

Writing the Revolution – The Politics of Truth in Genet's *Prisoner of Love*

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'... Saintliness cannot be placed in question.
Emmanuel Levinas¹

The last thing Jean Genet's work needs is another philosopher's commentary. After Sartre's monumental *Saint Genet* and Derrida's equally monumental – although anti-Sartrean – *Glas*, it might seem prudent, indeed respectful, to leave unsaid any further philosophical remarks about Genet. However, in this article, I would like to discuss a work of Genet's that neither Sartre nor Derrida were able to deal with in their commentaries: the posthumously published *Prisoner of Love* (*Un Captif amoureux*). I shall discuss this work in terms of the problem of truth – philosophy's problem – and more particularly in terms of how one tells the truth about a political event, in this case, the Palestinian revolution. How is the revolution to be written? Can the revolution be truthfully described? I shall proceed by placing *Prisoner of Love* in both its historical context and in the context of Genet's earlier prose work, paying particular attention to *The Thief's Journal*. After surveying the differences between Genet's earlier and later prose work, I shall then try – through a series of extended quotations – to show how the problem of writing the revolution is raised and finally resolved in *Prisoner of Love*. In this moment of resolution or, as I will claim, redemption, our understanding of Genet will undergo inversion.

Breaking the silence? The biographical and historical context

The very appearance of *Prisoner of Love* five weeks after Genet's death in April 1986 was both surprising and significant, for it represented the only published piece of extended prose by Genet in the period following the publication of *The Thief's Journal* in 1949. Why did he break this silence? Was there indeed a silence to be broken?² At least, why should Genet resume writing for publication after such an extended break? Towards the end of *The Thief's Journal*, and at the beginning of the short sequence of pages that form the philosophical climax of that book (and, indeed, of Genet's early prose *oeuvre*) he writes,

Unless there should occur an event of such gravity that my literary art, in the face of it, would be imbecilic and I should need a new language to master this misfortune, this is my last book.... For five years I have been writing books: I can say that I have done so with pleasure, but I have finished (TJ 170/JV 217).

Genet's promise appeared to be confirmed by the fact that in the intervening years he only produced three plays – albeit of major importance: *The Balcony* (1956), *The Blacks* (1958) and *The Screens* (1961) – and a trickle of occasional prose pieces on the theory of art, literature and theatre – most notably '*Ce qui est resté d'un Rembrandt déchiré en petits carrés bien réguliers, et foutu aux chiottes*' (1967). After 1968, much of Genet's energy was given over to political writing, whether for the student movement in France, the Black Panthers, the Red Army Faction or the Palestinian resistance. Yet these occasional writings by no means constitute a large body of work; as Derrida notes in *Glas* (1974), 'he almost never writes anymore, he has interred literature like no one else' (GL 50/GLtr 36). An explanation often offered for Genet's relative silence after *The Thief's Journal* is that Sartre's *Saint Genet* had entombed Genet's *oeuvre*, burying his corpus alive and imprisoning him within a totalizing narrative of liberty to which he was condemned and from which it was impossible to escape through writing. Indeed, if one accepts Sartre's thesis that Genet's prose work is akin to an extended psychoanalytic cure, where writing becomes the means for self-liberation from trauma, then it is necessary to read *The Thief's Journal*, '... as a literary testament or at least as a conclusion' (SG 502/SGtr 545). Soon after the publication of *Saint Genet* in 1952, Genet remarked, in a letter to Jean Cocteau, 'You and Sartre have turned me into a monument. I am somebody else, and this somebody else must find something to say.' In response, Cocteau notes in his journal, 'Jean has changed since the publication of Sartre's book. He looks as if he were at once trying to follow it and to escape it.'³ Whether interring literature in *Glas* or being himself interred within the pages of *Saint Genet*, the question remains: what could have provoked Genet to write a 504-page book after a break of nearly thirty years?

Genet writes *Prisoner of Love* in order to tell the truth about the Palestinian Revolution,⁴ 'Before I started to write it I'd sworn to myself to tell the truth in this book' (CA 503/PL 374–5). It is a book which has truth as its goal, insofar as Genet wants to achieve a correspondence or adequation between his writing and a set of empirical historical events. Very broadly, *Prisoner of Love* is a collection of *souvenirs* of the time Genet spent amongst the Palestinian revolutionaries – the *fedayeen* – between 1970 and 1972. Although originally only intending to stay for a week (CA 331/PL 244), Genet ended up spending two years with the Palestinians in their camps on the East Bank of the Jordan. Genet arrived at the moment when the Palestinians, frustrated by the dismal performance of the Arab league – Egypt, Jordan and Syria – against Israel at the Six Day War in 1967, had begun to use their

