Michel Butor, the Peripatetic Writer: A Portrait of the Artist as Voyager

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Kyoto, the capital in the west, in Hiroshige's woodblock prints is a sort of trip of initiation filled with various temptations and ordeals. But nowhere in this collection is the imperial city of Kyoto as the terminus, the coronation of the trip. One gets the impression that there is still another stage and feels as if the trip will still continue westward: "Ces 53 étapes ne sont que le début d'un voyage rêvé, qui ferait sortir du Japon, traverser la Chine ou l'océan, mènerait de l'autre côté de la terre. Il s'agit d'un départ pour l'Europe, car les 'sites fameux' de ce continent doivent être aussi utiles que ceux de l'archipel pour nous aider à nous figurer le paradis."

At its end, this chapter reads: "Ceci est la dernière page du livre japonais mais la première du livre français." This means that just as Hiroshige's *53 Stages on the Tokaido* will make us imagine a trip to Europe, so we Japanese readers will find ourselves in France when we have read this book *Flottements*—not in the actual France but in the France that exists nowhere else than in the book, the terminus of the *flottement* westward. *Flottements* is a way to Utopia. Then when the French reader, having journeyed from left to right along the printed lines and from west to east by the *parcours français*, comes to the final chapter of the floating trip and reads the last page beginning with "Ceci est la dernière page du livre français, mais la première du japonais" and arrives at last at the passage "à l'est, la salle d'or qui abrite quelques unes des plus belles statues du monde," he may well see in the eyes of his imagination a paradise in the east and the sweetly smiling Shaka.

Meiji Gakuin University

[1] Michel Butor, "Trente-six et dix vues du Fuji," in his *Répertoire III*, Paris, Minuit, 1968. Subsequent references to the *Répertoire* series will be made parenthetically, using the abbreviations *R2* and *R3*.

[2] The essay *Flottements d'est en ouest* was written at the request of the Asahi Publishing Company. Butor visited Japan at the publisher's invitation in April 1980 and stayed for about two weeks, during which time he saw many art works, temples and gardens in Kyoto and Nara. This essay, which was written after Butor returned to France, is scheduled to be published in the original and in a Japanese version by Asahi in 1982 with many illustrations.

[3] Personal communication during Butor's stay in Japan.

[4] The oldest wooden structure in the world, near Nara.

[5] As I note in the closing section entitled "Book-Mobile," Butor labels as the *parcours japonais* the version beginning with chapter one, "Horyuji," and ending with chapter twenty-one, "Hiroshige's *53 Stages on the Tokaido*"; the so-called *parcours français* takes the same twenty-one chapters in reverse order.

[6] Roland Barthes, "Écrivains, Intellectuels, Professeurs," *Tel Quel*, 47 (Autumn 1971), p. 4.

[7] Michel Butor, dialogue with Jacques Chancel, Radio France, 1 June 1979.

[8] Unfortunately, due to financial reasons, the publication of this ideal bilingual version has been postponed for the moment.

Michel Butor, the Peripatetic Writer: A Portrait of the Artist as Voyager

By JACK KOLBERT

Picasso was once quoted as follows: "Ce qu'il faudrait, c'est parler de quelqu'un comme on ferait son portrait. Plus on y met de soi, tel qu'on est, plus on approche de la vérité. Si l'on essaie de rester anonyme, par la haine ou par le respect, si on se fait disparaître, c'est là qu'on est le plus mauvais. Il faut être comme on est, il faut en avoir le courage, alors là ça peut devenir intéressant."[1] As I attempt to paint the portrait of Michel Butor, for whom his incessant travels became an important source for many of his texts, I shall, like Picasso, inject into my analyses much of myself—that is, of my personal impressions of and reactions to the subject. To put it bluntly, I have been attracted to Michel Butor's writings for at least several reasons. First, I have had the good fortune of meeting him at regular and irregular intervals (an excellent Butorian term!) in different parts of the globe. Second, my family and his have developed close personal and professional ties with each other, and we have occasionally traveled together. Also, there are many affinities that draw us together, not the least of which is our shared propensity for the adventure of travel.

