimed at inventing the necessary equilibrium, by means of the fluctuations and contradictions of destiny, and by

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reconciling the exigencies of the service of God and wisdom with the historical entreaties of the human and of the sanity of his body. The conclusion of this adventure-in-the-world clearly singles out a frustration of the itinerant party in the face of the failure of his attempt and a refusal of history considered as responsible for this tragic destiny.

Nevertheless, Samba Diallo only confesses that he is vanquished in the temporal order, that is, in the universal order. His quest for wisdom and knowledge carries on, but in a different order, which transcends the present, perhaps when it has materially and dialectically destroyed it?—Freudian zoophrenia? Understood in this vision, and in spite of its “difference,” the instant is, in its state of being, like a structure which repeats the dimensionality of historicity—in a spatial, temporal and mystical sense. And because of this, if it destroys the historical aspect by the effect of sublimation operated by the desire for escape and purification, it at the same time precipitates, under the effect of an ill-identified reagent—but one which is in a state of neurosis and mentally off-balance—a totally new reality, endowed with an absolutely autonomous life of its own, a life which is coherent, satisfying for the mind that has created it, and what is more, we are told, superior to life in a temporal context.

By thus refusing to incarnate himself in our time, and in our history, in order to take refuge in the instant, the visionary inaugurates the new phase, and discovers at least that he is free. This is first and foremost an intellectual and philosophical liberty, which has stripped him of the type of knowledge which alienates him from this world, and enabled him to rediscover true “knowledge” (or wisdom), just when he is about to enter the realm of the “bright arena.” The “limpid quality” in his eye, its boundless power, henceforth underlies the omnipotence of his new self, a power as vast as the sea itself which challenges and rejects any measurable concept of time, and, at once intelligible and confounded, heads for the realm of meta-temporality, with eternity.

The evidence of the kinsman-like relationship between the master and the disciple, which we noted above, imposes itself automatically. Being a kinsman or relative transcends any participation in the same ethical, ethnic and cultural heritage, and

extends to a similar appreciation of the historical datum, to a similar expression of human dissatisfaction, to a similar sacrificial practice, to a similar faith in the divinatory and prophetic power of the repeated word. All reside identically in the state of permanent hypertension, and the weariness which results from this—primarily physical and mental—precipitates them into an identical state of unruly behavior, which is dangerously excessive for the order of the world because it is possessed with a quality of ecstatic variance. With astonishing ubiquity, both simultaneously postulate a painful situation in time and a happy participation in the realm of the meta-temporal, in the instant.

The destiny of Samba Diallo—the intellectual, chatterer and blubberer, totally unconcerned by any efficient praxis, absolutely alien to any thought of participation—in a concrete sense—in the task of his country's development, this destiny, thanks to the laws of a certain notion of pre-formation, have an indication of the end. For him, the miracle is worked, fortunately, at the conclusion of his adventure, when a hand (the hand of an assassin, and a crazy one at that) spares him the vision of the eschatological drama. Maître Thierno is not given this chance, and—though one wonders whether this is unjust or the novelist's cynicism—he is able to contemplate the ensuing disaster, as he wants to, of his masochistic pedagogy. Samba Diallo's failure is primarily his own failure, the failure of his megalomania, the failure of his ambition to try and match up to God, at any price, in the omnipotence of his creative word.

The Moslem religion, as presented to us here in its liturgical manifestations as well as in its psycho-sociological consequences, is authentically Senegalese; it is a cross-breeding of ethical traditions, inherited from Arabia and from the Negro continent, with the paganization of Islam and the remodelling of this imported religion in accordance with the most secular traditions and values of the Diallobé people. The conquest of a divinatory and prophetic power as a result of an individual initiation based on invocations is an age-old pagan tradition, even if the text, which has to be repeated several times until a state of total exhaustion is achieved, is made up of phrases and sentences taken from the Koran, which are intended to evoke the communion between God and the believer. Once in the period of the "hall," where he scorns the world and takes refuge in the

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divine absolute, the believer shuns any rational control, by virtue of varying degrees of asceticism, because he is astray in the divine. With its super-rogatory or sacred formulae, repeated day and night to the point of psychosomatic madness, the nobiliary statue which bestows the perfect knowledge of the Koran coincides with the structure of a pagan tradition of castes, at the same time as it elevates the person reciting to the throne of the Saint, once he has reached the supreme level of mystical possession. Transcending this by their caste, the Saint and the madman, in a remarkable trans-valuation of values, are merged into one and the same experience of the mystical life, in the many-valued one-ness of one and the same destiny.

And furthermore this itinerary—no less strange in as much as it never ceases to cause anxiety—leads to this strange syncretism of values and states of being. By the new purifying tension which it imposes on the believer, and by the enhancing coincidence of values which concur with its realisation, the Marabout practice of the Islamic religion—more so than blood—enables one to raise up the recipient who is possessed by the incandescence of the sacred verse towards the radiant peaks of the sanctifier. But once a saint, the saint reveals himself as a madman too—whose madness is excited by the quest for the ideal; a quest which is fine and generous in its motivations, grandiose and romantic in its paroxysm, pathetic and tragic in its consequences, proud and intransigent in its historicity. And this Marabout wisdom leads to this very madness. It provides the essence of its condemnation—because it is precisely a matter of choosing between madness and wisdom, between the mystic and neurosis—by condemning time and history, according to Thierno, Samba Diallo also sets himself up as the grave-digger of this paganized Islam, whose real “structure” constitutes the “tide of time”; at the same time he preaches an inner return to the sources, to the rebirth of the world, to that paradisaical moment which will burst forth with the radiant light of an Islam purified of all its pagan remnants. Is it not precisely this restoration of Islamic orthodoxy, dear to certain Toucouleur elites, that one sees in outline behind the material and spiritual chaos which is incarnated in *L’Aventure Ambiguë* by Thierno and his Marabout monastery? This question merits discussion.