bases in Jordan as a springboard for guerilla attacks on Israeli targets, which included some extraordinary acts of air piracy.⁵ Genet was forcibly evicted from Jordan at the end of 1972, but between that time and 1983, when he began writing *Prisoner of Love*, he returned to the area on numerous occasions. Genet's book narrates, through a powerful and non-linear photomontage of notes and anecdotes, the fate of the Palestinian people, from their dream-like optimism of the late 1960s and early 1970s to their betrayal and humiliation at the hands of the Jordanians, the Israelis and even their own leadership. The book was very loosely commissioned by Yasser Arafat. An anecdote wryly related by Genet recounts an inconsequential act of 'politeness': 'Why don't you write a book?' asks Arafat; '*Bien sûr*' replies Genet (CA 126/PL 90). But *Prisoner of Love* is persistently critical of the Palestinian leadership; Genet writes, 'I found the manners of almost all the ordinary Palestinians, men and women, delightful. But their leaders were a pain in the neck (*emmerdants*)' (CA 328/PL 243). The real heroes of *Prisoner of Love* are the ordinary Palestinian people, the men and women of the resistance, and one man and woman in particular. But I shall return to this. Genet's initial reflection upon Arafat's suggestion was, 'I didn't believe in the idea of that or any other book; I meant to concentrate on what I saw and heard' (CA 126/PL 91). Genet's transition from literature to action, from *langage* to *engagement*, appears irreversible; and yet, he adds, 'without my quite realizing it, everything that happened and every word that was spoken set itself down in my memory' (*ibid.*). It is this storehouse of memories that Genet struggles to write down in *Prisoner of Love*. A more direct spur to the writing of this book was the massacre of the Palestinians in the Lebanese camps at Sabra and Chatila in 1982. Finally, after numerous requests for his memoirs from Palestinian acquaintances, Genet started writing in either August or October 1983 (unsurprisingly perhaps, he contradicts himself: cf. CA 331/PL 245 and CA 456/PL 338). He paid his final and, for the book, most significant visit to the area in June 1984, spending a few months in Irbid and Chatila. The writing of the book was completed in 1986. After suffering from throat cancer for some years, he died on the night of 14–15 April 1986, whilst correcting proofs of *Prisoner of Love*.

Genet's death is not accidental to *Prisoner of Love*, rather it is the horizon against which the book is written and behind which the author eventually vanishes (CA 161/PL 117). Genet's death is the book's genesis. In a concluding remark, he writes:

Perhaps the massacres at Chatila in September 1982 were not a turning-point. They happened. I was affected by them. I talked about them. But while the act of writing came later, after a period of incubation, nevertheless in a moment like that or those when a single cell departs from its usual metabolism and the original link is created of a future, unsuspected cancer, or a piece of lace, so I decided to write this book (CA 502/PL 373).

The fabrication of the book is like the growth of a cancer, where a cell departs from its usual metabolism, connecting with and infecting other cells, interconnecting to form the sentences on a page. Death is the event that prompts the book, watches over its growth, disrupts its progress and prevents its completion – Genet died before completing his corrections to the proofs. In order to remain as lucid as possible during the writing of *Prisoner of Love*, Genet refused pain-killing drugs (PL xxi). Indeed, every page presents the reader with the agony of the book's creation, a struggle which results in a fractured and quasi-cinematic narrative technique, leaping back and forth in time, moving randomly between spaces and cutting quickly from image to reportage to reminiscence. Genet's frustration at not being able to relate facts

as they happened, his lapses of memory, his repetitions and strange leaps of thought, make it an agonizing book to read and agony to have written.

One thing a book tries to do is show, beneath the disguise of words and causes and clothes and even grief, the skeleton and the skeleton dust to come. The author too, like those he speaks of, is dead (CA 414/PL 307).

And yet, if mortality is the horizon of the book's production, a horizon which repeatedly returns to haunt its narrative style, *Prisoner of Love* perhaps also represents Genet's intimation of immortality, not the literary immortality of literary greats, but rather the immortality or eternity of what Genet calls 'the joy of being' ('*le bonheur d'être*').

A little while ago I wrote that though I shall die, nothing else will. And I must make my meaning clear. Wonder at the sight of a cornfield, at a rock, at the touch of a rough hand – all the millions of emotions of which I'm made – they won't disappear even though I shall. Other men will experience them, and they'll still be there because of them. More and more I believe I exist in order to be the terrain and proof which show other men that life consists in the uninterrupted emotions flowing through all creation. The happiness my hand knows in a boy's hair will be known by another hand, is already known. And although I shall die, that happiness will live on. 'I' may die, but what made that 'I' possible, what made possible the joy of being, will make the joy of being live on without me (CA 423–4/PL 314).

Prisoner of Love presages and prefaces its author's death, pre-supposing it both as the condition for the book's possibility and also for the possibility of the transcendence of that death through the continuity of humanity and the eternity of creation – 'the happiness my hand knows in a boy's hair will be known by another hand.'