At this very conference, the eighth in the Puterbaugh series at the University of Oklahoma, Butor himself has confessed that "the writer is a restless person."[2] By "restless" he means that he is forever struggling to come to grips with his insatiable need for increased self-understanding through new experiences of life (such as travel), new conceptions of artistic expression and new themes. Throughout his life Butor has welcomed commentaries on his works. He manages also to attend quite a few conferences dedicated to his writings. His closest friends know that he enjoys hearing others recompose, decompose, occasionally distort, embellish here and denude there, analyze and offer critiques of what he has written. If some writers systematically reject the value of commentaries by

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others concerning their works (some even refuse to read the criticism surrounding their writing), Butor, for his part, enjoys public vocalizations about his texts, especially when he can be present to learn something new about himself. By being present at such symposia, and by generally participating in them himself, Butor the creative artist also plays the role of the performing artist who assists in the interpretation of his work, but only up to a point: i.e., Butor does not wish to deprive scholars and critics of their own reactions, provided of course that they bear the onus of their personal reactions. "Vous aurez," he writes, "entièrement raison de vous lancer dans cette aventure interprétative; tout mon texte vous y invite, mais vous conserverez l'entière responsabilité de ce que aurez découvert."[3] He has already admitted that commentators of his writings were useful, even necessary as aides who would assist him in establishing some sense of cohesiveness in his literary career: "[L'écrivain] cherche à se constituer, à donner une unité à sa vie, un sens à son existence. Ce sens, il ne peut évidemment le donner tout seul; ce sens c'est la réponse même que trouve per à peu parmi les hommes cette question qu'est un roman."[4] (Later in his life, in lieu of "roman," he would surely have written "livre.")

As we carefully study the two decades of Butor's career, we note that there has indeed emerged both in his life and works a certain "unité à sa vie." I refer to his irrepressible, surging passion for travel. Butor's direct or indirect use of the theme of travel or of some form of geographical displacement is, in my judgment, one of several important ingredients that cement his collective compositions into a coherent whole. Allied to the theme of travel in Butorian literature are the various subthemes connected with geographical mobility. Take, for example, the meteorological changes in different parts of the world. The various climates of the places Butor has visited have always fascinated him, from fog in Santa Barbara to rain in Angkor Wat, from bitter cold in Zuni, New Mexico to snowstorms in the Colorado Rockies, from muddy conditions in Seoul, Korea to billowy clouds over the Pacific. Then there are almost always in his books the paraphernalia of travel, ranging from the ubiquitous trenchcoats and umbrellas to well-worn suitcases and passport cases. Throughout Butorian literature we relive with him such travel events as the inevitable customs inspections, the sudden shocks of the hero-voyager descending from a train or plane to find himself in a strange land with different linguistic patterns, occasionally a wholly new system of lettering or characters, and startling changes in architectural styles and urban configurations. I do not pretend that the theme of travel is the only unifying force in Butor's works; but surely it is a pivotal theme that adds a very special character to his oeuvre.

Despite the prominence of the theme of the voyage in Butor's works, there seems recently to have developed in Butor's own lifetime, alongside his seemingly insatiable passion for geographical mobility, a nascent dimension of travel fatigue. Here is one of his candid admissions: "Je voyage moins depuis quelque temps. Je m'assagis, je m'alourdis, j'ai des difficultés de tous ordres, bien sûr, j'ai besoin de sentir en sécurité les miens, personnes qui grandissent, objets qui s'accumulent, de les installer."[5] Incessant trips, jet lag, sheer physical exhaustion, combined with a sense of obligation as a spouse and as a father for his four growing daughters have made these repetitive trips increasingly burdensome for him. Also, ironically, because he has traveled so extensively, he has brought home with him an immense quantity of travel mementos and souvenirs. His personal abode has for a long time begun to look like a museum of international folklore. He simply wishes to remain home more to enjoy his objects and to manage them more effectively. One senses also, in Butor's maturing soul, the growing need for roots. Even though the key slogan in his book *Où* is that "Je hais Paris" (he does periodically feel the need to flee Paris and all that his routine existence in France entails), he also feels an identical desire to return home from time to time to rejuvenate himself once again with the culture and language of his native country.