The climate which prevails within this community, made up of Thierno—the madman—and Samba Diallo, is evidence of an identical marginal situation when compared with society, and of an identical lack of harmony with the world. To achieve expression this lack of harmony is crystallized in different forms. Thierno systematically searches for saintliness; he professes and practises the act of mortification in a country where, in fact, everybody is primarily concerned with the satisfaction of the body and of the material self. On another note, the madman leads an existence which is ordered by the same behavioral patterns of dysfunctioning and verbal lack of harmony. His behavior in the hall on the quayside is quite significant: he misappreciates the functions of the shelter and does not benefit from it at all, when the Diallobé and the White Man alike are concerned with “putting wood on wood” in order to build houses; and furthermore the madman exposes his body to sickness, by putting into physical practice the principles professed by Maître Thierno—without explaining himself for so doing. Lastly, Samba Diallo never tires from shouting his lack of harmony with the world, and airing his desire to modernize tradition without alienating the originality and freedom of man in so doing. His refusal, with its quite intellectual and philosophical bases, dilutes into an interminable logorrhea of a disputive nature, which never elaborates any particular praxis. His sojourn with Maître Thierno has impregnated him with an indelible spiritualism, the obsessive preoccupations of which never allow him to stop short at any perspective whatsoever of concrete, even manual, action, in spite of his long and in-depth intercourse with technological societies. The excelling of the body and the real and the cult of the word derive from a spiritualizing passion, the tradition of which comes to it directly from the offices of Thierno, with the difference that it is henceforth a matter of the troubled and troubling human word, substituted for the ecstatic, recited, divine word. His distance from the world and from action has not changed—he dwells in the summits while the others wallow in underdevelopment—he dies as he has lived: out of contact with what is real and actual, out of touch with what is normal, having applied his hand to nothing himself.

His death, nevertheless, from all the evidence, derives from the collective crime. Sheikh Hamidyu Kane has participated to

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no lesser degree in the fatidical decision. Samba Diallo might have ended up in a position of glory. He has been diluted in death, in accordance with the personal decrees of the novelist. Perhaps by assassinating his hero, the author has reckoned that an African intellectual as removed from reality and as "crazy" as this could not survive? and should not inspire the youth of the country, confronted by the task of development?

In addition the relations between the author and the "community" of madmen are not conceived at an absolute distance. In order to penetrate to this depth the dysfunctioning of his characters, perhaps Sheikh Hamidu Kane has gone some of the way with his strange clients?

THE NARRATOR.

As a slice of the history of a character, and from the point of view that it is constituted as a written text, the Romantic work always describes a certain length of time, the serial unfolding of which corresponds to the phases of development of the personality of the writer; at the same time any undertaking to read the work automatically poses the problem of the relationships between the writer and the hero. The text then can be defined as the place of an encounter, a coincidence, when the artist tries, by means of the interdependent stability of the dialogue, to encompass the oneiric visions defining his hero's universe; and when, by transposing his way of seeing the world into the realm of the imaginary, he also transposes the tendencies of his own personality, which can be detected through the appearance of certain phantasms, certain emphases, certain obsessions which mean that instead of translating nature, a description is often nothing more than an interpretation of the real, even a transformation of life.

The episode of the *Night of the Koran*, which marks, in time, the apotheosis of the first phase of the initiatory experience of Samba Diallo, pertinently illustrates this writer-hero relationship and its consequences on the generation of the text seen as a place of transposition into the order of the imaginary of a singular encounter which takes place in the disarray of phantasm and actuality. Everybody knows the circumstances: faced with

the pressures of history and the pressures of western modernity, Samba Diallo has to leave the Koranic school and enter the modern school. Under the guidance of the extremely ascetic Maître Thierno, the Koranic instruction constituted the first systematic pedagogic experience, with its dramatic recitation of the sacred verses and its permanent mortifications of the body and its crazy tendencies. The ceremony of the *Night of the Koran* is a performance bound to give an excellent result: a complete mastery of the recitation and of the voice, and a complete control of the madnesses of the body. Its finality is demonstrative: it tends to prove the achievement of progress and it tends to solicit a discharge for the itinerant before the next step. With its verbal autonomy, the text glows a highly suggestive and “diplomatic” manner of expression:

“That night it seemed that nature had wanted to associate herself with a delicate thought in the boy, for hardly had the shining dusk dimmed than a thousand stars had burst into being in the sky. The moon shone to life at the heart of their twinkling festival and all of a sudden the night seemed to be filled with a feeling of mystical exaltation. The house was quiet. Stretched out on a *chaise longue* on the veranda the knight was plunged in thought. Huddled around the mother of the family the women were chattering in low voices. Softly, Samba Diallo left his room and entered the courtyard, paced up and down a while, and then, slowly, preluded the Night of the Koran which he was offering to the knight. Hardly audible at first, his voice strengthened and gradually grew louder. He could feel himself being invaded by a feeling, the like of which he had never experienced before. Everyone in the house had stopped talking. At first rather nonchalantly stretched out on the chair, the knight now straightened up at the sound of Samba Diallo’s voice, it now seemed that in the Word he was experiencing the same levitation which was uplifting the master. The mother had left the huddle of women and walked over towards her son. Feeling himself being listened to by the two beings he loved most on earth, and knowing that in this bewitching night he, Samba Diallo, was in the act of repeating for his father what the knight himself had done for his own father, and what, all down the generations

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for centuries, the sons of the Diallobe had done for their fathers, and knowing that he had not failed in what was expected of him, and that he was going to prove to all those listening to him that the Diallobe would never die in him, Samba Diallo was at one moment on the point of swooning. But the thought struck him that it was important for him, more so than for any of those who had gone before him, that he acquit himself fully and well this Night. For it seemed to him that this Night marked an end. Was not this twinkling starlight above his head the studded bolt coming down now on a period now terminated? Behind the bolt a whole world of stellar light sparkled softly, and it was important to glorify this one last time. His voice which had progressively swelled as if bound to the force of the stars, now soared to a pathetic fullness. From the end of the ages he felt a long love, now threatened, well up in him and pour forth through his voice. In the humming of this voice some being gradually dissolved, some being which, just before, had still been Samba Diallo. Imperceptibly emerging from depths whose depth he could not grasp, phantoms invaded him and took his place. It seemed to him that his voice had become numberless and deaf, like the voice of the river, certain evenings.

But the river's voice was less vehement, and it was not quite so close to tears. The river's voice did not convey this denial, so dramatic, which he now cried out. Nor did it have the accompaniment, deep down, of this nostalgic chant.

