

The Writer's Identity as Self-Dismantling Text in Julien Green's *Si j'étais vous . . .*

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Written between 1944 and 1946, Julien Green's novel *Si j'étais vous . . .* is one of the author's most fantastic and enigmatic texts, having generated interpretations ranging from the Freudian to the theological. For example, Melanie Klein's 1968 analysis stresses the psychological mechanisms of identification adopted by the hero Fabien Especel, while Marilyn Gaddis Rose's more recent essay (1986) emphasizes the "ethical conventionality" of the work, a teleology that designates "the will of the devil" as "the more visible and immediate realization of the will of God" (Rose 79).¹ Recognizing the self-reflexive nature of the work, Jacques Petit assimilates Fabien's psychic itinerary to that of the writer "qui se cherche à travers les êtres qu'il crée" (Petit 106), or who, as Green remarked, "se transforme . . . en qui bon lui semble" (*Si j'étais vous . . .*, Avant-propos 1527).

Yet certain central features of the text have not yet been addressed and may lead to the proposal of a different interpretation, one focusing on the problem of the writer's identity in his works. The argument of this essay is that Green articulates in this book the dynamics of the novelist's impulse toward self-elaboration, so that, as Jeanne had said in *Varouna*, Green's immediately preceding work, "le fait d'écrire un roman est en soi un roman dont le héros est l'auteur" (*Varouna* 827). Green seems to ponder further the nature of an author's creative self, or what remains of it when it is left in a state of textual undress, unsupported by the fictional doubles who cover up its lack of cohesion.

To begin with, despite the fact that his literary efforts are unsuccessful Fabien is shown to be a writer like Green himself, but more importantly, he is a character in another writer's fiction. As metatext, Green's novel describes the conversion of an author into a succession of language objects which are similar and alien to him. In each of his different incarnations, Fabien transposes himself as text,

marrying a residual consciousness of self to the desired attributes of his "host."² Like the impossible word incorporating both the thing and what it means, Fabien seeks to become simultaneously another and himself. Yet, since as Blanchot says, "le livre . . . , c'est justement moi-même devenu autre" (305), it need not serve as a vehicle for authorial self-replication nor advance a writer's movement toward eventual self-discovery through serial transformations into textual epigone or into idealized fictional avatars of a self which they occult. Fabien's round-trip journey, as related in the novel, may therefore represent the process of turning the writer's reality into language, and the subsequent endeavor to resituate what that language had displaced.

The dialectic that this work describes between evasion and confinement, the writer's flight from imprisonment in an unchanging sense of self, is first articulated through Fabien's use of books as accessories of identity. The pleasure-loving sensualist left waiting at a nocturnal rendezvous is a reality he sublimates into an image of self as bibliophile: "D'ordinaire, en rentrant, le jeune homme prenait un livre et s'asseyait à la table, comme pour donner à la soirée une fin sérieuse en accord avec l'image qu'il se formait de lui-même" (844). Between the self-fictionalizing star-gazer and the disenchanting hedonist, the disparity is so great that only literature can bridge it. By reading the books that others write, he can impersonate his ideal, counterfeiting the author who destroys a reality that oppresses him and who escapes into the alternate world of his own textual simulacra. In fact, the work that Fabien turns to as failed lover, writer, and Catholic is *L'Imitation*, which tells of likening the disciple to his model, the hypocrite to the believer, and the actor to his role.

Since everything that Fabien tries to apprehend in life—women, words, religious faith—ultimately proves to be elusive, it is natural that he look on writing as a manual operation, as the means whereby he grasps what for him remains "insaisissable." The ink-spot on his blotter thus resembles a thieving hand, the hand of "un Voleur de Vent" who can grasp what slips away (853–54). "*En avril, le Voleur de Vent se tenait sur une passerelle et quand le soleil brillait entre les nuages blancs le coeur du garçon se gonflait de bonheur, comme si toute cette lumière eût été pour celui qui la trouvait belle et qu'il eût pu l'emporter chez lui dans ses mains*" (854). Yet it is the character's self-obliviousness that makes possible this pleasure, as experience later nullified when converted into knowledge. Compilation of old

