

Bataille's "The Solar Anus" or the Parody of Parodies

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It is clear that the world is purely parodic, in other words, that each thing seen is the parody of another, or is the same thing in another form.

Ever since sentences started to *circulate* in brains devoted to reflection, an effort at total identification has been made.

—*The Solar Anus*

"The Solar Anus" was written in 1927, at a time when the "virulence and obsessions" present in Bataille's writing caused a friend to arrange for his psychoanalytic cure (Stoekl x). Allan Stoekl, translator of "The Solar Anus," writes that the intellectual violence characteristic of this text was in many ways "the animating force behind Bataille's heterodox 'theory'":

Bataille by 1927 (in "The Solar Anus") was already developing an approach to what he would call later . . . heterogeneous matter—matter so repulsive that it resisted not only the idealism of Christians, Hegelians, and Surrealists, but even the conceptual edifice-building of traditional materialists. (xi)

In this essay, I argue that Bataille uses parody as well as a certain intellectual violence in "The Solar Anus" to attack the "conceptual edifice" underpinning Cartesian, Hegelian, Romantic, and Surrealist discourse.

The reason for this attack is that the discourses in question lay claim to an impossible achievement: that of arriving at a “total identification,” whereby the subject manages to embrace a “transcendent whole.” As Mikhail Bakhtin suggests, any discourse that claims to be self-sufficient and free from the critique of parody cannot maintain this position. For Bakhtin, there “has never been a genre without its own parodying or travesty double” (53). All genres and discourses—“epic, tragic, lyric, philosophical”—may and indeed must “become . . . the object of a parodic travesty ‘mimicry’” (55). This mimicry “shows that a given straightforward generic word—epic or tragic—is one-sided, bounded, incapable of exhausting the object; the process of parodying forces us to experience those sides of the object that are not otherwise included in a given genre or a given style. Parodic-travesty literature introduces the permanent corrective of laughter . . . the corrective of reality that is always richer, more fundamental and most importantly *too contradictory and heteroglot* to be fit into a high and straightforward genre” (55).

If it is true, as Bakhtin suggests, that all genres and discourses inevitably invite a “travesty mimicry,” then one could argue, along with Daniel Hawley, that Bataille is engaged in just such a travesty mimicry, when he parodies reductive scientific and metaphysical discourses in “The Solar Anus.” Hawley writes: “All of Bataille’s writings are, at bottom, an attempt to subvert rationalist thought that would transform human existence into a scientific fact, servile language that would reduce the human subject to an object and a metaphysics that would authorize such a degradation of human becoming” (167; my translation).

As I have suggested, the metaphysical and scientific discourses that “The Solar Anus” parodies are those that would attempt the “total identification” mentioned at the outset of this essay. Bataille’s text subverts these discourses, for none of them is sufficiently dialogized, and all bear the trace of a “closed authorial monologue” that invites parody. The premises of these discourses are indeed challenged when the images of Bataille’s parodic cosmogony¹ subject them to a “travesty mimicry,” which reveals them to be “bounded, incapable of exhausting the object” of their reflection.

However, on another level, Bataille's "The Solar Anus" challenges *any* attempt at parody. His text begins with a reference to a global parody, "the world [being] purely parodic," each thing "the parody of another" or "the same thing in another form" (5). Such a definition suggests that each target of this parody is itself parodic of another target, as parodic objects refer to parodic objects . . . without possible end. In this manner, Bataille refuses to allow the establishment of a new discourse or value that would be transcendent vis-a-vis the target of his parody. The "global parody" of which he writes becomes the corrective needed to address the limits of any and all discourses that, despite their pretensions to the contrary, are incapable of exhausting the object of their study or of revealing a reality "too contradictory and heteroglot to fit into a high and straightforward [discourse]" (Bakhtin 55). In particular, Bataille's parodic strategies are directed towards the ways in which *solar energy*, long the symbol of transcendence and a "higher" reality, has been represented by the respective discourses in question. In what follows, I consider these views of solar energy on an individual basis, for each one is subjected to the intellectual violence of Bataille's parody in "The Solar Anus." In the end, it is Bataille's own idiosyncratic view of solar energy that best unleashes his intellectual violence, for it is a view that, unlike the descriptions of solar energy in the discourses under attack, disrupts both the notion of transcendence and that of a "total identification."