Despite Butor's recently expressed misgivings about trips, it is incontrovertible that without them his literary output would have assumed an entirely different tonality. There exists a pivotal statement by Butor on the theme of travel literature in an essay entitled "Le voyage et l'écriture" (in *Répertoire IV*). This statement is his most systematic enunciation of travel philosophy printed in a single work. Here is a key portion of the statement (*R4*, 9), freely interspersed with my own commentaries. "J'ai beaucoup voyagé, paraît-il, certes pas assez pour mon goût; il suffit que je regarde sur un globe terrestre ces innombrables régions où je ne suis jamais allé, pour que me saisisse à nouveau ce violent désir, inverse de la nostalgie . . . auquel je suis incapable moi-même de donner un nom pour l'instant." Note that Butor characterizes his zeal for travel as "ce violent désir"; so strong is his anticipation for trips to still unvisited places that he finds himself lacking in terminology to designate this desire—one of the rare moments when this otherwise prolific master of words cannot find a term strong enough to describe something vital. "Mais surtout j'ai besoin de digérer d'anciens voyages, je n'en suis pas encore tout à fait revenu, je n'en reviendrai jamais complètement." Here of course the author confesses that former trips continue to haunt him throughout his later life. He even suggests that previous trips will impinge upon his forthcoming travels and deeply affect his future writings about them. His present and future life is affected by that which he has experienced during prior voyages. Here we confront a fundamental pattern of Butorian creativity: namely, that of the *alluvionnements*, a pattern about which I shall have something more to say later on. Suffice it to point out here that my theory of *alluvionnements* is illustrated by the manifold ways in which each of Butor's trips recurs—like

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themes and variations—in his subsequent writings: consider, for example, a sequel like the Zuni Shalako dances and the adventures of "Neige à Bloomfield" which recur again and again in more than one book.

But Butor struggles—mostly in vain—to come to grips with the problem of how to integrate his trips into his professional life: "Il s'agit pour moi de trouver un *modus vivendi* avec eux par le moyen de l'écriture, avant de pouvoir repartir vraiment; c'est donc pour voyager que je voyage moins." There is in this last paradoxical sentence the clear indication that he requires more time to appreciate the meaning of prior travel before he can become involved in trips to still unvisited sites, and that he hopes to overcome this problem through his own writings. "Or j'écris, et j'ai toujours éprouvé l'intense communication qu'il y a entre mes voyages et mon écriture." In this single utterance—"l'intense communication qu'il y a entre mes voyages et mon écriture"—we find the vindication of the title of my article, "Portrait of the Artist as Voyager." For the author of *La modification*, the phenomenon of traveling and that of writing are both interdependent and inseparable components of life.

In Butor's article "Le voyage et l'écriture" there then ensues a fairly technical discussion concerning the use of literature as an expression of travel and travel as an inspiration for literary creativity. Butor, treating the "livre comme objet," even defines the horizontal—and occasionally vertical (for certain languages)—movement of the reader's eyes along the black-and-white interspaces of the pages of a book as a form of travel from one destination to another. He stresses also that the state of travel is especially propitious for the act of reading books. So many travelers utilize the time they have available to them while sitting in airplanes or waiting to change trains in terminal buildings to do their most meaningful reading: "C'est pourquoi aussi le voyage est pour nos contemporains un lieu privilégié de lecture: combien parmi eux ne lisent plus que dans le métro, le train, l'avion?" (*R4*, 12).

Michel Butor goes so far as to propose a new science, that of "iterology": namely, the objective study of the phenomenon of travel. He demonstrates here a particularly keen sensitivity to the publicity of travel within the realm of commercial advertising. (This same sensitivity is especially prominent in his little book *Intervalle*.) He also realizes that tourism may well be the largest industry in the world. The key term in the science of "iterology" is *displacement*: that is, the substitution in one's life of one site for another. Butor actually categorizes various kinds of geographical displacement. Here are some of the categories he enumerates: "nomadism," the act of movement for the sake of movement; "exodus," departure for a new geographical site for a specific term; moving to a new place for purposes of retiring there or to find some new professional opportunity; political emigration; travel on a roundtrip basis in which the traveler returns to his point of departure; business trips; vacations; domestic travel within a geographical area in which the language and culture of the places visited do not substantially change; overseas travel involving drastic or moderately different alterations of linguistic communication and social mores; pilgrimages to sacred places related to the traveler's religious faith; sentimental trips to the place of one's birth and/or early childhood. Finally Butor accentuates the importance of literary travels, such as those undertaken by Gérard de Nerval and Chateaubriand, trips which have left such indelible imprints in the career of Butor. In sum, Butor codifies a kind of mythology of the *trip*. But it is not only the science of travel that interests him; he actually believes in the adventure of travel as approaching the mystical experience of poetry.