Long into the night his voice was that of the voiceless phantoms of his ancestors, which he had evoked. With them, he lamented their death in tears; but for just as long they sang his birth.⁹

We must return to the encounter between the narrator and the hero in order to understand the nuances of the narration. Samba Diallo wants to demonstrate, and in order to do so he speaks, sings, stirs himself, and plays; Sheikh Hamidu Kane wants to relate what he has seen and heard and understood, as a journalist at the event. And because he has not seen very much, he dramatizes or suggests explanations which, by electrifying

⁹ C. H. Kane, *ibid.*, pp. 91-2.

what has been lived through, exaggerate it and give it the dimensions of a theatrical performance which is at once cosmic and fantastic. He narrates and comments at the same time: he says what is seen and allows himself to exceed what is seen and thereby plunge into the oneiric: by adding a supplement.

The basic ritual—is it the legacy of tradition or the pressure of circumstances?—is reduced to its essence, with an astonishing sobriety. The inner public is, to the greatest degree, reduced to the royal couple and a few anonymous women. There is neither academic aeropagus, headed by Maître Thierno, nor jubilant participation of the people with princely celebrations and display of pomp or common exuberance. The stripping process is total: the silence of the house is progressively achieved by the extinction of all to-do, procession and ritual presentation in the boy reciting, who simply “leaves” his room, walks about and “plays the scales” before actually starting on the recitation. Later on, in the middle of his chanting, a moment of swooning wells up. A triptychal time: silence, apotheosis and swooning successively symbolizing the void before the birth in history, then the achievement of the novice, and finally the decline of tension, the death of the previous, original personage. These essential gestures are accompanied by a visual impression (perception of the moon and the stars) and an auditive impression (the voice of the river), which frame the unfolding of the ceremony like exterior properties. The narrative stops here: the night of the Koran is a banal, different, ethnographic fact, the advent of which should only be noted by virtue of the royal prestige of the reciter. The latter, nevertheless, comes through discreetly, but with passion and intense emotion, both of which can be read in the quavering voice as well as in the boy’s eyes, and the expression on his face.

The essence of the discourse is an interpretation of the passion and emotion of Samba Diallo, an interpretation which is aimed at translating their dimensionality, their developments, and the personal, familial and historical significance of the performance. This attempt to translate an inner psychological reality which is hard to comprehend and impossible to explain in its immediate state, constitutes, in fact, an exercise in speculation, or bold supplementation, suggesting the passion of the quest and the wandering imagination of the narrator. The latter, of course,

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as creator-reader, utilizes his knowledge of the hero's past life, and makes use of it frequently in order to attempt a pertinent and rational explanation of the actual spectacle, but it is no less true to say that his intervention in the autonomous life of the facts relies on an excessive, pervasive freedom, at the same time as it reduces to the middle distance the performance of Samba Diallo, and invites us to enter still further into the dazzling universe of Sheikh Hamidu Kane himself.

It is, in effect, he who creates the structure within which the ceremony will unfold. It is, in addition, not just a matter of setting up just any kind of decor. The geometry here is three-sided: sky, earth and the waters of the river, a pagan symbolism which totalizes the perception of the universe and which confers to the structure a cosmic spatial dimension, to which the triple temporal dimension past-present-future will correspond. This, in fact, is the harmony, the participation of the sky, the earth and the depths, which achieves, round the figure of Samba Diallo, the festival of the whole universe, and, by the effect of gigantizing, gives the night of the Koran a new character in the history of the Diallobé.

Each of the worlds participating in the harmony lives an autonomous and fairy-like life. First of all, the sky is in the throes of a sudden germination; it is aglow with the flashes of the brilliant dusk; and then populates itself with thousands of stars before the moon rises. The successiveness and the gradation in the illumination of the sky are, like in the cinema, reeled on in slow motion by an avid observer of the spectacle and of contemplative emotions. The jubilant twinkling and sparkling of the whole phenomenon in the heart of the night is translated metaphorically as the culminating point, the fullness of mystical exaltation.

If, in the dance of the stars, the observer cares to believe he can read an exaltation, a culmination of the mystical life, the upsurge of the voice of the river, for example, is a step backwards towards the 'unfathomable' depth of man, history and the universe. In its 'vehemence' the river is time, the river is history, swift, torrential conveyor of the remnants of life, reducing to phantoms the monuments which formerly illustrated the African gesture: the invasion, the instigation of the phantoms corresponds to the upsurge of the "thousands of stars in the

sky”; their voiceless chant, uniting in the same sacred eulogy the regret of the past, the triumph of the present and the interpellation of the future, corresponds to the mystical exaltation.

The animation of the summits and abysses supplies something like a mythological framework to earthly life. Once more, let us remember, everything on earth is extinction, minimal animation. Sheikh Hamidu Kane only waxes enthusiastic in the act of escape. On earth, it is silence and meditation. The silence of the house, the relaxation of the knight, his meditation, the murmuring of the women, all testify to this. Here too the place is articulated around three points: house—veranda—courtyard, all of whose social and religious functions are evident. Only the tri-lateral movement of levitation continues to signify life—the father straightens up, the mother leaves the group of women and draws near her son, the son undergoes the same levitation which raised up Thierno; the boy leaves his room, walks up and down, preludes; his voice, at first inaudible, gains strength and finally grows loud.

The whole universe is jolted by a mechanical movement in an onward, upward direction, corresponding to the progression of developments which comes about little by little, in successive three-time stages. Such a synchronism of movements, which translates the perfect harmony of sky, earth and water, reveals a vast theatre with cosmic dimensions, commanded by the celestial vault, which admits several phases, above, on earth and underground. If the height shines with a thousand lights, it is also the only point which is fixed and defined; the rest of the construction moves incessantly. The fixed, celestial summit is also a bolt, a foolproof barrier between an interior and an exterior. The exterior is the rest of the universe, the past in its temporal and spatial role, but also the unexplored future. On the other hand the idea of interiorness, vault, earth, river, at the extremities, gathered at the middle, and with a warm atmosphere; but also a suspended, psychedelic theater, by virtue of its animation and its twinkling. This three-storeyed theater is also a new theater, dazzling by its geometry and its form, by the arrangement of its lighting, the agitation and vehemence of the river. It is a mythological theater.

The physiology of the places suffices to explain the majesty of the interior ceremonial. The rite, thus reduced in its articula-

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tion, is nonetheless described and commented on with a superabundance of details, metaphors and explanations which create an evident disproportion between the text which presents the scene and the text which relates the ludic performance. This is realised by a single actor.

Here too the report of the narrator is organized on two keys. First, an order of things perceived or heard such as the movement or the voice of Samba Diallo, or again the expressions of his face; and an order of things imagined, arising from the interpretation, that is a free play of the narrator's imagination.