It is well known that the Cartesian attempt at total identification sought to ground philosophical investigation through its inquiry as to whether a knowledge immune to skepticism was possible. This grounding of philosophy in the indubitable existence of the cogito and its innate knowledge of the truth of God's existence is reflected in Descartes's view of solar energy. For Descartes, the sun must necessarily occupy its place in the solar system, accompanied by the earth, other planets and comets in their correspondingly necessary forms. It could be no other way, for God's perfection and perfect laws ordain that the solar system take their present shape. Descartes arrives at this position by subjecting the idea of the sun and planets to his method of inquiry based on

doubt, in order to arrive at the inevitability and necessity of the solar system's present form. In the following passage, he proceeds from doubt to the certitude that the universe must necessarily take its present form:

I have not only succeeded in satisfying myself in this short time on all the principal difficulties usually treated in philosophy, but have also discovered certain laws which God has so established in nature, and the notion of which he has so fixed in our minds, that after sufficient reflection we cannot doubt that they are exactly observed in all which exists or which happens in the world. [I] resolved . . . to speak only of what would happen in a new [world], if God should now create, somewhere in imaginary space, enough matter to make one; and if he agitated the various parts of this matter without order, making a chaos as confused as the poets could imagine, but that afterward he did nothing but lend his usual support to nature, allowing it to behave according to the laws he had established. . . . I showed what were the laws of nature, and without basing my reasons on anything more specific than the infinite perfection[s] of God, I tried to demonstrate everything which might be doubtful, and to show that nature is such that even if God had created several worlds, there would have been none where these laws were not observed. I showed how the greater part of the matter in this chaos would, in consequence of these laws, become arranged in a manner which would make it similar to our skies; and how nevertheless some of these parts must compose an earth, and some planets and comets, and others a sun and fixed stars. (32-33)

Just as Descartes had required for his philosophical inquiry a grounding in the indubitable truth of his existence as cogito and in the innate and indubitable truth of God's existence as perfection, so, in his view of the solar system, does he establish a grounding in the necessary and perfect laws by which the universe must function in its present form, thereby excluding any possibility of a reign of chaos.

Bataille's text incorporates this notion of the grounding necessary for Descartes' philosophical inquiry and subjects it to parody. Where Descartes's system seeks and establishes a *ground*, Bataille's "Solar Anus" posits the indeterminacy of a "*mobile centre*":

Gold, water, the equator, or crime can each be put forward as the principle of things.

And if the origin of things is *not like the ground of the planet that seems to be the base*, but like the circular movement that the planet describes around a mobile center, then a car, a clock, or a sewing machine could equally be accepted as the generative principle. (“Solar Anus” 5; my italics)

The circular motion of the planets around a mobile center could thus be seen to undermine the metaphor of a fixed and stable ground necessary for Descartes’ attempt at total identification. In *Inner Experience*, Bataille notes that it is Descartes’ “intuition” that founds his “discursive knowledge.” His project of “Seeking the Truth in the Sciences” is structured upon acquired discursive knowledge, while the intuition at its base is subject to a forgetting: “But this knowledge . . . what does it mean, when its foundation is removed? Descartes had given as a goal for philosophy ‘a clear and assured knowledge of what is useful for life,’ but in him this goal could not be separated from the foundation” (106). In the end, it is the very “tormenting genius of Descartes,” his “spirit of contestation”—a spirit which he allowed to become assuaged by a system grounded in certain “indubitable truths”—that, on the contrary, leads Bataille to the final affirmation: “I only know one thing: that a man will never know anything” (106). It is the very impossibility of successfully *grounding* the desire for indubitable truth that informs Bataille’s use of a mobile centre to describe the origin of things.

If Descartes’s system requires the establishment of a foundation or ground, Hegel’s discourse relies on the principle of circularity, as the following quotation from *The Phenomenology of Mind* makes clear:

True reality is merely this process of reinstating self-identity, of reflecting into its own self in and from its other, and is not an original and primary unity as such, not an immediate unity as such. It is the process of its own becoming, the circle which presupposes its end as its purpose, and has its end for its beginning; it becomes concrete and actual only by being carried out, and by the end it involves. . . . (80-81)

Hegel's view of the sun, its importance to the solar system and its relationship to the ego, is developed according to the principle of dialectical and *circular* reflexion which characterizes his philosophical inquiry, just as Descartes's view of the sun and solar system had reflected the necessity of a ground from which all things would proceed. Hegel's *Philosophy of Nature* is a text that puts forward a view of the universe that is also ordered by a circular or dialectical movement. Nature is seen as being "in the Idea," but as the "Idea's falling short of itself" (209). In its material state Nature does not "correspond to its Notion" (209); rather, in Nature, "Notionlessness holds sway . . . and each material point appears to be entirely independent of all the others" (210). The movement of circularity reflected in the *ego's* adequation with its Notion ("true reality is merely this process . . . of reflecting into its own self in and from its other, and is not an original . . . unity") is repeated in Nature's movement towards adequation with *its* Notion: "matter [in Nature must] negate . . . itself as untrue existence . . . [so that] a higher existence emerges, [so that] [m]atter involves itself into life" (218).