memories and portraits of dead moments becomes the textual cemeteries Green had told of in other works.³ Thus to the burial plot of self there corresponds the charnel house of books, of objects put to death by words later massacred by editing. So as he contemplates his "deux pages" that are "couvertes de ratures," Fabien's manuscript assumes the aspect "d'un dessin où l'on croyait voir, en un fantastique paysage de désastre, des ruines noircies par le feu" (851). On the other hand, Fabien's idealized persona exhibits a kind of linguistic infantilism, in the sense that his unselfconscious speech is akin to not knowing how to speak. Attuned to what Barthes calls an object's "infra-signification" (*Elements of Semiology* 41), *Le Voleur de Vent* sings songs "dont les mots n'avaient pas de sens" (854), while for Fabien, his author, "le langage cherche à se faire insensé" (Blanchot 316). The physical substance of the text he writes affords him compensation for the absence of its subject matter, which his language has abolished. Putting the world in words for Fabien is an admission of his impotence, an act of aggression, and the means to an illusory self-rehabilitation: "souvent, la nuit, il se jetait sur tout ce papier blanc non sans l'obscur sentiment d'une revanche qu'il prenait ainsi sur le monde" (851).

Another view of the devil is that he is simply Fabien's inspiration, what inspires him to Protean dreams of textual metamorphoses. Indeed, his transmigrations are blocked only when he is locked outside his books, alienated from the body of words on which his signature is written.⁴ Fabien's hosts can be looked upon as obsolescent narratives, former modes of consciousness he is unable to recover.⁵ The words of *le Voleur de Vent* have no such fixed, estranging quality, since they are impermanent utterances spoken to be dispersed into the wind. No distortional mirrors in which a writer confronts a misplaced self, their purpose is to celebrate, their essence to pass away. "*Et si la brise s'élevait tout à coup, frisant la surface de l'eau, il se mettait à chanter n'importe quoi, pour que l'air portât ses chansons par-delà les toits, aussi loin que possible et jusque dans des pays où sans doute il n'irait jamais*" (854).

Through language, "Dieu avait créé les êtres, mais l'homme dut les anéantir" (Blanchot 313). Yet the children not yet "dédoublés," not divided by self-awareness, can still make out an echo of that original creative power. Their understanding or receptivity to the unmediated speech of nature is described by Green in a passage from *Partir avant le jour*:

Dieu parle avec une extrême douceur aux enfants et ce qu'il a à leur dire, il le leur dit souvent sans paroles. La création lui fournit le vocabulaire dont il a besoin, les feuilles, les nuages, l'eau qui coule, une tache de lumière. C'est le langage qui ne s'apprend pas dans les livres et que les enfants connaissent bien. (42)

But then these fugitive messages are locked inside a book, and the child's fluid experience becomes a definitive edition of self. Not coincidentally, the first job that the Windstealer takes on is as apprentice in a bindery, where he spends his days in darkness, enveloped by the smell of glue. No longer does he live in sunshine, watching clouds and flowing water; now he can only see these natural sights represented on a page. Thus contaminated by literature, he begins to show a preference for ideas or abstractions over the existing things they banish. His incipient quest for knowledge tends to orient him toward death, makes him long to be a character in the narratives from which he feels excluded. The death of self, which parallels the death of image-referents, is his only way to circulate among the pictures he examines. In one particular volume, "*il y avait des montagnes, des lacs, et aussi des jardins qui donnaient envie de mourir parce qu'il n'était pas possible de s'y promener*" (855).

The confinement within a prison of language is central to the novel's theme of immurement and clausturation. The domestication of the Windstealer is finally accomplished through his formal education, his relegation to "*un collègue aux murs impitoyables*" (855). There he loses his intuitive grasp of the language of the world, and forfeits the resources of his "ignorance" in favor of the learning he finds in books. But this desire to internalize and become a textual container is thwarted as he realizes "*que ce n'est pas en pressant un livre sur son coeur qu'on s'instruit*" (855). Instead of living, he continues reading and manipulating symbols, "*mais il ne savait plus parler au vent,*" as Fabien's text concludes.