Sometimes his memory and his culture supply him with the elements of this interpretation. The same is true when he claims to read an emotion in the hero and, in anticipation, an explanation (he felt, feeling listened to, he thought, he felt welling up...) How at this point could he substitute himself for the hero, sympathize with him, to explain with such precision the inner upheaval of the hero, the fantasy of his dramatic reflection, the causes of a possible swoon? At other times the interpretation borders on a fairly pagan mythological vision, as in the personification of nature associating herself "with the delicate thought of the boy," or when it refers to the progressive reinforcement of Samba Diallo's voice, bound up with "the force of the stars." This passion for interpretation by excessive explanation of mythologization of the universe corresponds to a huge inner upheaval in the writer. The impressions, phantasms, men, phantoms, conflicts and cataclysms inter-collide in a scene of dramatic disorder. Hence results an effort at clarification which one finds in the cinematographic slow-motion of the scenes or the very clear differentiation of the phases of each sequence (cf. the three times of each movement, or again the very rational propositional and syntactic distribution).

The whole is an esoteric festival dominated from above by the unruly illumination of the sky, at the center by the static silence of the family, and lower down by the agitation, the "chant of the voiceless phantoms." With regard to the so-called recitation we are in no degree informed either of the content of the Koranic text, or of its philosophical or theological meaning, or of its pertinence in relation to the dramatic circumstances traversed by the history of the Diallobe. The only sound is the strange melody of the humming voice of the boy reciting, at

first “scarcely audible,” then “strong,” and gradually growing stronger until at one stage it becomes “exalted” in a “pathetic fullness.” The illumination, the silence or universal aphonia, are thus organised as if consciously—one should say conscientiously—in order to emphasize, with an eminently substantial relief, the privilege of the melody, of the vocalism, in the absence of any rational discourse, or any word spoken, in other words in the absence of any consonantal articulation.

This mellifluous development of the voice which flows from its source, then glides, unctuous, rising higher and higher, spreading out like a river flowing towards the sea, constitutes a fourth dimension in this fantastic theater, in a fathomless interdependence between stage and actor, spatial form and aerial performance, conceived poetically. This society made up of stars, men and phantoms is an unusual court which surrounds the suggested shadow of God, the invisible presence, by reference to the Koran. Must one underline the epic intention? It is evident. It is the diffusion of the epic through the omnipresent melody which creates the poetry, an incantatory choral poetry woven by the alto of Samba Diallo and the “dullness,” the bass performed by the river.

The simplicity of the ritual, the astonishing economy of the performance, in short the banality of the basic ceremony are as much techniques of de-articulation intended to better emphasize the poetic concentration. We can go further than this: this is the result of several other theatrical procedures: slowing-down, then extinction of the external tumult, collective participation, in silence, of the universe, predominance of the musical element, concentration of inner agitation, muscular tension, osmosis of the reciter and the universe, by the simultaneous harmony of air, earth and water, and lastly, positional disequilibrium created by this dialectic movement, which, as if simultaneously, urges Samba Diallo ascensionally towards the psychedelic brilliance of the stars, and descensionally towards the invasion of the voiceless chant of the abysses “of whose depth he had no conception.” Poetry is nurtured at the source of the epic and the occult, that is, at the source of the night.

What is suggested, with respect to Sheikh Hamidu Kane, is a dysfunctioning of conduct, a derangement of the total being with mythologization of the vision of the world and total

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irrationalization and poetization of being-in-the-world. To show his excellence, the artist, on Samba Diallo's track, has had to carry out the principles of Maître Thierno, but in so doing he has installed himself in a state of alienation, in madness, in night. A night in which, despite the twinkling of stars, the visibility remains vague and approximate. And it is this uncertainty which nourishes the imagination, excites apparitions, suppositions and phantoms. The extremely close presence is suddenly filled with a horde of phantoms from the beyond; the strange and unique voice of Samba Diallo quite suddenly seems to be "numberless." The initially physiological, and then psychological and mental derangement opens out into a topological shift towards the sky, and most of all towards the abysses. A peculiar continuity is then established between the here, the height and the depth, the past, the present, and the future, the illumination, the incantation and the voicelessness, the mystique, the child, the father and the ancestors, and all at once history is realised.

From here on, the symbolism of the night is a very rich polymorphism—it is an epic, poetic climate; it is uncertainty, the source of epopee and poetry; but it is also a date, a unique appointed time as well as the generative point of history, in other words of the text. If the text opens with the upsurge of stellar clarity in the heart of the night, it is just as much—when observed from the narrator's angle—a discourse on the inner discourse of Samba Diallo, the amplification of an inner debate which has evolved elsewhere. The interrogation provokes a response—the upsurge and the meaning of history—and in this translation of the inner debate by a witness who has seen nothing, the boldness of the exchanges will be limitless, as will the mania for interpretation and speculation. The discourse and performance of Samba Diallo take place as it were at the second level. Any textual analysis becomes a research centred on the word of the narrator, a word essentially situated in the epic, in the poetic, and in the deranged.

And it is significant that these turmoils in the vision, with the behavioral dysfunctioning which they provoke, only realise their paroxysm at the heart of an obsessive appeal to light. It is only by the powerfulness of his eye, his regard, that Maître Thierno, the visionary, can read the future of his disciples, once he enters the hall. The madman has thus been labelled because

of the versatility of his glance, a glance he plays with to excess in order to identify the nature of places and appreciate the advantage he will be able to take from them. If he fails to notice any particular brightness of light, this is because everything unfolds in the lights of the "morning," but he stresses insistently the brilliance of the tiling on the floor and the effects of the reflections which they produce in the hall. It is also a question of light in the final discourse of Samba Diallo—that brightly lit arena to which he aspires, the limpid quality of the surge and the eye, eternal light, whose stellar sparkle which illustrated the *Night of the Koran* is nothing more than a foretaste. The quality of sight, the sensitivity of the visual organs, the fixture of the luminous adjuvants supplied in abundance by nature, sometimes with a violence which is totally theatrical so as to supplement a person's ability to perceive the world, to know it, and to master it, these are the elements of a real power to which every man aspires. From here on the obsession with light becomes a polemological dimension in the determination of the conditions of security. Darkness is the founder of this mysterious, teratological universe, purveyor of menaces, the unforeseeable upheaval of which explains why man is inhabited by this bodily tension and this intuition of permanent drama. Light reduces, laicizes and gives secureness to the universe by a sense of distance which refers each object to a clearly perceived position which permits an eventual riposte. The appeal of light is also a cult of distance. The madman, the marginal person, the artist, all are defined precisely by a certain distance which separates them from the world, a psychosomatic distance consecutive to sickness, or an ideological distance consecutive to a desire for disconnection or dysfunctioning. Is it in order to envisage better the order and power of the riposte that the writer, in his malaise, and frightened by the distance which separates him from other people, clings so desperately to the light, as if to illuminate our world of madmen? The question should be asked.