> Puisque j'ai déjà proposé une science, je puis bien proposer un art: celui qui consisterait simplement à voyager peut-être en laissant quelques traces ici et là, mais celles-ci étant subordonnées à l'effet général, telle innovation dans l'itinéraire, tel changement de véhicule, ou telle station prolongée pouvant susciter autant d'admiration ou de commentaires qu'une belle expression dans un beau poème. (*R4*, 28)

Often Butor reacts to the experience of being at an airport as if it were a poetic one. He finds a magical quality in the drama of planes taking off and landing, in the enchantment of blinking blue or red lights along the nocturnal runways, when suddenly these long narrow spaces are illuminated in the pitch black of night by the headlights of approaching aircraft, or when the silence of night is ruptured by the music of jet engines that roar as the plane is warming up. Most of us take for granted the so-called "romance of the the railways": giant locomotives approach or depart from the station platforms with people tearfully waving good-bye to each other or else joyfully greeting each other upon arrivals. It is safe to contend that no author of our times has done more than Michel Butor to communicate the poetical quality of airports, railway stations, customs houses, terminal buildings and of flight itself within airplanes or travel in trains. Travel constitutes the very raw material with which he composes his texts. However, it is important to note that he seldom copies his immediate impressions on the spot. Preferring to "fine-tune" his impressions of travel at some later date(s), Butor has admitted, "J'écris rarement sur place. Je ne tiens pas de journal de voyage. Je parle d'un lieu dans un autre et pour un autre. J'ai besoin de faire voyager mes voyages" (*R4*, 29).

There exists a kind of cross-fertilization linking Butor's trips into a single intertwining web of experiences. This cross-fertilization explains one of the major tenets of his creative philosophy: to wit, that his works themselves are complements of each other. It is no coincidence that Butor's books appear in series or groups. Much of his poetry has been grouped under the heading *Travaux d'approche*, even though his poems were composed over a period of several years. The novels appeared within the same period of his life. *Le génie du lieu* contains to date four volumes that have

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appeared between 1958 and 1978 (and the series is not yet concluded); *Matière de rêves* is also comprised (thus far) of four titles that have been published intermittently between 1975 and 1981. The so-called "stereo genres" (which I prefer to designate by the term "mega-genres," because of the ancient Greek meaning in *mega*—of combining forms) also resemble each other in so many ways. Nor should we forget that *Illustrations* and *Répertoire*, also with four volumes each at present, contain many interrelationships from book to book. Each of Butor's volumes germinates the next ones and maintains a kind of "rubbing off" action on them. Similar themes, stemming from travel, unite the books into a coherent unity. For example, we note the recurrent theme of alienation felt by the foreigner disembarking in a strange land with its incomprehensible language and bizarre customs. Compare the experiences of Revel arriving in Bleston (*L'emploi du temps*) with those of the young protagonist getting off the train in a small German hamlet (*Portrait de l'artiste en jeune singe*).

Travel for Butor serves as a strategy for comparing and contrasting places with each other. Some of his most complex metaphors derive from his obsessive desire to compare and contrast the accumulating experiences of travel. The well-known comparison of what Rome symbolized for Léon Delmont (*La modification*) in contrast with what Paris meant for him is such an example and extends throughout the entire novel. The ultra-sophistication and urbanity of a world capital like Paris sharply contrast with Butor's depiction of the life of the early Mormon pioneers in western America, as well as with his highly charged and even occasionally tedious descriptions of the Zuni dances in New Mexico, also with the ancient burial places outside Seoul and the kaleidoscopic changes of color on Mount Sandia just outside Albuquerque. Dramatically Butor contrasts the places he visits outside metropolitan France with the capital of his native France by the following introductory statement: "J'ai fui Paris. . . . J'ai mis entre Paris et moi toute une épaisseur de campagne."[6] The word *épaisseur* (density) is in itself interesting: Butor demonstrates a lifelong propensity for contrasts between dense and empty places, between tightly compressed places like Paris and Berlin, on the one hand, and voids of enormous distance and visibility (New Mexico, Australia) on the other.