In *The Philosophy of Nature*, Hegel contrasts the traditional view of the sun (its supremacy as the center of our solar system) with what he sees as its subordination to Life and the transcendence of the Idea. He acknowledges, for example, the fact that "[t]he sun is usually regarded as the most important [planetary body], for the understanding tends to prefer what is abstract to what is concrete . . ." (263). However, he sees all particular bodies (including the sun) as finding their essential unity by relating themselves to the "universal center" (263). Thus, while "matter in general posits its center," and while "all the bodies of a system posit their sun" (265), the sun is, in its turn, subordinate to the Idea. Life transcends all particular bodies and "is therefore the primary *truth*; it is superior to the stars, and to the sun which although it is individualized, is not a subject" (vol.3 10).

The Hegelian attempt at total identification defines a circular, dialectical movement: Nature, and the sun within it, must be negated as "untrue existence" for a "higher existence" to emerge and for "matter" to "involve into life." In this way alone will it

become adequate to its Notion. As I have indicated, this circular, dialectical movement, by which Nature proceeds toward its adequation, is a paradigm for the ego's own attempt to find adequation with *its* Notion in its desire for total identification.

One finds in *Inner Experience* a passage which subjects this circular movement, essential to the Hegelian dialectic, to a *mise en jeu* that repeats its own logic. In addition to the fact that even if one were assured "of having a well-closed circle" one would perceive the "unsatisfying nature of knowledge," there is nothing that guarantees the immunity of this circular thought from its own dialectic processes: "But this circular thought is dialectical. It brings with it the final contradiction (affecting the entire circle): *circular, absolute knowledge is definitive non-knowledge*. Even if I were to attain it, I know that I would know nothing more than I know now" (Bataille, *Inner Experience* 108).

In "The Solar Anus," Bataille in effect exposes the vulnerability of Hegel's "well-closed circle" to its own circular thought by depicting a "mobile center." This mobile center could be seen to parody Hegel's description of a *universal* center which is posited by the ego as it contemplates Nature's (and the sun's) adequation with its Notion:

The planetary systems that turn in space like rigid disks and whose centers also move describing an infinitely larger circle, only move away continuously from their own position in order to return to it, completing their rotation. (Bataille, "Solar Anus" 6)

One might think that this passage—though it includes the image of a *mobile* center—supports rather than undermines the notion of circularity or rotation as a primary principle. Bataille, however, uses parody to undermine circular (and, by implication, dialectical) movement as a sole and primary principle, for he suggests that rotation is continuously undone and transformed into sexual movement. By means of this parody, the notion of a universal center is replaced by a mobile one, and the movement of circularity is continuously transformed into its sexual counterpart:

The two primary motions are rotation and sexual movement. . . . These two motions are reciprocally transformed, the one into the other. (6)

Hegel's description of a *circular*, dialectical movement as the ego proceeds to adequation with its Notion is parodied in this context by Bataille's description of a *rotation* transformed by sexual movement.

As stated earlier, the third discourse whose attempt at total identification invites parodic subversion in "The Solar Anus" is that of Romantic poetry. Where Descartes sought to establish a ground for his inquiry, and Hegel a circular, dialectical adequation of the Ego with its Notion, the Romantic describes a need for elevation, for flight to the transcendent position occupied by the Sun. Hugo, in an attempt to appropriate the sun's energy, writes:

J'ai des ailes. J'aspire au faite.
 Mon vol est sûr;
 J'ai des ailes pour la tempête
 Et pour l'azur.

 L'homme en cette époque agitée,
 Sombre océan,
 Doit faire comme Prométhée
 Et comme Adam.

Il doit ravir au ciel austère
 L'éternel feu;
 Conquérir son propre mystère,
 Et voler Dieu.

I have wings. I aspire towards the summit;
 My flight is sure;
 I have wings for the tempest
 And for the skies.

 Man in this stormy time,
 Dark ocean,
 Must act like Prometheus
 And like Adam.