NOVEL AND MADNESS.

A more comprehensive reading of Chapter VII, from which we have extracted the madman's "discourse," sheds a still more

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clarifying light on this problem of the madman's position in relation to so-called normal society, and the problem of the distance he maintains between this society and himself, either by the device of sickness, or by simple disagreement. The text in its entirety is the account rendered of two conversations, two series of verbal exchange which succeed one another in time and to all appearances barely refer to the same subject. The bond between them is the central presence of one and the same figure. Maître Thierno, on either one stage or the other, and the brief intrusion of the madman condemning the course of the Diallobé. Now, whereas the terms of the first conversation continue to preoccupy the Maître, even after the departure of the Diallobé representatives and the subsequent arrival of the madman, the latter asks Thierno to get rid of the former, that is, to make a clean sweep of their visit, their words and their problems.

The second sequence of the conversation is therefore not satisfied by the idea of taking over from the first, in the sense of historical development; it wants to get rid of it, destroy it; it heaps the blame on *it*. The madman accuses the Diallobé of presenting themselves with a "sheep's face," and "deceiving" the master. The language from their mouths, and the language of their demeanor is false: they are the people of simulation, dissimulation; they disguise the truth; they are diametrically opposed to truth. On the other hand the madman tells them what they are, and it is the truth; he describes the situation as it really is, the true situation. The madman's word is truth, whereas the word of the Diallobé, and particularly the word of their spokesman, is a lie.

So the first conversation unfolds precisely around the idea of non-knowledge proclaimed by Thierno. The drama which applies to everyone—the conventional, the erudite, the rulers—is that "they do not know." They might well be able to choose, by a strange connivance with their own tendencies. This choice, under such conditions as these, would imply a certain futility of knowledge, science, prescience, and prophecy: it would not suppress the contradictions. The semblance of freedom cannot be the equivalent of true freedom. The difference between the people and Thierno lies in the fact that Thierno measures the dramatic fullness of the impasse, whereas the people still hopes for a word of truth from the master, a word which would

institute truth. The people is asking for, searching for, in quest of, the truth; it 'interrogates' the master. It asks the master to speak the truth, to institute the truth by his word. Mastery, wisdom, science, prescience, word of truth, all of these thus maintain reciprocally an inner traffic something like a process of interchangeability.

And so the master proclaims his non-knowledge, his inability to perceive and then pronounce the truth; his inability to say what will be the lot of the Diallobé tomorrow. And he says truly what is here and now, today, for himself, and for everyone. This awareness of his limitations, his non-knowledge, his distance in relation to truth gives rise to a new behavioral state of being within him. The assaults which come into being against his mind excite further assaults against his body. The master is assailed, as if by a harrassing spiritual depression, with a deflation of mystical tension, a reduction to the minimum of religious practice, hostility of the ill-smelling, painful rebellion of the body, whose heavy weight begins to be agonizingly felt. The general atmosphere veers towards logical difficulty, even nullity: an inner void, which is a sign of a logical problematic, a sign of non-knowledge; an outer void in no way altered by the brief intrusion of the Diallobé, and their subsequent departure "of which one is not even aware."

"That day nothing moved upwards towards the sky, not even the flame in the fire, not even the echo of the young voices" (p. 104).

Void both within and without, the master pronounces his non-knowledge, his removal from the truth in this atmosphere of nudity, and total emptiness: "I shall say nothing... I know nothing." Now wait. The word of a master can only be a word of knowing, of wisdom, of prescience: a word of truth. When it is not these things, it is no longer the master's word, it is no longer even a tiny word becoming a stutter, becoming chatter, idle talk, or the negation of the word. The word which is based on non-knowledge to exaggerate, flatter, mislead, and please, is not a word. Entrenched in his dignity as master, scholar and reputed visionary, the master refuses to take any chances; he refuses to say anything whatsoever which is not a certainty;

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he refuses to say anything of which he is not certain, and totally, absolutely certain.

“What a man really knows is, for him, the succession of numbers: he can recite it infinitely, and take it in any sense, with no limits. All I could say to you now, on the contrary, would be frank and brief.”

The master thus encloses himself in a state of silence, in meditation, in the quest for truth. This silence—the silence in the house, the silence personally observed by Thierno—is the normal climate in which self-mastering intelligence basks, intelligence which is conscious of its non-knowledge. And as such it is a dramatic atmosphere in as much as it is a scene in which the scholarly man of intelligence—and reputed as such—is revealed the precariousness of his status, the limitations of his reflective and technical performances, and the certification of his dramatic deficiencies. It is precisely when the people is in desperate need of him that Thierno can do nothing for the Diallobé.

The Diallobé have a certain compassion for Thierno, but they become hardened in their hope—or illusion—that he will utter the (easy) word to please them. Lover of truth and yet aware of the distance which separates him from it, Thierno finds himself ensconced in dysfunctioning, in material and spiritual discomfort: the confrontation between the Diallobé and himself has reached its paroxysm. In fact the master's refusal to talk is not total so much as punctual; it is linked with the historical circumstance with which the Diallobé are confronted. The master simply suspends the word. What he knows is so partial, so slender, that he could never claim that it is boundless. And yet, because he is the master, the master already withholds a certain knowledge. And having punctually suspended the power of his word, his creative power of truth, he transfers the function of meaning of truth to another organ in his body, the mouth and the word which issues from it being for the time being disqualified. The eye is this new organ, henceforth promoted to the upstage position, where knowledge plays its game of revelation, communication and perception. This is a substitution of organs, a transformation of the system of

exchange. This happens primarily because Thierno, who has certain convictions, certainties, and a certain store of knowledge, has decided to warehouse their substance in his eyes, and manoeuvre it by means of this organ, so as to transmit it to others. Consequently, and as only one glance can perceive the significance of another, the eye becomes the basic stage of all scholarly communication, the place of giving and receiving, the place where truth is manifest, together with the communication, perception, reading and writing of truth.