In a similar vein, Butor stresses the contrasts and similarities between urban patterns of life and primitive rituals. Between the densely inhabited apartment building on the Passage de Milan in the novel of that name and the primitive, though highly complex dances of the Northwest Indians, between the totem-pole culture of British Columbia and the soaring skyscrapers of Manhattan, so awesomely described in his article on Mark Rothko's paintings, between the mighty splendor of Niagara Falls and the architecturally harmonious arrangements of structures surrounding the Piazza de San Marco in Venice, between the fashionable (and often fatiguing) round of "soirées à Washington" and the pungent western-style barbecue on some ranch in the great cattle country (in *Mobile*), one finds countless gradations of contrasts among the cultural patterns of the societies and the configurations of life on our globe.

Travel for Butor is also closely related to his educational experiences as a former student and currently as a professor. For him travel is more than a horizon-expanding enterprise, as it is described, for example, both in Gargantua's admonitions to his son Pantagruel to travel or in Rousseau's similar advice to his disciple Émile. For Butor travel is much more than a broadening experience; it is also an absolute necessity of literary inspiration. Though his earlier classroom readings continue to haunt him all his life, Butor has remained as an adult a voracious reader of world literature. Before he undertakes a trip, he makes it a point to review all the literature that he has ever read on a given site. Once having visited this site, he compares his real impressions with his expectations. The books Butor has read prior to traveling, however, represent not only the standard guidebooks but also some of the classics of world literature and the definitive source books on given sites. That his work on Niagara Falls emanates from his reading of Chateaubriand's commentary on the same subject is already a truism of Butorian criticism. But many readers of *Matière de rêves* may not realize that a number of the literary characters who appear and reappear in his nightmares were actually selected because Butor once was asked to prepare, on relatively short notice, courses on the nineteenth- and twentieth-century French novel (during one of the years he spent at the University of New Mexico).

Another point I wish to emphasize is this: no writer of our era has demonstrated better than Michel Butor such an ingrained capacity for pure cosmopolitanism. So much of what he wrote in all four series of *Répertoire*, in *Les mots dans la peinture* and in the four volumes of *Illustrations* depended in large measure upon his visits to scores of museums around the world. There he could view the artistic works he treats critically in the very galleries in which the original pictures are displayed. He devoted countless hours in museums that range from Chicago to Berlin and from Kassel, West Germany to Tokyo. A penetrating study he wrote on Chagall is based not so much on the paintings of this master-artist as they are on display in France, where they are so abundantly available, but rather on the Chagall he saw in the Worcester Art Museum in Massachusetts. *Western Duo* required Butor to have available to him the facilities of the Tamarind Workshop (of lithography) in Los Angeles and later in Albuquerque. His cosmopolitanism of course transcends the visual arts and includes the other art forms, especially literature. A volume of assorted critical essays like *Essais sur les modernes* is clearly the end product of a man who has not only enjoyed lifelong contact with the standard works of the French literary repertory—Baudelaire and Proust, for example—but also of an

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avid reader endowed with a deep appreciation of non-French authors like Ezra Pound, Dostoevsky and Faulkner. The cosmopolitan Butor puts his global instincts to good use in music as well. When he composed his fascinating little study *Dialogue avec 33 variations de Ludwig van Beethoven sur une valse de Diabelli*, it was after he had attended a live recital of these variations by Marcelle Marcenier on 7 September 1970 in Liège, Belgium.

But Butor's cosmopolitan peregrinations are not circumscribed to the terrestrial confines of planet Earth. His imagination has broadened his sense of mobility and has carried his travels even into cosmic space. For Butor the voyage may well become a cosmic experience. *La rose des vents*, a kind of space-travel book, transports the reader vertiginously across the geospaces of time and the great eras of human life. A loyal disciple of the anthropologist Lévi-Strauss, Butor allows us to peer across the millennia of human history, from the vantage point of the portholes of some undefined spaceship that negotiates the cosmic nebulae of the universe with incredible facility.