He must rob the austere heavens
 Of eternal fire;

Conquer his own mystery
And steal God. (92-93)

While Hugo's poem evokes a Promethean flight towards solar fire, Bataille's "Solar Anus" parodies the impulse toward elevation, the soaring of the spirit toward the sun in order to appropriate its energy and transcendence. Whereas the Romantic poet "aspires toward the summit," Bataille depicts man's daily and almost mechanical rising and collapse as a great coitus with the celestial atmosphere:

A man gets up as suddenly as a ghost from a coffin and falls in the same way.

He gets up a few hours later and then he falls again, and the same thing happens every day; this great coitus with the celestial atmosphere is regulated by the terrestrial rotation around the sun. (7)

The incessant rise and fall of one who emerges from a coffin—grounded in death—in order to penetrate the atmosphere in a daily and repetitive copulation, clearly undermines the image of flight and spiritual elevation so cherished by the Romantics. Where Hugo seeks an elevation, an appropriation of solar fire, another Romantic poet, Lamartine, in Neo-Platonic fashion, separates the imperfect world of shadows inhabited by the poet from the transcendent sphere of light to which he aspires. The sun, which illuminates the lower, earthly realm, is in turn imperfect—it is merely the reflection of a divine solar light with which the poet seeks identification:

Que le tour du soleil ou commence ou s'achève,
D'un oeil indifférent je le suis dans son cours . . .
Je ne désire rien de tout ce qu'il éclaire,
Je ne demande rien à l'immense univers.

Mais peut-être au-delà des bornes de sa sphère,
Lieux où le vrai soleil éclaire d'autres cieux,
Si je pouvais laisser ma dépouille à la terre,
Ce que j'ai tant rêvé paraîtrait à mes yeux!

That the circling of the sun begins or ends,

With an indifferent eye I follow it in its path . . .
 I desire nothing of all that it illuminates
 I ask nothing of the immense universe.

But perhaps beyond the limits of its sphere
 Place where the true sun illuminates other heavens
 If I could leave my remains on earth,
 That of which I have so dreamed would appear before
 my eyes! (Lamartine, "L'Isolement" 28-29)

The Romantic notion that the imperfect earthly realm (and its sun) is paralleled by a transcendent sphere of divine and perfect light is subverted by Bataille's description of a single but fractured reality, whose continuous and heterogeneous movements are governed by the two primary and reciprocally transformed motions of rotation and sexual movement. "It is through the use of this magically valued combination" ("Solar Anus" 6) and not through identification with the source of divine and transcendent light "that one can determine the present position of men in the midst of the elements" (6). The Romantic (and indeed Christian) belief in the coexistence of two spheres—one imperfect and chaotic, the other transcendent and whole—is countered by Bataille's assertion that "everything on earth is broken apart by vibrations of various amplitudes and durations" (7). Though there is but one reality, Lamartine has divided it, if only in order to permit union with a divine realm, posited as separate and desirable in its transcendence. The continuous "vibration" of which Bataille writes thwarts any desire for the union of two hypothetically distinct spheres. While the Romantic would hope to render imminent the alleged transcendence of the divine realm, the continuous vibrations ordering earthly life in "The Solar Anus" destabilize and fracture the Romantic notion of a realm that is but the imperfect if intact shadow of its divine counterpart.

A fourth attempt at "total identification" whose discourse is parodied in "The Solar Anus" is that of the Surrealists. Like the Romantic poets, André Breton sought the union of ego and transcendence, the latter taking the form of a surreality, the "resolution of those two states of dream and reality, so contradictory in appearance, into a sort of absolute reality, a *surreality* as it were"

(Breton, *Manifestes* 27). While Surrealism was to have “plunged its roots into the life of its time,” and while André Breton claimed to hold fast to the tenets of dialectical materialism, it is easy to detect a tendency towards idealism in his thought. Such a tendency is clear when he writes that “the materialist attitude is not incompatible with a certain elevation of thought” (18), an elevation whose movement is repeated when Breton writes utopically of “the more or less secure flight of thought towards a world at last made habitable” (155).

Breton’s belief in a certain point in the mind “where life and death, the real and the imaginary, the past and the future, the communicable and the incommunicable, the high and the low cease to be perceived as contradictory” (154) corresponds to the desire to break free of the limits assigned to experience, which he describes as “pacing about in a cage from which it is more and more difficult to free it” (22).