But in a hierarchic sense is the eye a more effective stage than the mouth? Is the language of the eye superior to the language of the mouth? One could answer this by saying that the type of truth transmitted by the eye is a truth of inadequacy, of non-knowledge, and that the word, when reserved for great occasions, is made to express the truth in full. But let us also hasten to emphasize that Thierno makes his verbal pronouncements in vain; by swearing to his own non-knowledge, he convinces no one, and on the contrary accentuates the disarray of his speakers.

“People of the Diallobé, I swear to you that I know nothing of any worth. I should like to, as much as you. The people gathered looked at one another, deeply perplexed. If the master did not know, then who could ever know?”

The intervention of the eye and the glance constitutes a supplement to the word. The eye gives assistance to the mouth, the word needs the help of the expressivity of the eye if it is to signify truth, if it is to communicate truth and capture the allegiance of those looking on, by convincing them.

“The master had spoken vehemently, and his eyes roamed over the whole crowd at once, as if to communicate to each one of them the conviction that he knew nothing.”

But here we see how neither the eye nor the word can convince anyone:

“Those gathered remained dejected. The word of the master had perhaps been too lofty.”

The failure of the eye and the ineffectiveness of the word to bring conviction are the master's failure. They reveal that he is

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not master of his body or his eye or of spoken words. His hold on language, that is, on the world, remains very relative. In vain does he manipulate the word, multiply the versions of one and the same thesis; all he does is suggest the interest that he gives respectively to one or the other manners of communicating the truth. The distribution of the important points sheds a welcome light on what appeared to be a general confusion of means. There are words, and words: there is the master's word which expresses knowledge, institutes truth, and there is the word invoked by the Diallobé, facile talk, the "extravagance" of non-knowledge, and madness. Just as there are looks, and looks, at once aiding, assisting, supplementing and substituting the word, for which the eye is thus the discreet but indispensable adjuvant, but nevertheless secondary to the word — less transformable into different versions, less available.

The conversation between Thierno and the madman refers to this, sometimes as the antagonism and sometimes as the complementarity between the word and the glance. In Diallobe society the tradition is cultivated, as it were, of the evaluation of sincerity and truth, by means of the vitality of the eye and the use of the word. Here, of course, all excess is harmful, and signifies lack of intelligence, falsehood, non-truth and madness. The excessive mobility of the eye, just as an exaggerated volubility of the word, is a sign of instability, uncertainty, not-knowing and madness. The madman has been nicknamed as such because of both. And he at once withdraws into himself, into a state of reserve and loss of speech, into a relative silence, which nevertheless in no way affects or alters the mobility of his glance. But from the very outset of the dialogue his word is liberated, his word has free range, and he uses it to emphasize all the intelligence and all the knowledge in his glance.

The scene in the hall and the subsequent episodes are in effect a hymn to the intelligent and knowing power of the madman's eye. Behind the recital and behind the torrential, varnished word one can make out the structure of a new theater, in which the madman is nothing else but the central figure. The once more three-dimensional scene includes the quayside, the hall and the streets. Although it existed previous to the advent of the madman, as a district of a town with its urban structures, this space only becomes a stage, and is only turned into a theatrical setting

with the gradual intrusion of the Negro-African element. This element discovers it, identifies it, adjusts it, dismantles it, remounts it, in order to guarantee his own security in the face of the onslaught of the cold and the stares of the other people there. As we have seen the eye plays the principal part in the hall, the most dynamic part. The madman's behavior, with its strange dysfunctioning, astonishes the other protagonists on stage. After the woman, a man "makes his way" over to the madman and takes his wrist, while some one else brings up a "seat," and "eager hands" stretch out to help him into it. The reaction is not a surprise:

"I brushed them away and stood up with a very deft movement. I stood a good head above all the people round me. I had recovered my serenity and now that I was on my feet there could not have been anything about my whole person which did not seem fit and perfectly healthy. I could hear people wondering what to do all round me. They were a little surprised by the way I had quickly got to my feet. I stuttered a few words of apology."

These few "stuttered" words, hardly formulated, and hardly audible, uttered at the crux of the scene, are the only words spoken by the madman. They are words which have only just emerged from limbo. No sooner born of sound than they fade away, they are rendered volatile as soon as they have been uttered. Everthing here dissolves into gestures and movements of the eye. The glance of the eye becomes the exclusive adjuvant of the madman—his weapon. In his solitude, in the remove and distance which he subsequently develops between himself and the crowd of curious faces, he will need his eyes. If he is on guard, suspicious, he will have to be watchful, he will have to keep an eye on the others in order to avoid the "weight" of "countless stares," in order to take note of the door set in the wall (and thus not readily visible) which will "shelter him from the entreaties of the passers-by, in order to "turn his head away" as soon as a passer-by decides to stop beside him. It is also with his eye that he examines the space around him in search of the undiscoverable help: the horizon affords neither home-ground nor a companion to his wretchedness:

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“My eye scanned the whole vast place and saw no end to the stone... Nowhere was there the tender softness of bare earth... My eyes strained in vain for the upheaval of a bare foot...”

The last sequence of this scene is quite fantastic. For the tension of straining his eyes has ended up by tiring them, and blurring his sight. Added to this there is the sensation of thrill engendered by his suspicion, his fear, his desire to defend himself, as he sees enemies all round him, and not a friend in sight. The language which was an exhaustive description of the personal preoccupation of the traveller becomes the evocation of a mirage, coupled with an interpretation of what is being seen. The district of the town becomes a “valley of stones,” the avenue an “axis” and the traffic a “fantastic river of enraged machinery,” the vehicles appear to him as “monarchs ... enraged, ... sullen, yet obedient.” His entire judgement is one of disgust and condemnation.

“On the raised roadway filled with cars, not a soul set foot, I never saw such a thing, I master of the Diallobé. There, before my eyes, amidst an inhabited complex, on great long corridors, I was offered the sight of a perfectly inhuman overview, not a man moving there. Can you imagine that? master of the Diallobé, in the heart of a man’s city a whole region prohibited to his bare flesh, forbidden to the alternate contact of his two feet...”