From saintliness to solidarity: *The Thief's Journal* and *Prisoner of Love*

We already seem far from the truth of the Palestinian Revolution. However, proceeding negatively, it is important to stress what sort of book *Prisoner of Love* is *not*. Firstly, it is not a straightforward reportage of historical events in the Near East; one learns little history from the book and at the end the reader is left rather with a bundle of disorderly facts. I found that the book needs to be read *with* a history of the period rather than *as* such a history. Secondly, *Prisoner of Love* is not a piece of political propaganda for the PLO; the book shows the Palestinian leadership to be vain and corrupt and Genet expresses little hope for the future of the movement. What could be said to be the book's political motto is spoken by a young *fedayee* in the form of a question: 'Having been slaves, shall we be terrible masters when the time comes?' (CA 133/PL 96). The belief that political life is a continual negotiation with evil, relieved only by scintillating moments of revolution, is a recurrent theme in *Prisoner of Love*.

However, a third and more substantial point needs to be made; namely, that *Prisoner of Love* is not simply the second volume of Genet's autobiography and a sequel to *The Thief's Journal*. The two books differ substantially both at the level of *form* and *content*. At the level of *form*, *Prisoner of Love* lacks the poise, lyrical self-assurance and thematic coherence of *The Thief's Journal*. In *Prisoner of Love*, Genet's style is simple, direct and without

pretension, whilst his images and recollections are almost photographic, offering snapshots which yet manage to express great poignancy and depth. For example,

Though I was lying still in my blankets as I looked up into the sky, following the light, I felt myself swept into a maelstrom, swirled around and yet smoothed by strong but gentle arms. A little way off, through the darkness, I could hear the Jordan flowing. I was freezing cold (CA 19/PL 9).

Or again, Genet will suddenly expand the focus of an image in order to move from the particular to the general, letting the reader survey a wider historical or political horizon. For example,

As I squatted down, resting, I was drinking tea – noisily, for it was hot and in those parts it's the custom to proclaim the pleasures of tongue and palate. I was also eating olives and unleavened bread. The fedayeen were chatting in Arabic and laughing, unaware of the fact that not far away was the spot where John the Baptist baptized Jesus (CA 55/PL 37).

The reader of *Prisoner of Love* is presented with a long series of these images: luminous, highly coloured and randomly sequenced. Of course, such a non-linear piling up of images, anecdotes, snatches of dialogue, maxims and reflections is characteristic of Genet's earlier prose, but *Prisoner of Love* takes this technique a stage further, mixing genres and almost entirely abandoning the linear logic of story-telling. The book is bitty and flows awkwardly, employing or rather being employed by a language that at times appears to be out of control. Genet remarks that this 'probably shows what a relief it is to open the floodgates and release pent-up memories' (CA 255/PL 186). Yet at the same time the narrative maintains a sinuous continuity which holds the book together by the slenderest skein. Genet writes: 'I've only to hear the phrase "Palestinian revolution" even now and I'm plunged into a great darkness in which luminous, highly coloured images succeed and seem to pursue one another' (CA 407–8/PL 302). And again: 'I feel now like a little black box projecting slides without captions' (CA 408/PL 303). The logic and argument of *Prisoner of Love* is advanced through bursts of images involuntarily dredged up from Genet's memory. And yet, *Prisoner of Love* is not *A la Recherche du temps perdu*; Genet always remained a kind of anti-Proust. In *The Thief's Journal*, Genet argues that any attempt to recompose the past through the activity of involuntary memory is impossible. For Genet, a book '... is not the quest of time gone by (*une recherche du temps passé*), but a work of art whose pretext-subject is my former life' (JV 75/TJ 58). This experience of the impossibility of recomposing the past into a present act of writing is radicalised in *Prisoner of Love*. For, although the book is, for the most part, a work of involuntary memory, the book itself does not and cannot claim to rediscover that past and bring it to life. The reader is continually faced with the failure to present recollection in the form of writing. Genet asks the reader 'Do you remember?' (CA 261/PL 190), and remarks to himself: 're-reading what I've written' (CA 167, 325/PL 121, 240) as if to underline the inadequacies of writing as a means for the presentation of remembrance. *Prisoner of Love* is a book of flawed memory, a flaw that is caused by the failure of writing itself. If this is indeed the case, then the question that must be asked and to which I shall return is: How does Genet's narrative in *Prisoner of Love* recall the truth about the Palestinian Revolution?

At the level of *content*, *Prisoner of Love* at the very least complicates the triad of betrayal, theft and homosexuality that combine to form the counter morality of *The Thief's Journal* (JV 181/TJ 141). Theft is not discussed and, although the book's central theme is perhaps the eroticism of the revolutionary act (a