But the liberation of experience to which Breton aspires is more accurately the liberation of experience from all that is base, sordid, rancid, and vile, the qualities that he accuses Bataille of promoting so assiduously in his writing. Breton is, on the contrary, interested in a veritable retreat from base material reality and in a return to the well-spring of the imagination when he writes: “It is a question of returning to the sources of poetic imagination and, moreover, of holding fast to them” (32). For Breton, it is a question of putting thought back on the path of total comprehension, of “restoring it to its original purity” (155), a purifying operation which evokes the affinity felt by Breton for alchemy and its procedures: “Surrealist experiments exhibit a remarkable analogy of purpose with the experiments of alchemy; the philosopher’s stone is nothing other than that which should permit man’s imagination to wreak a stunning revenge on all things” (207).

François Warin believes that Breton’s affinity for alchemy is a direct target of Bataille’s parody in “The Solar Anus”: “‘I seek the gold of time’ said André Breton for whom poetry had the power to transfigure or sublimate the greyish lead of quotidian existence. To the old dream of the alchemists, Bataille answers ‘Lead is the

parody of gold' ” (20-21). By including in “The Solar Anus” the specific example of lead as the parody of gold, Bataille submits Breton’s affinity for alchemic procedures, as well as his preference for the high over the low, to parody. Bataille’s critique of Breton’s tendency to project the “elevation” of thought parallels his subversion of the Romantic desire for transcendence. Where Breton writes of the poet’s need “to rise above the momentary feeling of living dangerously and dying,” having used “the venging weapon of the idea against the bestiality of all beings and all things” (*Manifestes* 221), Bataille writes of the being, once again rooted in death who “gets up as brusquely as a specter on a coffin and falls in the same way. He gets up a few hours later and then he falls again, and the same thing happens every day . . . ” (“Solar Anus” 7).

Where the Romantic poet had written of the divine sphere of light or true sun of which the earthly sun is but an imperfect shadow, Breton claims to disdain the metaphor of the sun, “great distributor of true values” (*Les vases* 144) (“But please, let us go beyond hymns to the sun!”). And yet while Breton claims to disdain the sun as metaphor for the “universal center” of existence, he nonetheless pursues the notion of a transcendent *surreality* from whose vantage point “everything which is high is like that which is low, and everything which is inside is like that which is outside” (*Manifestes* 361).²

Breton’s desire to erase the difference between the opposites high and low, inside and outside (“Everything would lead one to believe that there exists a certain point of the mind where . . . the high and the low cease to be perceived as contradictory” (154)) is countered by Bataille’s depiction of the solar anus, where high and low, pure and impure *collide in their difference*. Where Breton had created the project of “comparing two objects as distant as possible from one another or [of] putting them in the presence of one another in a sudden and striking way” (*Les vases* 145), his ultimate goal was to reveal “the concrete unity of the two terms brought into relation”: “What must be broken is the entirely formal opposition of the two terms . . . the more the element of immediate dissimilarity is strong, the more it must be overcome and denied” (148).

Bataille, on the contrary, seeks the scandal, the collision of high and low, of anus and sun that will break not the opposition of the two terms but the integrity of the viewer. His solar anus is a deliberate refusal to “purify” thought and restore it to the “path of total comprehension.” Where Breton would prefer to avert his gaze from the *fumier* upon which imprisoned Sade cast the petals of a rose,³ preferring, rather, a *surreality* in which the *unity* of pure and impure was revealed, Bataille directs his glance to the solar anus—the *scandal* of thought from which neither high nor low recede.

Indeed, it must be stressed that if neither high nor low recede from the scandal of thought which the solar anus expresses, then it follows that low does not replace high in a new position of prominence. As Alan Stoekl writes: “The fall of one system is not stabilized, is not replaced with the elevation of another . . . Thus filth does not ‘replace’ God: there is no system of values, no new hierarchy” (xiv). Furthermore, low cannot replace high if, indeed, a global parody is at work. If it were otherwise, the new value would, in its turn, require the corrective of Bataille’s parody.

Rather, Bataille’s refusal to replace one system with another, to replace high with low, is sustained in “The Solar Anus” by an unorthodox use of the copula, or the verb “to be.” While the four strategies for total identification mentioned in this essay begin by positing a transcendence, relative to which the ego situates itself (God, the Idea, the divine sphere or the sun, a surreality), the verb “to be” in Bataille’s text thwarts the establishment of a transcendence. Bataille writes:

It is clear that the world is purely parodic, in other words, that each thing seen is the parody of another, or the same thing in a deceptive form. (“Solar Anus” 5)

If all things are related in purely parodic terms, if each parodic object refers to another object, both parodied and itself parodic of another object . . . then nothing, in his view, escapes parody, in order to emerge as a transcendent value. This is what leads François Warin to describe the parody at work in Bataille’s text as being “a *mimésis* without *archè* or *hierarchè*, a play which causes

all of our 'fables' to circulate around that absent center or that abyss of nonsense that bursts forth in Nietzschean laughter" (20).