As Butor strives through the phenomenon of travel to attain a more complete appreciation of what he called "l'unité de sa vie," he draws from virtually every conceivable stratum of his travel experience: psychological, geographical, educational, linguistic, literary, even from the intimate events of his own daily family existence. (The names of his closest family and friends recur incessantly in many of these books.) His approach to travel is so all-encompassing that we may readily state that, between his personal existence as a creative artist and the texts that he has produced, there is indeed a true consubstantiality. By the term *consubstantiality* I do not suggest that Butor intends his works to serve as autobiography. On the contrary, his trips are not at all static remembrances of the past, chronologically arranged into a running narrative. Instead they represent, as noted, the thematic raw materials for his creative process. They serve as constantly growing accumulations of experiences and ever-changing ingredients for future writings. On at least one occasion he has utilized the word *alluvionnements* to denote a special phenomenon in the creative process: apropos of Montaigne he once asked, "Quelle est donc la figure déterminante formée par chacun des livres, figure que les *alluvionnements* successifs ne détruisent pas, mais précisent, raffermissent, au contraire en la diversifiant?"[7] (emphasis mine).

Life forms an incessant stream of events, each one leaving behind it sediments of all sorts and picking up new deposits along the way. Even when one returns to the same places, both the traveler and the places visited have changed. One returns to a place like New Mexico for a second and third time, but by then one has had the opportunity of visiting also Asia Minor, the Australian heartland, British Columbia's forested coastline and the mountainous spine of Japan. So now one views New Mexico through the eyes of a refreshed, enriched and reinvigorated world traveler. The successive alluvions of life have left their marks, even their scars on the traveler. As he recaptures some of these older experiences in a new textual form, he has no choice but to present them in a totally redigested fashion.

*

In concluding, I would like to demonstrate that the travel theme has added a note of continuity to all of Butor's works, from his earliest compositions to the most recent. To corroborate my contention, I have selected three moments in his writing: his earliest pieces in "Eocene" (from *Travaux d'approche*), *Réseau aérien* (from his middle period) and *Matière de rêves*, from his most recent writings. Right from the start, even before he had earned a reputation as a New Novelist—a reputation he has always felt excessively restrictive—Butor had manifested in his earliest poems a marked fascination for travel. In "Eocene" Butor wrote (in poems composed in 1950–51) a piece entitled "Pérégrination" which may well be regarded as an ode to the adventure of travel: "Prends garde ô voyageur . . . et tu seras pour eux comme cet étranger perdu / qui ne sait plus retrouver l'usage de la parole / et murmure quelques mots incertains / . . . / que reviens-tu chercher dans ce peuple / qui ne te connaît pas."[8] This early poem contains many precursory elements for some of the early pages of *L'emploi du temps* and *Portrait de l'artiste en jeune singe*, where we witness similar heroes, to their shock, suddenly arriving in places where the difficulty of linguistic communication between the traveler and his hosts creates an initially insuperable alienation. In another poem, entitled "Poème écrit en Egypte" (in "Eocene"), we are treated to the same high dosage of Butorian alliterations and sonorous consonances that characterize the striking word-music of works like *Réseau aérien* much later in his life: "Migrations voilà donc où vous aboutissez / le ciel couleur de mirabelle / et la faïence bleu de mer tout écornée / . . . / ô voyageur dans les ravins de brumes et de bruits."[9]

Of all Butor's titles, none is more unabashedly travel-oriented than *Réseau aérien*. This work, one of his most unjustly underestimated, glorifies our own age, the age of jet travel. Whereas, on the one hand, Butor exalts the magical effects of soaring over billowy clouds and silvery oceans, in contrast with this awesomeness of aerial travel he makes us listen, on the other hand, to the trivia pronounced by the passengers within the planes themselves who spend their time aloft not in admiring the majestic contours of the Earth beneath them, but rather on such pedestrian subjects as their duty-free purchases, the acquisition of souvenirs and customs inspections. This same binary character exists in Butor's depictions of Niagara Falls and the basilica of San Marco in Venice. It is Butor's way of reminding us that in travel there exist two levels of adventures: the elevated and the awesome, on the one hand, and the pedestrian, practical, even irritating (e.g., customs inspections) on the other.

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The most recent phase of Butorian literature focuses on his dream life. Even though the four volumes of *Matière de rêves* deal exclusively with Butor's sleeping existence, they reflect substantially many of his waking experiences. The people in his nightmares are none other than his spouse, his daughters, the characters from the books he uses in teaching his courses. Once again we crisscross the airports of his life, the ubiquitous customs inspections, the train stations. A Butorian figure rushes frantically around the world to deliver lectures, purchasing souvenirs here and postcards there. But, in contrast with the novels and stereogenres, the transitions of people and places in *Matière de rêves* are amazingly abrupt; effortlessly we leap from Salonika to Iceland, from Prague to Australia. On the same page we encounter the Maori of New Zealand and undergo a terrifying experience at the Nice airport.