The shifting and transforming of the function of the eye are evident. The level of perception is one of “contemplation,” when emotion supplements the action of the physiological organ and perturbs it. We plunge into the superlative, the hyperbole, into excess, and why not into extravagance? And the master, who up to this point has imbibed the words of the madman without interruption, cannot endure them any longer, particularly because he has been unexpectedly called in as a witness. And he questions him not on the “coherence of what he is saying”—which completely satisfies him although he finds it surprising—but on the veracity and truth of his word. The master is astonished; he expresses certain doubts; does not believe the word, although he wishes that it was true, and could thus serve as a justification of his own theories.

“Is that true? is it true that in the very heart of his own dwelling-place the furtive silhouette of man now faced such mortal spaces?”

The madman retorts by taking exception to his role as *witness*: he has seen these things, therefore what he says is true. “Yes, I’ve seen it,” he repeats twice, and, satisfied with this first utterance the master asks him to elaborate, and the madman is astonished that he has convinced him so swiftly and so completely.

“What else did you see?”

“Really? You want me to tell you?”

“Yes, tell me.”

“I saw machinery.”

The madman plunges off again into his narration, and then into ecstasy, or rather, poetry. He talks of mechanical shells, “long, coiled spaces which move,” “spaces without interiors,” “self-inflicting silhouettes,” and as his narration gradually unfolds, he starts to relive it, and turn it into something actual and present, happening *now*. He testifies to the master, becomes moved, and excited and ends up by crying.

“This long space moves. Now you know that it was in fact stability itself which gave the appearance of movement, like its reflection. Now it has started to move. Its movement becomes more accomplished than the jerky progression of the hesitant silhouette. It cannot fall. Where would it fall to? And so it drove back the silhouette, afraid, itself, of falling, of losing its movement.”

The madman fell silent. Leaning on an elbow, the master stood up and saw that he was crying.”

The central position of the master throughout Chapter VII is in no need of further elaboration. He is the master of the pack, master of knowledge, master of the distribution of words, master of the last judgement. This is the scene of his omnipotence. The attitude, the right and the fault of the Diallobé all depend on his word, his decision and his judgement if he does not master the reply. He has said that it is because he cannot master the reply. But is it not also because he has not mastered

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the question? The question has been posed to him, ordered, directed. And Thierno refuses, he says, to answer in an objective sense. But is this not also to put things back in their proper place, to restore each thing to its role? To render to the master what is the master's; the power to excite reflection and advance replies?

In the dialogue between the master and the madman the initiative—only justly—falls on the master. It is the master who gives the word to the madman, asking him to specify things, asks him to make more illuminating elaborations, and orders him to continue the narrative. As the omnipotent director, he minutes down the lapse of the rejoinders and allots them value with regard to the truth of the narration. He is the judge: an impartial judge. He puts up with the verbal diarrhoea of the madman and lets it flow on uninterrupted. But above all he lets the madman talk, while everyone else would like to shut him up. He wants to judge each part—like a master, like a scholar, and like a just man. The madman is perfectly informed on the general attitude of his position: a climate of ostracism. The opening afforded by the master is an unexpected windfall. He leaps at the opportunity, not at all certain of the result of so doing. The interest shown by the master surprises him and overwhelms him. The silence and acquiescence of the master please him more deeply than he had expected, and affirm his capacity as the valid interlocutor of the master of normal society; this demystifies the widespread opinion about his madness, and he weeps with joy and emotion. Furthermore the master accompanies his reaction of acquiescence with a series of affective gestures, which are demonstrative and theatrical, and aimed, socially speaking, at incarnating and officializing his judgement.

“The master then sat down and, drawing the madman towards him, made him lean back against his chest, with the madman's head resting in the hollow of his shoulder. With his bare hand he wiped the man's tears, then, gently, started to rock him.”

This episode recalls the return of the prodigal son to the fold of “normal” children, after years of roaming, ostracism and madness. In order to reach this final stage of warm rediscovery, the old fighter has in effect taken an examination—a *dokimasia*.

In order to re-assume his place, he has had to convince the master that he is not mad. Throughout this conversation the master's attitude is, incidentally, extremely meaningful. By letting the madman take the floor, he has reversed their positions, questioned a tradition, and a widespread opinion; he has embarked on a process of eventual profanation of the word. But even at the outset, the master does not accept all the risks; he does not completely play his role of interlocutor in total favor of the madman. The exchange of reality is unilateral at the beginning. The master's participation in the dialogue remains minimal. A question often has to be put to him more than once before the slightest reply is elicited from him. And by ostensibly repeating the questions of the master, and by sometimes vulgarly soliciting his participation, his interlocution, the madman clearly desires and hopes for a security, or rather a compromise. The master, on the contrary, remains reticent and suspicious. When, at the outset, the madman starts to philosophize, the master tacitly reckons that philosophy does not enter the madman's orbit. And what is more, because he has been absent from the territory for a long spell, he will not know how to deal with the serious matters afflicting the country. The fact that he proposes that the master get rid of those who have ostracised him is a matter of personal vengeance without the slightest pertinence to the discovery of the truth. How could the madman possibly know more than anyone else, and more than the master?

Seizing a deviant sentence, the master rather asks him to evoke the land of the White Man, to evoke what he has seen, and thus what he knows. The madman is only taken seriously if he is like a witness, and all at once the master takes the hook, sits back comfortably, and listens attentively. He has seen the interest and perhaps the truth. The madman's narrative unfolds on two notes: at the level of the word and at the level of the eye, a dual writing, which the master reads with great precaution before pronouncing any definite judgement. With regard to the narration, the master swiftly certifies the coherence of it. "The immediate coherence of the story struck him." His judgement of the glance follows soon after.

"The master got up to meet the stare of the madman (the immediate coherence of the story struck him). His aston-

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ishment then increased when he saw that this expression was now fixed. He had never seen the madman this way before."