If Bataille's parody effects an exchange of terms which circulate around an absent center or an abyss of nonsense then it follows that the verb "to be" will no longer forge a link with transcendent meaning. The vehicle required for "the effort at total identification" (the copula or verb "to be") does not, in "The Solar Anus," permit the coupling or union of ego and transcendence, but is rather the catalyst for a scandalous eruption, a vehicle of "amorous frenzy" ("And when I scream I AM THE SUN an integral erection results, because the verb *to be* is the vehicle of *amorous frenzy*" [5]). What distinguishes this "amorous frenzy" from the identification of terms made possible by the verb "to be" is, therefore, that the former disrupts and destabilizes the ego, turning the notion of identification into a rupture, a catastrophe. It is precisely Bataille's idiosyncratic depiction of solar energy which expresses this cataclysm and the impossibility of "identification."

While it is true that the sun occupies a position of prominence in the solar system "because the understanding tends to prefer what is abstract to what is concrete" (263) and while it has symbolized the transcendence desired by Romantic poets, Bataille counters that humans tend to avert their gaze away from the sun, denying its capacity to burn and blind the eyes that contemplate its fire:

Vegetation is uniformly directed towards the sun; human beings, on the other hand, even though phalloid like trees, in opposition to other animals, necessarily avert their eyes.

Human eyes tolerate neither sun, coitus, cadavers, nor obscurity, but with different reactions. ("Solar Anus" 8)

Yet for this "amorous frenzy" to be given literary or linguistic expression in "The Solar Anus," Bataille must use words which, despite the reader's "identification" with the *Jésuve*, remain on the page. One senses the presence of a struggle, as if the centripetal forces seen by Bakhtin as ensuring linguistic unity⁴ were under attack, pulled from their moorings by this eruption of cen-

trifugal forces: the centripetal forces *encircle* the text, ensuring its meaning and providing a medium for the reader's experience, while the centrifugal forces *rupture* the circle, exposing the abyss of nonsense that bursts forth from an absent center.

However, the frenzied and scandalous eruption of the *Jésuve* that "The Solar Anus" describes is not the *only* means of escape from linguistic constraints; the violent, inner compression of Night provides another way out. Indeed, both the *withdrawal* from language and the *eruption* out of language's circularity are given expression in Bataille's erotic tales. In *Madame Edwarda*, for example, one finds the following description of a violent retreat, the implosion of a shattered experience into a horrifying and dead silence:

Like a piece of earthworm, she shook, overcome by breathing spasms. I leaned over and had to pull from her the lacy black velvet mask she was swallowing and tearing between her teeth. The disorder in her movements had laid her bare right to her waist: her nudity, now, had no meaning, but at the same time, had that excess of meaning of a corpse's garment. What was strangest—and most anguishing—was the silence in which Madame Edwarda remained enclosed. Of her suffering no communication was possible and I became absorbed in that dead end—in that night of the heart which was no less deserted, no less hostile than the empty sky.

The convulsive spasms of her body, the ignoble rage horribly visible in her face, seared the life in me and shattered it to the point of disgust. (44-45; my translation)

This example of a violent *centripetal* force, strong enough to shatter that other centripetal force described by Bakhtin as ensuring linguistic unity, is in sharp contrast to the violent *centrifugal* thrust expressed in the following passage from *Story of the Eye*. Positioned above the rotating wheels of her bicycle, Simone is literally thrown in a trajectory propelled by violent erotic spasms, as figurative expression is given to the notion of eruption out of circularity:

She had no more than I exhausted the rage which her nudity evoked. I heard her raspy moanings; she was literally wrenched

by joy and her nude body was thrown on the embankment amidst the sound of steel dragged across stones. (*Histoire* 120; my translation)

When the narrator finds her, however, she is “absent” and “inert”:

I found her inert, her head hanging: a thin rivulet of blood had run from the corner of her lips.

I raised up an arm which fell again. I threw myself on that inanimate body, trembling with horror, and as I embraced her, a spasm of dregs and blood passed through me, in spite of myself; in a grimace, my lower lip hung open, as if I were an idiot (120; my translation).