Earlier I mentioned that Butor includes in his travel writings virtually every aspect of the voyage. There is, however, one level of travel that is virtually absent in him: the political situations of the countries he visits. Except for an isolated parenthetical question about the caliber of the government in Greece during one of his visits, he makes almost no reference to politics. Possibly the most notable exception is his description of the Berlin Wall (in *Illustrations II*). In a poem entitled "Regard double" his poetic voice assumes an especially moving poignancy: "Vous qui n'êtes de Berlin, venez à Berlin, car Berlin vaut bien le voyage; / et vous y pourrez voir . . . les gens qui passent d'un Berlin à l'autre / . . . et ceux qui ne peuvent pas passer, qui s'approchent de cette frontière au bout de la rue . . . ralentissent, s'arrêtent."[10]

In truth, Butor is a kind of Rabelaisian figure who, through travel, seeks to encompass all of life, the life of the past, present and future, the life of France and the life of non-France, the life of mobility and the life of conjugal stability when he returns home. He reminds us of his protagonist in *Second sous-sol*, who can find total peace with himself only through the integration, within the being of a single soul, of all sorts of opposites and similarities. Butor writes:

> Pulpe de lèvres et de sourires, en te mâchant je connaîtrai la science du bien et du mal, je deviendrai semblable au plus beaux mots de toutes les langues, lorsque les murmurent ou les chantent les plus sensibles de toutes les femmes; je deviendrai hanté, enté, par tous les dieux mes pères, pépin de réconciliation, baiser de paix, l'or du grand large.[11]

Let me conclude by predicting that Butor's very presence in Norman, Oklahoma at the eighth Puterbaugh Conference will figure in his indefatigable search for "l'unité de sa vie." We can safely assume that one day, immortalized among the *alluvionnements* of some future book or books now germinating within the mind of Michel Butor, will be this two-week voyage he made to the campus of the University of Oklahoma. A first poem on the subject has already emerged!

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[1] Quoted by Jean Vercors in the front matter of his recent book, *Moi Aristide Briand*, Paris, Plon, 1981.
[2] Michel Butor, "The Origin of the Text," public lecture at the University of Oklahoma, 12 November 1981 and included in this issue of *WLT*.
[3] Michel Butor and Denis Hollier, *Rabelais ou C'était pour rire*, Paris, Larousse, 1972, p. 41.
[4] Michel Butor, *Répertoire*, Paris, Minuit, 1960, p. 274.
[5] Michel Butor, *Répertoire IV*, Paris, Minuit, 1974, p. 9. Hereinafter abbreviated as *R4*.
[6] Michel Butor, *Oŭ: Le génie du lieu 2*, Paris, Gallimard, 1971, p. 7.
[7] Michel Butor, *Essais sur les Essais*, Paris, Gallimard, 1968, p. 18.
[8] Michel Butor, "Eocene," in his *Travaux d'approche*, Paris, Gallimard, 1972, pp. 25–28 passim.
[9] Ibid., p. 41.
[10] Michel Butor, *Illustrations II*, Paris, Gallimard, 1969, pp. 2–6 passim.
[11] Michel Butor, *Matière de rêves II: Second sous-sol*, Paris, Gallimard, 1976, p. 99.

Michel Butor 1980: Exploration of the Resistances to a Harmonious New World

By MICHEL LAUNAY

"January 1980, or the Night of the Werewolf." The problem: progressing in the knowledge of a contemporary writer's work, in the building of a friendship with that writer, and in the reciprocal help which that writer (an academic by necessity) and an academic (dreaming of being a writer) can bring to each other, each respecting the other, digging into the double, triple, quadruple ambiguities of their untrammeled collaboration, in order to produce a few more pages, a few more bits of knowledge, a few more happy beings and moments, within and around themselves. Viator[1] named his collaborator Scriptor, in the double sense of the Latin "secretary" and the dream of that secretary. This problem, which is theoretical and practical, could be translated into

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