sensuousness expressed in Genet's descriptions of the *fedayeen*) homo-eroticism is not used as a means of linguistic, moral and political subversion and does not have the shocking intensity of Genet's earlier work, particularly *Our Lady of the Flowers*. Rather, a different eroticism pervades *Prisoner of Love*, what might be called revolutionary love. Genet, when presented with the beauty of the *fedayeen* – 'decked with guns, in leopard-spotted uniforms and red berets tilted over their eyes, each not merely a transfiguration but also a materialization of my fantasies. And apparently at my disposal' (CA 244/PL 178) – is surprised at himself 'for not feeling any desire for them' (ibid.). This overcoming of desire in the act of revolutionary love recalls the themes of *Ce qui est resté d'un Rembrandt ...*, where, in a third-class railway compartment travelling between Salon and Saint-Rambert-d'Albon, Genet exchanges a brief glance with a rather ugly traveller sitting opposite. This glance has the force of a revelation for Genet, a revelation of the 'universal identity of all people' (CQ 22), where Genet feels himself flowing away from himself into the other ('*j'e m'écoulais ... je m'éc*' CQ 22–3 and cf. GL 21/GLtr 16 *et passim*). Genet's problem here, as Jean-Bernard Moraly expresses it, is the following: 'If every man is worth the same as another, how can one desire?' (VE 112). Beneath the sexual eroticism that seeks to reduce the other to the self and whose desire is premised upon the unique individuality of the other person, Genet locates a fragile glance which produces the revelation 'that each man is every other man and myself like all the others' ('... *qui tout homme est tout autre homme et moi comme tous les autres*') (CQ 30–31). This conception of love as the recognition of alterity and revolutionary solidarity – truly an ethical metamorphosis – signals a break with the egoistic, masturbatory desire that informs Genet's earlier work. It is this revolutionary love for the Palestinians which holds Genet captive and to which he alludes in the book's title: *Un Captif amoureux*.⁶

The concept of betrayal undergoes a similar a complex shift between Genet's earlier and later work. In *The Thief's Journal*, betrayal – low or abject betrayal, '*la trahison abjecte*' (JV 257/TJ 202) – becomes the unique mode of access to a state of moral and aesthetic perfection which enables Genet 'to break the bonds of love uniting him with mankind' (JV 258/TJ 202) and found a morality opposed to that of the social order: saintliness (*la sainteté*). For Genet, saintliness is 'the most beautiful word in the human language' ('*le plus beau mot du langage humain*') (JV 226/TJ 178). It is the central ethico-religious concept of Genet's earlier prose. Saintliness is a form of 'asceticism' (JV 227/TJ 178) achieved through an experience of abjection that demands the recognition of evil, pain and degradation, of actions that run counter to accepted notions of human self-interest, that opens the possibility of total altruism and goodness. It is in saintliness that we learn to value the other human being more than ourselves. With a paradoxical logic reminiscent of the narrative voice of Dostoevsky's *Notes from Underground*, Genet's early homo-erotic prose should be read as a course of spiritual instruction or purification into saintliness, a form of ethical life in revolt against the Social Darwinism of European society. Returning to betrayal, the use of this concept is complicated in *Prisoner of Love*; in a couple of passages, Genet employs formulations strongly reminiscent of *The Thief's Journal*: 'Anyone who hasn't experienced the ecstasy of betrayal knows nothing about ecstasy at all' (CA 85/PL 59). And later on: 'Anyone who's never experienced the pleasure of betrayal doesn't know what pleasure is' (CA 367/PL 271). But in other concepts, Genet condemns the betrayal committed by the Israelis (CA 155–7/PL 112–13), and the Circassians (CA 233/PL 169); and there is a debate throughout the book about the betrayal of the *fedayeen* by elements within their leadership. Indeed, what distinguishes the *fedayeen* for Genet is precisely their resistance

to the temptation of betraying the revolution: 'they (the *fedayeen*) were beset by the temptation to betray, though I think it was almost always resisted' (CA 368/PL 273). Furthermore, if Genet writes *Prisoner of Love* in order to tell the truth about the Palestinian Revolution, then it is precisely this truth that he does not want to betray.

The triumph of truth over art: Genet's inverted Nietzscheanism

In *The Thief's Journal*, Genet quips, 'to speak of my work as a writer would be a pleonasm' (JV 115/TJ 90). He claims that he wrote in prison in order to take refuge in his past life and that later, when free, 'I wrote again in order to earn money' (ibid.). The motivation behind *Prisoner of Love*, as I will show, is quite different. Genet is not writing to make money. He is not even writing in order to produce a work of art; but rather he writes in order to tell the truth. This contrasts strongly with Genet's proclamations on the truth content of his writing in, for example, *Our Lady of the Flowers*: 'What's going to follow is false, and no one has to accept it as gospel truth. Truth is not my strong point' (OLF 169). It also announces an aesthetics totally at odds with the views of *Ce qui resté d'un Rembrandt...*, where Genet writes,

It is only these sorts of truths, those which are not demonstrable and which are even 'false', those that cannot be led without absurdity to their extreme point without leading to their and our own negation, it is these sort of truths that must be exalted by the work of art (CQ 21).⁷

For these reasons, *Prisoner of Love* does not sit at all easily with the rest of Genet's prose *oeuvre*, it rather undermines it, causing a collapse within its values and vocabulary,

In other days, I think I'd have avoided words like heroes, martyrs, struggle, revolution, liberation, resistance, courage and suchlike. I probably have avoided the words homeland and fraternity, which still repel me. But there's no doubt that the Palestinians caused a kind of collapse in my vocabulary (*Mais les Palestiniens sont certainement à l'origine d'un effondrement de mon vocabulaire*) (CA 367/PL 272).