This brief embedded narrative is a key to Fabien's story, which tells of the character's movement through a succession of fictive selves, and his later attempt to retrace his steps through textual self-dismantling, until he recovers a central self not meant to compensate for some deficiency. The proprietary relationship of the author to his language—"*L'idée que ce qu'il logeait dans sa tête devenait son bien*" (856)—extends the notion of text as transposed "head" or repository of thought. Yet the books that serve as vehicles for

authorial self-possession are as monotonous in their sameness as the consciousness informing them. They are unable to make up for the loss of the otherness of the world, which they manage to destroy through their acts of explanation. Fabien and his character are thus susceptible to promises of seeing things through others' eyes and being housed in others' bodies. The proposal that the devil makes involves an initial transformation, a suggestion that the Windstealer become instead a thief of souls. Souls are rare and valuable things, as the devil will observe, while the wind is something common and accessible to all: "voler du vent est toujours une médiocre affaire: le vent," as he inquires, "n'est-il pas à tout le monde?" (856). Yet in the association of breath and air, the wind and soul are one, linked as speech modalities, in the voice of nature and that of man. As *Voleur de Vent*, he had intercepted and relayed the world's message, while as *voleur d'âmes*, he eavesdrops, mimicking others' internal dialogues. The recurrent sense of "enlissement" that Fabien experiences arises from the reversal of a kind of strange ventriloquy. There the dummy becomes the self who can put words in the mouth of his operator, who becomes himself an anonymous automaton.

Driven to the estate where the pact is finally sealed, Fabien is escorted to an ornate, private library. As identity is a process of continuing self-narration, so the devil's shelves of books of souls have other shelves behind them (879). The idealized Fabien, who aspires to authorial celebrity, is directed by his tempter to search through all his papers, so that his "glory" might discover there "le livre dont elle a besoin" (879-80). Yet the enclosure of the writer inside a single, perfect volume denies the dynamics of creation and the need for self-revision. The devil's "subalterne" cites the ephemerality of language and its substantive, contractual quality, describing it as something that is simultaneously bound and binding. Inviting Fabien out on the lawn to pursue their discussion, he compares their words to wind in a way that recalls *le Voleur de Vent*. Self-consistency and what expresses it can be easily blown away: "Le vent se chargera de disperser nos paroles, de même qu'on efface des mots sur une page" (880). On the other hand, the document that is formalized when signed in blood is replaced by the spoken word that the signatory proffers. Contradicting what he had earlier said, the devil's agent notes: "Cette parole que vous venez de prononcer nous tiendra lieu de tous les parchemins traditionnels signés de notre sang" (882). It is significant that Fabien is also told his identity is a word: "'Apprenez,'

fit l'homme, 'que votre personnalité est enclose en votre nom' " (882). Defined as something transferable, the self is therefore part of discourse, engaged in communicative exchanges and subject to others' appropriation. The I who is named by others is not the one I call myself, and, more importantly, this spoken identity, assuming the status of a word, partakes of the qualities of language objects in being detachable, hollow, lifeless. As Blanchot says:

Je me nomme, c'est comme je prononçais mon chant funèbre: je me sépare de moi-même, je ne suis plus ma présence ni ma réalité, mais une présence objective, impersonnelle, celle de mon nom qui me dépasse et dont l'immobilité pétrifiée fait exactement pour moi l'office d'une pierre tombale pesant sur le vide. (Blanchot 313)

The dissociation occasioned when one is transposed in his name, in an alien identity that robs him of life and "steals his soul," is precisely what will happen when Fabien works his transformations. When uttered in conjunction with some mysterious Hebrew formula, the name no longer acts as a means of identity stabilization, but becomes what is referred to as "le principe des métamorphoses" (882). Not surprisingly, when Fabien migrates from one body to another—when he speaks his name—he lapses into a state of catatonia. Unconscious and immobile, he himself becomes a thing, devoid of the energy animating the one that he has named.

Once back in the city, Fabien hears again the cautionary speech of nature, the howling of the wind which he in vain tries to decipher, or else its gentle whispering that counsels silence and attention: "on entendait un vaste chuchotement comme celui de la mer déferlant sur une plage" (883).⁶ But rather than pay heed to this liberating language, he hastens to make use of the new power at his disposal. In all of Fabien's transformations, he does not wish to be another, but to assimilate some quality he feels would enhance the one he is. He does not desire to be Poujars, with his fragile heart and failing eyesight, but to be a Fabien improved through the enjoyment of the other's professional status. Fueled by frustrated narcissism, Fabien's journey thus describes a search for self in others who possess some putative advantage: power, physical strength, rare intelligence or beauty. But the residual self or author of the various textual changes gets lost when his hosts impose their own idelect and worldview. Poujars lacks "le

cran," "l'impertinence d'un jeune homme" like his occupant (894), and discovers he is again confined to his own unique prison of language.