The “experience” depicted in these passages defies the constraints of linguistic representation. The attempted description of this “experience” can in a sense do no more than “recontextualize” that which belongs more properly to the realm of the Unspeakable.

The Romantic poet is less frustrated by the centripetal forces of language against which the exaltation of his experience strains. The elevation and flight to which he aspires does not entail an eruption out of language’s circularity.⁵ The union of lovers, of ego and Other, is, on the contrary, *made possible* by the verb “to be.” In the following poem, for example, Lamartine describes the union of lover’s souls without questioning the capacity of language to represent this union:

Comme deux rayons de l’aurore,
Comme deux soupirs confondus,
Nos deux âmes ne forment plus
Qu’une âme, et je soupire encore!

Like two rays of dawn,
Like two sighs entwined,
Our two souls are now but one,
And I continue to yearn! (“Souvenir” 43)

The experience of union is appropriated by the poet and transcribed with confidence. Yet to the extent that it does not truly challenge or attempt to overthrow linguistic constraints, it is a

pale shadow of the more extreme experience of loss that characterizes the eroticism of Bataille's fiction, to which every reader of his tales has living access.

As Bataille is well aware, any attempt to transfer the violence of eroticism from the realm of "experience" to that of literature is a "recontextualization" of the Unspeakable. "The Solar Anus" indicates this on several levels. There is first, within the text itself, a description of lovers who have returned to inhabit their separate selves after their "amorous frenzy" has subsided:

In bed next to a girl he loves, he forgets that he does not know why he is himself instead of the body he touches.

Without knowing it, he suffers from the obscurity of intelligence that keeps him from screaming that he himself is the girl who forgets his presence while shuddering in his arms. (6)

Given that the Romantic tendency towards elevation has already been targeted in "The Solar Anus," it is possible to discern here a parodic description of the Romantic union of souls of which the quotation from Lamartine's poetry is an example. Where the poet envisions a beatific union of souls, in the contemplation of which he can luxuriate, Bataille depicts an "experience" which empties lovers of any sense of self, as well as the complete forgetting which accompanies the waning of erotic frenzy. Thus Lamartine's confidence in the memory of this union is parodied when Bataille writes:

The absent and inert girl hanging dreamless from my arms is no more foreign to me than the door or window through which I can look or pass.

I rediscover indifference (allowing her to leave me) when I fall asleep, through an inability to love what happens.

It is impossible for her to know whom she will rediscover when I hold her, because she obstinately obtains a complete forgetting. (6)

This passage constitutes, then, a parody of Romantic descriptions of amorous union which, in themselves, are "recontextualizations" of a more extreme "experience" that defies linguistic representation. Finally, when one links the description of

inert and indifferent lovers in "The Solar Anus" to those of the inert and absent lovers in the erotic tales already cited, the problem of Bataille's use of parody becomes a vertiginous one. Does the experience of the lovers in "The Solar Anus" parody that of Mme. Edwarda and Simone in Bataille's erotic fiction? Is what the latter are described as experiencing not already a "recontextualization" of the Unspeakable? It is here that Bataille's notion of the parodic function of language comes full circle, for the key to the puzzle lies within the imagery of "The Solar Anus" itself.

When Bataille writes "The two primary motions are rotation and sexual movement . . . These two motions are reciprocally transformed, the one into the other" ("Solar Anus" 6), we have not only a means for undermining the four previously discussed strategies for "total identification," but an explanation of the way in which his own language is caught within and struggles against the centripetal forces of linguistic representation. The paradox of having to use language to describe the Unspeakable is represented in "The Solar Anus" by the figure of circularity, or the principle of rotation. Bataille's erotic fiction can, however, transport its reader outside of the textual domain when it depicts the "amorous frenzy" or the violent eruption of the ego into the realm of the unrepresentable. The reader forgets the language, far off in the wings, which has delivered this encounter. "The Solar Anus" represents, metaphorically, this momentary loss of language by the principle of sexual movement (scandalous eruption, amorous frenzy . . .). However, it is language that captures and evokes the forgetting of its trace in the text; it is forgotten, only to re-emerge as the reader represents once again the experience of loss as a movement inscribed by the centripetal forces of the text. Thus, to return to the paradigm for the paradox of representation in language, the two principles of rotation and sexual movement "are reciprocally [and repeatedly] transformed, the one into the other" (6).