And again, when Genet refers to himself in the third person as an old man with the dream of a house on the coast with a view of Cyprus, he writes,

An old man travelling from country to country, as much ejected by the one he was in as attracted by the others he was going to ... rejecting the repose that comes from even modest property, was amazed by the collapse that took place in him... (*l'étonnement de sa chute en lui-même...*) (CA 430/PL 318–19).⁸

The massive scale of this collapse is recorded on the pages of *Prisoner of Love*; Genet was at home in Palestine (CA 463/PL 344), *bei sich* in a country that does not exist. Recalling the first quotation from Genet given above, one can conclude that the event that renders Genet's literary art imbecilic is the Palestinian Revolution.

Prisoner of Love proclaims the triumph of truth over art. It is a work of reverted Platonism, or inverted Nietzscheanism, which elevates the true – the identity of thought and its object – over the aesthetic – the metaphorical and non-identical relation of thought and its object. My hypothesis here is that *Prisoner of Love* is a book about the conditions for the possibility of truthful narration,

and, more precisely, about what sort of narrative technique is required in order to tell the truth about a revolution. The question then becomes (and it is this problem that Genet struggles with on the pages of *Prisoner of Love*): Can writing tell the truth? Or must writing always exist within an economy of betrayal?

I want to explore these questions by looking in detail at some extended passages from *Prisoner of Love*. The book begins with the following words,

The page that was blank to begin with is now crossed from top to bottom with tiny black characters – letters, words, commas, exclamation marks – and it's because of them that the page is said to be legible. But a kind of unease, a feeling close to nausea, an irresolution that stays my hand – these make me wonder: do these black marks add up to reality? (*la réalité est-elle cette totalité des signes noirs?*). The white of the paper is an artifice that's replaced the translucency of parchment and the ochre surface of clay tablets; but the ochre and the translucency and the whiteness may all possess more reality than the signs that mar them.

Was the Palestinian revolution really written on the void, an artifice superimposed on nothingness, and is the white page, and every little blank space between the words, more real than the black characters themselves? Reading between the lines is a level art; reading between words a precipitous one. If the reality of the time spent among – not with the Palestinians resided anywhere, it would survive between all the words that claim to give an account of it. They claim to give an account of it, but in fact it buries itself, slots itself exactly into the spaces, recorded there rather than in the words that serve only to blot it out. Another way of putting it: the space between the words contains more reality than does the time it takes to read them. Perhaps it's the same as the time, dense and real, enclosed between the characters in Hebrew....

So did I fail to understand the Palestinian revolution? Yes, completely. I think I realized that when Leila advised me to go to the West Bank. I refused, because the occupied territories were only a play acted out second by second by occupied and occupier. The reality lay in involvement, fertile in love and hate; in people's daily lives; in silence, like translucency, punctuated by words and phrases (CA 11–12/PL 3).

This passage raises the question that haunts the entirety of *Prisoner of Love* and to which Genet will repeatedly return, namely: 'Do these black marks add up to reality?' Do the legible written signs of a book correspond to the reality which they are said to describe? Genet replies emphatically in the negative. The reality of the Palestinian Revolution does not reside in the written signs that attempt to describe it, but rather that reality buries and conceals itself in the space between the written signs. The white space between the words contains more reality than the words themselves; a point that Genet perversely illustrates by analogy with the Hebrew language. The corollary of this is that Genet cannot claim to understand the reality of the Palestinian Revolution within writing; rather, its reality lies elsewhere, in the everyday life of the Palestinians, in involvement, in a silence that exceeds the written sign.

Thus, on the first page of *Prisoner of Love*, the reader is faced with the veridical inadequacy of the book he or she is about to read. There will be no adequation between language and reality, and no narrative technique (*technique du récit*) will ever be able to tell what the revolution was really like (CA 302/PL 222). *True narration is impossible. Writing is betrayal.* Genet makes the point

even more emphatically later in the book,

By transforming a fact into words and characters you create other facts that can never create the original one. I state this basic truth to put myself on guard. If it's only a question of ordinary morality (*commune morale*), I don't care if someone's lying or telling the truth. But I must stress that it's *my eyes* that saw what I thought I was describing and *my ears* that heard it (*ce sont mes yeux, mon regard, qui ont vu ce que j'ai cru décrire, mes oreilles entendu*). The form I adopted from the beginning for this account was never designed to tell the reader what the Palestinian revolution was really like.

The construction, organization and layout of the book (*récit*), without deliberately intending to *betray* (*trahir*) the facts, manage the narrative in such a way that I probably seem to be a privileged witness or even a manipulator....

Sometimes I wonder whether I didn't live my life especially so that I might arrange its episodes in the same seeming disorder as the images in a dream.

All these words to say, *this is my Palestinian revolution*, told in my chosen order. As well as mine there is the other, probably many others. Trying to think the revolution is like waking up and trying to see the logic in a dream (CA 416/PL 308–09).