The second identity that Fabien borrows does not figure as a text, one conscious of the inadequacy of its powers of self-expression. Poujars, as read by Fabien, had been "un majestueux personnage," who evinced a "bovine tranquility" "qui était le signe de la richesse" (889). But when Poujars is interpreted, his otherness neutralized from within, he is dismissed as being a cowardly man, another transparent, boring volume, like a grave of self in which Fabien fears to be inhumed. Inside the mind of Paul Esménard, Fabien's intelligence is dimmed, his self-evaluative faculty overpowered by the pleasure of muscular competence. With Paul there is no disparity between identity and its expression, since his stupidity assures that he can neither read nor voice his defects. The unification of the divided self, of the I and its object-narrative, is at first for Fabien a happy experience because it is inexpressible. Fabien/Paul "passa la main sur une de ses épaules, puis il caressa des doigts sa mâchoire. Un sourire béat relevait les coins de sa grande bouche. 'Y a pas à dire . . .' murmura-t-il" (899). For Paul there is no perceived connection between an action and its consequence, between authorship and text, and life for him is experienced as discontinuous, discrete moments. The unconscious Poujars, who has slumped down on his bench, is no longer an abandoned self; "C'était de l'étranger," Paul thinks (900). Although different from the Windstealer, not yet alienated by desire, Paul is driven to grasp the other and to do it with hands, not words. Like Joseph Day, who strangles Moïra to suppress her mocking speech, Paul seizes the throat of Berthe, and "d'une simple pression de pouce . . . la fit taire" (908). Self-integration can be achieved only when the other is put to death, made into a text that faithfully mirrors the intentions of its writer. For Berthe to express what Paul desires, it is necessary that she be censored, turned into a medium that conveys his meaning, her "non-existence devenue *moi*" (Blanchot 315).

Through the intercession of Brittomart, Paul is able to avoid "arrest," and once reminded that he is Fabien he looks for his next medium of transformation. M. Fruges, whose name suggests parsimoniousness and sobriety, is another character who, like Fabien, defines himself in terms of books. His ascetic life as classical scholar and translator of "dead languages" makes him feel at home in libraries, with their suitably austere ambience (916). As Fabien had

repressed the reality of himself as frustrated libertine, so Fruges denies his worldly appetites by withdrawing to the realm of literature. Like Fabien he hates his spartan existence, his miserable anchorite's lodgings, "et il . . . concluait que les livres l'avaient mené comme dans un cachot" (920). Both characters suffer from pangs of conscience, exhibit a certain religious fastidiousness. Though older and thus more timid, Fruges is an exaggerated double of Fabien. As actors who take their roles too seriously, they are self-deluding impostors, authors identified with the dead texts they copy and adapt to a more current idiom. Of all of Fabien's incarnations, Fruges is the most clearly equated with language, is embodied by and enclosed within his esoteric monographs. He describes himself as "Moi, l'auteur de plusieurs articles sur les pélagiens" (929), and discerns a perfect adequacy between his self and the name that expresses it. "Emmanuel, pensa-t-il. Et Fruges. Un nom sévère qui me ressemble" (927). But like a self-critical writer who re-reads his work, Fabien tires of the object through which he speaks and longs to vacate "cette répugnante demeure que me font le corps et l'âme de M. Fruges" (930).

The capital episode, as Green would describe it, comes with the encounter of Fruges and a boy. Wishing to regress to a pre-literate state, to the unified consciousness of childhood, Fruges tries to wed his own self-awareness to the boy's direct access to things. Like the text that attempts to make physically present what it can only abstract and destroy, Fruges seeks to borrow his child-victim's innocence and then experience it as pleasurable object. "Peut-on être heureux sans le savoir?" he wonders (933), to which the answer, as in the *Windstealer's* case, is that only ignorance can guarantee happiness. Already there is evidence that Fabien's journey will be a circular one, in its progression through the stages of man. As Fruges is just a caricature, an older version of Fabien, so he wishes to travel back through the years and recapture the perfection of childhood. Little Georges, the florist's son, whom Fruges looks upon so covetously, is like a half-forgotten memory of the boy that he had been: "Celui-ci est enrhumé en lui-même comme je l'étais à son âge . . ." (931) "Qui sait si cet enfant n'est pas appelé comme j'ai cru l'être jadis?" (935). The child and his adult self may be onomastically equivalent, but the former's name does not act as the title of a book one might open and glance through. The self, which is meant as a vehicle for personal knowledge and description that enables one to convey a sense of continuity and