This agreement between the coherence of the narration, and the mastery and fixedness of the stare is the "astonishing" proof which leads to the master's decision. The madman has already told the same story to the people, and his story was treated as an extravagance. His success here is clearly striking, but it is the result of an obvious art of narration with a labored enunciation, muscular tension and bodily trembling. The madman knew how to approach the master, knew how to put him at ease; he holds him back when he wants to leave, and places Thierno's head on the "fat part of his thigh", repeating the old man's questions to make him solemnly emphasize his own requests. The story which he relates contains, for its part, no discourse, except the "stammered excuses". All the rest is a composition of the places, an identification of the encounter between men and things. A puppet-theatre which he manipulates in his own way with skill, color and discretion, with definite success. The manipulator—or is he a mystifier?—in him is attributed the primary role in everything, and awards himself a superiority which insidiously penetrates the desires of a Thierno who is imbued with the superiority of Black Men, their values, and their religion as compared with White Men, in whom he recognises only a technical and warrior's skill and an exaggerated sense of material goods. Thierno lets himself be taken in by the madman, who, clearly, torments him, stupefies him, captivates him, seduces and convinces him. From his hiding-place in the wall, and totally motionless, the madman talks, not of what he does or feels, but of what he sees. His increasingly metaphorical address starts out by describing a sight which he himself calls fantastic. Then with the new sight, he embarks on a series of philosophical, metaphysical variations on the structure of the "machines." The exposé grows heavier, more complex, more embroiled, further from rationality, and removed from physical science. This marks the return to gossip, ecstasy, extravagance, confusion and madness. The guarantee of the master, his "I understand you" is the conclusion of this discourse, whose structural diversity we have underlined. The master's guarantee

is addressed to the whole discourse and comes at an opportune moment after the passage where the rationality is most in doubt.

If the reconciliation—agreement—between the master and the madman-pupil ennobles the rational status of the madman, it also implies that the master has had a certain affinity with the madman, that he has descended into the depths of the madman's universe. The movement of descent by the master and nobiliary ascent by the madman poses the fundamental problem of the ambiguity of language. The master, who has refused to talk with the nobles of the Diallobé, has let the madman speak to him, and after the long discourse with which we are familiar, he assures his support. The discourse is also the scene of the judgement in which the state of mind of the madman is analysed. It is the proof of his rationality as well as being the proof of his madness. The master's judgement differs from the judgement of the people, and the friendship he demonstrates towards the madman defies the normal reaction to him. Is this attitude of the master localized in this circumstance, or is it inscribed in the position of generalized defiance which he nourishes in respect of the people? Throughout the madman's discourse he is seeking the surety of the master, without renouncing his madness, without making the slightest allusion to his social status. The public invitations issued him by the master, his acquiescence pronounced out loud, and his affectionate demonstration at the end perhaps signify that, henceforth, there is an absolute coincidence and interchangeability between these? The madman is happy to relate a story that nobody else can certify. The master's invitation overwhelms him with an unrestrained desire that public opinion had hitherto inhibited, dismissed, and this desire seizes the opportunity for a torrential liberation. The language is the place and the scene where this desire and this liberation are realised. His narrative is an adventure of desire across the scene of language. Everything in his recollection is manipulated by this force of desire. The reconstitution and re-writing of the different movements of his story and their decipherment (or reading) are dramatized by a real textual ecstasy which makes up the general atmosphere. His text and narrative can be read "and deciphered as a search, as a desire for himself."¹⁰

¹⁰ Felman Shoshana in "Folie et Discours chez Balzac: L'illustre Gaudissart." *Littérature*, (Larousse) no. 5, Feb. 1972.

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As he gradually relates his story better and better, he relives it, rather like the reader reliving the existence of the character with whom he thinks he can identify himself. By so doing, he does not realise that an experience of this order is fiction, illusion. And not to realise the remove between illusion and life, to mistake the one for the other, this is madness.

The madman is only mad here because he makes a confusion of this type. In fact this confusion is realised by means of a clever rhetoric, like a rhetoric of madness. The stylistic techniques he uses are very diverse, both in the manipulation of roles, the imprinting of his own character, the theatricalisation of the spectacle, the spirit of a setting which can incorporate a host of characters in the web of its language, and above all his way of insinuating himself into the master's opinion, his way of compromising him in his madness by trying to acquire his complicity, his connivance and his surety. If it intrinsically contains this power of desire, which for the madman is a temptation to madness, the madman's discourse at the same time makes use of a reflexive system which denies madness, and at the bosom of which—to borrow Felman Shoshana's expression—"It is madness itself which confesses and denounces itself as such, constructs itself and destroys itself... Its manner of functioning resides in its own negation."¹¹

Whether it is a question of Sheikh Hamidu Kane re-writing and reading the scene of the Night of the Koran, or of Thierno rewriting and reading the first writing of the Koran or imagining himself writing even as he listens to the madman's story, or lastly of Samba Diallo, at the moment of ultimate illumination, creating for himself a world with a "bright arena" to go and live in, it is the same Romantic relationship that we find between the narrator, the observer, and the scene of his writing, when he really imagines himself living the life of the character whose story he is narrating. In *Don Quichotte Moderne*, Marivaux evokes this precise situation which is the very essence of the novel, with regard to those readers who are plunged and encompassed by their Romantic readings, and who attempt to identify their heroes, and identify themselves with these heroes, who try to imagine their style, their feelings and their behavioral

¹¹ *Ibid.*

attitudes so that they can imitate them. By repeating what has been written, and what they see, they think they are living and reliving it, as if they become "living books." Reading—and writing—is at once an act of rationality and a moment of madness. The status of the novel relies precisely on this convention, together with the aesthetic of the illusion, according to which, in the words of Jean Rousset, "events and fictitious characters exist as if they were real."¹² The intrusion of the madman, or his madness, in to the Romantic scene will have no element of surprise attaching to it, either from the creator's viewpoint or from that of the characters and the events which they create. This is the logic of the bewitchment of the spectator, gripped and traumatized by the scene: he plunges into ecstasy even as he proclaims himself in search of the meaning. Shoshana Felman writes again: "What can be the pertinence of madness in literature? What is the meaning of the intrusion of the pathological into the heart of the Romantic discourse? The stake of literature is its meaning; but the madman's discourse is, *a priori* non-sense; at least it is illegible and incomprehensible. Madness integrated in literature thus straightaway poses the question of being able to read the illegible: why and how does non-sense produce sense?"

The reader of *L'Aventure Ambiguë* will have perceived that at the heart of this important work there is no doubt that the most pertinent ambiguity, on the aesthetic level, remains that of sense and non-sense, light and darkness, knowledge and madness. As Maître Thierno would put it, it is the very ambiguity of the gourd.

¹² Jean Rousset in "Comment insérer le présent dans le récit: l'exemple de Marivaux." *Littérature*, (Larousse) no. 95, Feb. 1972, pp. 3-10.

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