The transformation of a fact into words does not represent this fact truthfully, but rather creates a new and different verbal fact that does not correspond with the one that was to be described. However, this Nietzschean claim, which Genet's earlier prose both presupposes and promotes, causes a verbal collapse within *Prisoner of Love*. For, as Genet repeatedly and almost obsessively insists (CA 45, 405, 447, 482/PL 28, 300, 331, 358–59), the events that writing cannot understand and narrate *really happened*: 'It's *my eyes* that saw what I thought I was describing, and *my ears* that heard it.' Thus, if writing cannot truthfully describe factual events, and yet those events occurred and are the ones to be described, then writing necessarily exists within an economy of betrayal. The betrayal of the truth which writing attempts to convey entails that the version of events eventually committed to writing will have a content imposed arbitrarily by the individual writer: 'This is my Palestinian revolution' (*'ceci est ma révolution palestinienne'*). As Genet notes in another passage, the order of the writing, the selection of events and the words chosen to describe those events will not '... be set down truthfully, as some transcendental eye (*l'oeil transcendant*) might see them, but as I myself select, interpret and classify them' (CA 280/PL 205). There is no transcendental key that will provide an understanding of the events of the Palestinian Revolution, nor can the description of those events lay claim to universal or intersubjective validity. Yet Genet refuses to let this state of affairs collapse his writing into a vicious subjectivism freed from demands for communication and truth-telling. He is committed to telling the truth even when he knows that the truth cannot be told.

However, this problematic has to be nuanced with respect to the particular events that are being described. Genet is obliged to tell the truth about the Palestinian Revolution. The question is, then, not simply: 'How is reality to be written?' but rather: 'How is the revolution to be written?' Genet repeatedly describes revolutionaries as dreamers and the revolution as a dream, a sublime and mysterious event that defies the linearity of conventional realist description and undermines any adequation between language and reality. Attempting to write the truth of the revolution is like trying to see the logic in a dream, and this imposes a form of writing that is neither realistic, historical or doctoral, but rather fragmentary and imagistic. Thus – and here

the form and the content of *Prisoner of Love* converge – the necessary failure to *understand* the truth of the revolution imposes a narrative technique that *evokes* the sublimity of the revolutionary event: its mystery, its infinity, its naïveté, its joyful optimism. *Prisoner of Love* is both a writing of revolution and a revolutionary writing; it is what Genet calls 'the celebration of mystery' (*'la célébration du mystère'*, or *'la fête'*) (CA 494/PL 367). Form and content combine in the following extraordinary passage, where an arbitrary enchainment of images becomes consequential within a revolutionary logic:

It may irritate me when a veteran tells me for the umpteenth time about the battle of the Argonne, or when Victor Hugo, in *Quatre-Vingt-Treize*, goes on about the forests in Brittany, but it won't stop me writing again and again that the days and the nights spent in the forests of Ajloun, between Salt and Irbid, on the banks of the Jordan, were a celebration, a fête. A celebration that can be defined as the fire that warmed our cheeks at being together despite the laws that hoped we'd have deserted one another. Or as the escape from the community into a place where people were ready to fight with us against that community. That exaltation may be felt when a thousand, a hundred, fifty, twenty or only two flames last as long as it takes the match that lighted them to burn out. And the only sound or song is that of the charred stick writing until it's consumed.

This last image reminds me that a wake is a kind of fête. In fact, every fête is at once jubilation and despair. Think of the death of a Jew in France under the German occupation: he's buried in a country graveyard, and seven of the worst Jewish musicians come from seven different directions carrying seven black boxes. Badly but superbly the clandestine septet plays an air by Offenbach beside the grave, then each goes off on his own without a word being said. For the God of Isaiah, who is only a breath of wind on a blade of grass, that night was a fête.

The slight or subtle unease of the Mukabarats as I looked at the mother's white hair and face was necessary for the celebration of the mystery, and made it possible for that strange encounter to become a fête.

Of course it's understood that the words nights, forests, septet, jubilation, desertion and despair are the same words that I have to use to describe the goings-on at dawn in the Bois de Boulogne in Paris when the drag queens depart after celebrating their mystery, doing their accounts and smoothing banknotes out in the dew (*défroissant dans la rosée, les billets de banque*).

But every more or less well-meaning organization is bound to be gloomy – not funereal, but gloomy. So they put loudspeakers in factories for the music to cheer up the assembly-line workers and increase their output. The owners of battery farms say music makes hens lay more eggs. Any celebration of a mystery is dangerous, forbidden. But when it takes place it's a fête (CA 494–5/PL 367–8).