purpose, emerges, Green says, at the moment "où l'on se sent brusquement séparé du reste du monde par le fait qu'on est soi-même et non ce qui nous entoure" (*Partir avant le jour* 20). Driven out of Eden "par l'ange fulgurant [du] Moi," the person discovers a projection of self which is a product and construct of language. Between Fruges and his victim there is the child's inarticulateness, but this "obstacle" or "wall" that encloses the boy does not imprison, but rather protects him. The world for him is not a fictional setting which determines the plot that involves him. Nor does he act as a character in a text that he writes and then later reads over and edits. Since children retain the gift of surprise, life is not a monotonous narrative.⁷ It is not shrunk to fit the dimensions of a self that repeats its story forever. Is the child's experience encoded in the same way as the experience of an adult? "Sais-tu lire," as Fruges asks, to which the boy answers, "Oui, quand c'est écrit gros" (934).

The emergent desire of Fabien/Fruges to forego self-recreation in language relates to the writer's impulse to find what his words overlay and conceal. "Le langage de la littérature est la recherche de ce moment qui la précède," says Blanchot, since it seeks "ce qui est le fondement de la parole et que la parole exclut pour parler" (Blanchot 316). At a bakery, Fruges glimpses a magnificent red-head whom he reads as a goddess of myth. Suppressing an awareness of her breathtaking body which exudes an odor of flour, he denies his desire by converting the woman into a trope from classical literature: "M. Fruges la compara intérieurement à une déesse du pain" (953). But it is precisely "sa robuste personne" (953) that he wants, not some airy figure of speech, and so "[l]'envie de la toucher lui vint . . . de la saisir entre ses mains" (953). The language patterns of adults are what stand between them and the world, and so Fruges will inquire if "la vérité n'est pas, en définitive, une pensée d'enfant" (958).

The hiatus in the account of Fabien's adventures, his perusal of others' life-narratives, is there to present the background of characters who all function as self-reading texts. The familial prison of Uncle Firmin's household contains an assemblage of ill-suited relatives whose identities and roles are so firmly defined that they appear as figures of myth. Stéphanie, the beautiful, castrating wife; Elise, the clownish, self-humbling ingenue; Camille, the ineffectual "bellâtre"; and Firmin, the sanctimonious tyrant are so unambiguous and fixed in their characters that they are condensed or distilled into essences. The enigma of self that Green's novel examines has been resolved in this

sinister setting, which offers itself as a self-contained world in which a "blissful clarity" reigns.⁸ Each of these figures takes part in a spectacle that is repeated in ritual fashion, a performance to which all are invited and at which everyone acts as onlooker. The third-person narrative adopts Elise's perspective, as it had adopted Fabien's earlier and causes no change in structure or viewpoint, since these characters will be shown as identical. Into this domestic, conventionalized hell Fabien-Fruges will shortly intrude himself, for the ostensible reason of wearing the handsome exterior of the henpecked Camille. But on a metatextual level, Fabien's arrival serves a much different purpose, by bringing to bear a subversive new reading of these self-explained, naturalized characters. Opposing his demythologizing speech to the others' theatrical language, Fabien/Camille, the only actual pretender, denounces the others' collective imposture. He slaps his wife, reveals Uncle Firmin as a pompous and self-loving bigot, declares his love to Elise, and rules out any further relations between them. Freeing them all of the parts they have played in their collaboratively authored realities, Fabien acts as semioclast, allowing them to confer on their lives a new meaning. Yet before he returns to his original self, he must overcome one final temptation, that of reproducing himself as love object, the synthesis of author and text. He recalls a passage from *La Bruyère* that speaks of the desire to become a young woman (1000) and ponders the cause of his attraction to Elise, "[qui] ressemblait . . . à quelqu'un que je connais" (998). All of Fabien's usurped identities have brought him closer to this discovery, as each new persona is a fragmented self, first repressed, then realized and discarded. He had turned into Fruges, his own intellectual father, who had wanted to return to his childhood, and in that guise, had experienced his duality as something painful that had to be resolved. His fantasy is to make the other himself and then to achieve an unchanging wholeness, by inspiring passion in his double Elise, and then exchanging positions with her. Yet he still wishes to retain the identity of Camille, who will possess her as beloved self: "je connaîtrai le secret de cette âme tremblante, je l'aimerai," as he imagines, but then he qualifies this impossible scenario, saying: "Enfin . . . Camille l'aimera" (1001).