This coexistence of language and silence, of circularity and violent eruption, of rotation and sexual movement, is given striking metaphorical expression in "The Solar Anus" by the image of

the solar annulus. The latter forms a ring of light around the sun in the event of an eclipse. This image of a black center surrounded by a brilliant circle of light suggests that the sun has been penetrated by a shaft of darkness. Circularity has been broken by a linear stroke, but the ray of blackness at the center is encircled by light: the solar annulus thus resumes metaphorically the difficult coexistence of the principles of rotation (the circle of light) and sexual movement (the dark shaft). It is also a paradigm for Bataille's use of language: linguistic circularity (the centripetal force of language) is undermined by the eruption of centrifugal forces. This eruption is, at the same time, captured and encircled by a re-emergence of the language depicting this outpouring. Indeed, there is no suggestion that one movement or force subordinates the other. For Stoekl, it is this type of insolubility that constitutes the radicality of Bataille's writing. Through this insolubility, Bataille highlights a "moment of automutilation or 'non-logical difference' in which two necessary and incompatible positions impossibly meet":

Bataille's radicality, then, may stem not so much from the content of his 'positions' themselves as from their violent interaction. . . . If Bataille's text is double, it leads necessarily and impossibly in two directions at once. . . .(Stoekl xxiii)

In "The Solar Anus," these two directions are those of parody and the impossibility of parody; of linguistic representation and its disruption in a violent frenzy. It is a text whose annulus encloses a parody or a "re-contextualization" of Cartesian, Hegelian, Romantic and Surrealist attempts at total identification while at the same time subjecting the aforementioned strategies, and any discourse for that matter, to a global and endless parody in which the transcendence of any position is impossible. Indeed, having become subject to Bataille's parody, the strategies under attack eventually re-emerge—once the frenzy of the Jésus subsides—as mere *parodies* of *any* attempt to approach totality.

Notes

1. I borrow this term from Daniel Hawley's article. Hawley views parody as functioning on three levels in "The Solar Anus"—linguistic, metaphysical and metaphorical (168).

2. Despite this apparent disdain, Breton includes many images of the sun in his poetry. The following quotations make this clear:

"Ce n'était qu'un rayon de la roue voilée . . ." ("Le Soleil en laisse")

". . . tu sentiras monter dans tes cheveux le soleil blanc et noir . . ." ("La Mort rose")

". . . ses rayons de soleil circulaires . . ." ". . . avec des traînées de soleil sur des fleurs rouges" ("Hôtel des étincelles")

". . . qui mettent une pointe de soleil dans la nuit profonde . . ." ("Un homme et une femme absolument blancs")

"Ce matin proue du soleil . . ." ("Le Sphinx vertébral")

"Je vois les arêtes du soleil . . ." ("Vigilance")

"Elle brie au soleil comme un lustre d'eau vive . . ." ("J'ai devant moi")

"Dans un grand soleil de feu d'artifice . . ." ("Au beau demi-jour de 1934")

"Sous un second soleil de serins sauvages . . ." ("On me dit que là-bas").

"It was only a ray of the veiled wheel . . ." ("The sun on a leash")

". . . you will feel the black and white sun rise in your hair . . ." ("The Pink Death")

". . . it's circular sun rays . . ." ". . . with trails of sunlight on red flowers" ("The Hotel of Sparks")

". . . which place a point of sun into the deep night" ("An absolutely white man and woman")

"This morning prow of the sun . . ." ("The vertebral Sphinx")

"I see the bones of the sun . . ." ("Vigilance")

"She shines in the sun like a light of running water . . ." ("I have before me")

"In a great sun of fireworks . . ." ("In the beautiful half-day of 1934")

"Under a second sun of wild canaries . . ." ("They tell me that over there")

3. Breton's disagreement with Bataille on the subject of Sade, the rose petals, and the *fumier* may be found on pages 218-20 of the *Manifestes*.

4. For Bakhtin's views on the centripetal and centrifugal forces of language, see *The Dialogic Imagination* 272.

5. It is true that the Surrealists tried to escape from the prison-house of language through automatic writing and the shocking juxtaposition of distant images; they hoped in this way to liberate thought and dream from their respective limits. But these attempts do not go far enough, particularly when Breton declares in the *Manifestes*: "If the depths of our mind are receptive to strange forces capable of augmenting those of the surface, or of fighting victoriously against them, it is in everyone's interest to capture them, to capture them first, in order to submit them later, if necessary, to the control of our reason" (23).

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