Prisoner of Love employs a form of writing that celebrates the mystery of the revolutionary event, an event which, like the Kantian sublime or the Moral Law, demands our respect. By limiting the claims to understanding, that which resists understanding is better understood; that is to say, better evoked, fêted or celebrated. However, Genet focusses his revolutionary writing upon a single image that haunts the entire book. This, and the other themes that have been discussed so far, are brought together in the closing passage of *Prisoner of Love*:

After giving his name and age, a witness is supposed to say something like, 'I swear to tell the whole truth...' Before I started to write it, I'd sworn to tell the whole truth in this book, not in any ceremony but every time a Palestinian asked me to read the beginning or other passages from it or wanted me to publish parts of it in some magazine. Legally speaking, a witness neither opposes nor serves the judges. Under French law he has sworn to *tell the truth*, not to *tell it to the judges*. He takes an oath to the public – to the court and the spectators. The witness is on his own. He speaks. The judges listen and say nothing. The witness doesn't merely answer the implicit question *how?* – in order to show the *why?* he throws light on the *how?*, a light sometimes called artistic. The judges have never been to the places where the acts they have to judge were performed, so the witness is indispensable. But he knows a realistic description (*la vérisme d'une description*) won't mean anything to anyone, including the judges, unless he adds some light and shade (*les ombres et les lumières*) which only he perceived. The judges may well describe a witness as valuable. He is.

What's the point of that medieval, almost Carolingian, sounding oath in the courtroom? Perhaps it's to surround the witness with a solitude that confers on him a lightness *from which* he can speak the truth. For there may be three or four people present who are capable of hearing a witness.

Any reality is bound to be outside me, existing in and for itself. The Palestinian revolution lives and will live only of itself. A Palestinian family, made up essentially of mother and son, were among the first people I met in Irbid. But it was somewhere else that I really found them.

Perhaps inside myself. The pair made up by mother and son is to be found in France and everywhere else. Was it a light of my own that I threw on them, so that instead of being strangers whom I was observing they became a couple of my own creation? An image of my own making that my penchant for day-dreaming had projected on to two Palestinians, mother and son, adrift in the midst of a battle in Jordan?

All I've said and written happened. But why is it that this couple is the only really *profound* memory I have of the Palestinian revolution? I did the best I could to understand how different this revolution was from others, and in a way I did understand it. But what will remain with me is the little house in Irbid where I slept for one night, and fourteen years during which I tried to find out if that night ever happened. This last page of my book is transparent (CA 503–4/PL 374–5).

Prisoner of Love ends with the image of a tribunal, where Genet is cast in the role of witness, upon whom it is incumbent to tell the truth, and the reader assumes the role of the judge, who is to listen to the evidence and come to a decision. The value of the witness consists in describing acts that the judge did not witness, acts which are not simply to be described realistically, but are to be given 'light and shade'. It is out of the transparent and memorial silence of past events that the witness, in his or her solitude, tells and betrays the truth. The only image that for Genet can evoke the truth of the revolution, that can bear the entirety of what Genet calls its 'enigma' (CA 242/PL 176), is the couple of mother and son that he met in Irbid. The revelation of this image is the truth of *Prisoner of Love*. But what is this image?

The scene of redemption: Genet becomes God

In 1970, Genet spent a half-day and a whole night in the company of Hamza, a young *fedayee*, and his mother. After striking up a rapport, Hamza took Genet back to his house to meet his mother, who was also sympathetic to the revolution. After a simple meal of sardines, omelette and salad, Genet helped Hamza prepare his arms for that evening's action against the Jordanian *Bedouin*. That night, whilst Hamza was out fighting, Genet took his place and slept in his bed, where, in the middle of the night, Hamza's mother brought Genet some coffee and a glass of water.

Such are the bare facts of the story, which appear unremarkable in themselves. However, it is this event that *haunts* Genet for the next fourteen years, returning repeatedly like a spectre as the book develops and which ultimately prompts Genet's final visit to the area in 1984 when he meets Hamza's mother once again (CA 460–86/PL 341–61). Now, why does this image bear the entire mystery of the revolution? How is the sublime truth of the revolution redeemed in this image? What follows is the crucial moment in Genet's narrative.

The fact that the Virgin Mary is called the Mother of God makes you wonder, since the chronological order is the same for parenthood human and divine, by what prodigy or by what mathematics the mother came after the Son but preceded her own Father. The order becomes less mysterious when you think of Hamza. ...

I lay fully dressed on Hamza's bed, listening to the noise of battle. It grew less regular but remained just as deafening and apparently close. Then in the midst of this aural chaos two little reports from nearby seemed to hurl the din of destruction back. I suddenly realized they were two peaceful taps at the door of my room. While iron and steel exploded in the distance, a knuckle was banging on wood a few feet away. I didn't answer, partly because I didn't know how to say 'Come in' in Arabic yet. And mainly because, as I said, I'd only just realized what had happened.

The door opened, light from the starry sky came into the room, and behind it I could see a tall shadow. I half-closed my eyes, pretending I was asleep, but through my lashes I could see everything. The mother had just come in. Was she taken in by my pretence? Had she come out of the now ear-splitting darkness, or out of the icy night I carry about with me everywhere? She was carrying a tray, which she put down on the little blue table with yellow and black flowers, already mentioned. She moved the table near the head of the bed, where I could reach it. Her movements were as precise as a blind man's in daylight. Without making a sound she went out and shut the door. The starry sky was gone, I could open my eyes. On the tray were a cup of Turkish coffee and a glass of water. I drank them, shut my eyes and waited, hoping I hadn't made a noise.