Self-fragmentation had been the effect of Fabien's earlier transformations, the actualization of his varying impulses to power, violence and knowledge. In each of these incarnations, a partial self was textually rendered, experienced as a particular voice of the

character he had authored. But the creation of a unified self, contained in a textual mirror, is an impossible wish that threatens to exclude further chances for self-expression. Human subjects cannot "return to that realm without losing their humanity, their language. Figures who attempt this return to undifferentiation are doomed to failure," says Rosemary Jackson, since "'self' cannot be united with 'other' without ceasing to be" (Jackson 90–91). Fabien's regressive project must therefore be abandoned, and when he confronts Elise, he simply declares: "Je ne t'aime pas" (1009).

When he leaves (or is chased out of) Firmin's house, Fabien no longer thinks of imprisonment, no longer imagines others' lives as "lieux de passage" he can move through.⁹ Instead he desires to seal himself off and close the doors (or the books) left behind him. Each of the self-texts that Fabien wrote had been intended as a means of deliverance, but instead of leading to escape his journey almost brings him to self-revelation: "L'écrivain qui écrit une oeuvre se supprime dans cette oeuvre, et il s'affirme en elle. S'il l'a écrite pour se défaire de soi, il se trouve que cette oeuvre l'engage et le rappelle à lui" (Blanchot 327). Authorial "suicide" is a vain aspiration since one's works will live on forever, and because he is involved in an unending process of literary metempsychosis Fabien becomes an amnesiac nomad "qui a oublié de mourir" (Blanchot 325).

John Dunaway asserts: "The transformations that fiction provided Green were the only means by which he was able to discover a self that he could live with" (Dunaway, *Metamorphoses* 92). Similarly, since Fabien is a fictionalist like Green, he "must become what he is writing" (Dunaway, "Motive" 86), and must realize that self-acceptance comes with writing the self out as text. But the generative aspect of the novelist's work is not enough to afford integration, and having dissociated himself in his books, he tries to reappropriate them through subsequent readings. Fabien whispers his name and affixes his signature to those he inhabits, but once he enters his chosen identity and experiences it from within, he fears that he will become "bogged down" and find his self-transformational power is blocked. The hoped-for coincidence of an author with the texts of self he has produced is an illusion designed to make him a prisoner happy to stay in his place of captivity. The "dédoublément" of Fabien/Green into the selves they project in their fictions cannot be resolved by assuming the role of their own appreciative readers. Indeed, the author's core self cannot be embodied in one single, completed narration, but rather

is something potential, existing only before it invents itself. Once replicated into a complacent outsider who merges with what he is reading, the self as author consents to his death in order to survive in his own finished volumes. Thus condemned "à une existence qui n'est pas la sienne . . . à une vie qui n'est pas de la vie" (Blanchot 327), he subordinates his self-regenerative power to identification with one fossil text. The intellectual vitality of the writer in process, of the "néant au travail" as Blanchot calls him (328), is opposed to his function as reader of self, as Green's work explicitly mentions, "car un homme qui lit est un homme qui dort et qui rêve qu'il pense" (1018). In retracing his steps, Fabien stops in the library where he had become a wordsmith as Fruges, and there he beholds the stupid expressions of those turned into what they are reading: "Des visages tout englués de songes se tournèrent alors vers [lui]" (1018). On his initial journey through others' lives, Fabien had often resembled these dreamers, was a somnambulist like his double Elise (984) in passing through these narcotic volumes. And as a sleeper abandons one dream for another, his previous selves are forgotten, his wandering among different fantasy narratives interrupted by spells of unconsciousness.

For the the writer like Green, with his vacant identity, who strolls through the streets of a city, "[un] visage entrevu est comme le résumé d'un roman . . . dont [il] nour livre l'essentiel" (Preface, *Si j'étais vous* . . . 1529). Once freed of his obsolete textual selves, Fabien reassumes his status as cipher, reverts to being Especel—"l'espèce," who seeks new novels as vessels of change. "Il lui semblait qu'il aurait pu aimer les personnes les plus différentes de lui-même" (1030). But before he embarks on his same old itinerary, Fabien manages to find his way home, returning to the "pays lointain" (1011) underlying his multiple acts of self-authorship. If as writer he possesses "le droit à la mort," it is a right that he never can exercise, since the only things killed are the transient selves he imagines and later transcends. So the dream of death ends when Fabien awakens and asks his mother for paper and pencil. Emblematic of the writer called back to his work, Fabien hears a knock at the door and subsides into the same hypnagogic state that overcomes Green in the process of writing.¹⁰ At the end, he finds himself back in the night, in the rain-swept Passage du Caire, and there he hears a familiar voice speaking his name and inviting him out to further adventures. And as he sets out again on his authorial voyage, he will look for new bases of fiction, in the faces of strangers who are not yet inscribed in his unfinished book of the dead.

NOTES

1. See Melanie Klein, 149–185.
2. In their introduction, Polly Young-Eisendrath and James A. Hall state their preference for the word *pretext* to the word *text*, “because the former expresses the possibility that presuppositions of a continuous and unified self are illusory. The self may be a project of deception, a masking of discontinuity and disintegration. The ‘self’ could then be viewed as a façade, a construction based on language, a cultural point of view on human life, expressing a desire for unity in the face of dissolution and death” (6).
3. See *Adrienne Mesurat* (285) for Green’s use of the term ‘cimetière’ and the discussion of his views on the word in *Memories of Happy Days* (304).
4. Fabien’s name and address are described as something “[qui] ne devraient jamais le quitter, mais devenir comme un passeport dans cette étrange voyage à travers l’humanité” (895).
5. “Although narrative structure cannot wholly account for the experience of a continuous sense of self, it does make an essential contribution to the sense of being a legitimate person. Without some adequate telling about one’s development and place in time, a person will necessarily feel excluded or disoriented, experiencing . . . social isolation . . .” (Young-Eisendrath and Hall 453).
6. In *L’Ombre*, Lucile uses similar words to recommend that man’s speech be superseded by the speech of nature. Referring to the ocean, she says: “on dirait qu’elle veut qu’on se taise parce qu’elle a quelque chose à dire, mais elle ne le dit jamais, elle dit toujours: ‘Chut!’” (1217).
7. “Or presque tous les enfants sont des poètes, c’est-à-dire qu’ils ont souvent un sens assez profond du mystère; ils sont dans le monde un peu comme des étrangers qui arrivent dans un pays où ils n’avaient jamais mis les pieds, et ils regardent autour d’eux avec beaucoup d’étonnement. Le but de l’éducation est de faire peu à peu disparaître cet étonnement en expliquant à l’enfant le sens de ce qui l’étonne. Et peu à peu il grandit et se sent tout à fait chez lui dans un monde où plus rien ne peut l’étonner. Et c’est ainsi que meurent les poètes” (“Mon Premier Livre en anglais” 1443).
8. Each character in this setting has been permeated by myth, has been reduced to what Barthes calls “a predicative nature” (*Mythologies* 143). The interactive environment in which Firmin and his family members live has been contaminated by this form of speech, which, paradoxically renders communication superfluous, since “it organizes a world which is without contradictions because it is without depth, a world wide open and wallowing in the evident, [a world in which] things appear to mean something by themselves” (*Mythologies* 143).
9. In *Je est un autre*, a play published in *La Parisienne* in 1973, “a voice” explains to Francis Martin, the character corresponding to Fabien Especel, that his host is a

simple point of transit: "Ce corps où tu te trouves n'est qu'un simple lieu de passage" (1042).

10. Dunaway mentions the trance-like state that Green would fall into during the writing of certain of his novels: "Green's fictional reality imposes itself on him in the form of an intense vision in which he must participate. 'Le vrai romancier ne domine pas son roman, il devient son roman, il s'y plonge. Entre lui et ses personnages, la complicité est plus profonde même qu'il ne le croit et s'ils pêchent, il pêche aussi de quelque manière. Il est tout ce qu'est son livre, s'il y croit, s'il se laisse prendre . . . ' [Journal 588]" (Dunaway, *Metamorphoses* 92).

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