Another two little taps at the door, just like the first two. In the light of the stars and the waning moon the same long shadow appeared, as familiar now as if it had come into my room at the same time every night of my life before I went to sleep. Or rather so familiar that it was inside rather than outside me, coming into me with a cup of Turkish coffee every night since I was born. Through my lashes I saw her move the little table silently back to its place and, still with the assurance of someone born blind, pick up the tray and go out, closing the door. ... It all happened so smoothly that I realized the mother came every night with a cup of coffee and a glass of water for Hamza. Without a sound, except for four little taps at the door, and in the distance, as in a

picture by Detaille, gunfire against a background of stars.

Because he was fighting that night, I'd taken the son's place and perhaps played his part in his room and his bed. For one night and for the duration of one simple but oft-repeated act, a man older than she was herself became the mother's son. For 'before she was made, I was' ('*j'étais avant qu'elle ne fût*'). Though younger than I, during that familiar act she was my mother as well as Hamza's. It was my own personal and portable darkness that the door of my room opened and closed. I fell asleep (CA 229-31/PL 166-67).

This passage describes Genet's initiation into what he calls the 'mysteries of resistance' ('*mystères de la résistance*') (CA 228/PL 166). The entire purpose of *Prisoner of Love* is the recovery in memory and writing of this event, of the simplicity of this routine act of a mother's giving a drink of coffee and water to her 'son'. It is the event of this gift that ultimately prompted Genet's visit to Irbid in 1984, where he felt compelled to meet Hamza's mother in order '... to establish that I knew something' (CA 476/PL 353). This event, the free and routine giving of coffee and water to a stranger mistaken as a son, constitutes the book's *redemptive moment*: the point of transcendence that Genet has to recover in writing. Genet explains this event through the theological paradox of the Immaculate Conception; namely, that Mary is the mother of the God who inseminates her, precedes her and is ultimately the cause for her existence. (This is the very concept that resounds on both columns of *Glas*. Derrida asks: 'And what if the *Aufhebung* were a Christian mother?' (G 280/Gtr 201).) The child is therefore older than the parent. The significance of this for Genet is that, for one night and for the duration of one oft-repeated act, he becomes the son of a mother who is younger than he. This paradoxical event soon begins to haunt Genet and he comes to associate the couple of himself/Hamza and Hamza's mother with representations of *pietà*, that is, the depiction of the Virgin mourning the dead Christ. There is no Biblical source for this, but it is intended to illustrate both the Virgin's motherly love for her son (and *via* him for humanity) and the Christ's suffering for our salvation. What fascinates Genet is that in some representations of the *pietà*, Mary appears to be younger than the dead Christ (CA 240/PL 175).

The paradox of both the *pietà* and the Immaculate Conception lend an essential and enigmatic ambiguity to the image of Hamza and his mother. If a son can be older than his mother, then Genet

can identify himself both as the son of a mother who is younger than he and, more particularly, as Hamza himself. This image allows a number of themes to be reconciled:

1. Genet becomes Hamza, the brave *fedayee*, and thereby becomes an initiate of the mysterious truth of the revolution.
2. Genet becomes reconciled with a mother who, paradoxically, could be his own mother and is thereby reconciled symbolically with his absent mother, Gabrielle (JV 46/TJ 34).
3. Genet *qua* Hamza discovers a home, somewhere outside of France and Europe where he can find proper repose.
4. *Genet becomes God*; he is not merely Saint Genet, but the dead Christ lying in his mother's arms. The truth of Genet's art is an act of auto-deification.

The various strands of meaning carried by the image of Hamza and his mother are knotted together in Genet's text. And yet the image is clearly contradictory, for why should the emblem of the Palestinian revolution be the Christian image of *pietà*? One has to

believe Genet's sincerity when he says that he does not know why he chose this image; it remains for him a question, a perplexity:

Perhaps it's not very important, but it's very strange, that for me the seal, the emblem of the Palestinian Revolution was never a Palestinian hero or a victory like Karamah, but that almost incongruous apparition: Hamza and his mother. ... But why had this oft-repeated, profoundly Christian couple, symbolizing the inconsolable grief of a mother whose son was God, appeared to me like a bolt from the blue as a symbol of the Palestinian resistance? And not only that. That was understandable enough. But why did it also strike me that the revolution took place in order that this couple should haunt me? (*que cette*

révolte eut lieu afin que me hantât ce couple?) (CA 242-43/PL 177).

It is now clear why the image of Hamza and his mother should be Genet's 'only really profound memory' of the Palestinian revolution. With this image Genet achieves redemption and reconciliation, redeeming himself and the truth of the revolution in the reconciliation of his desire for a mother, a family, a home, love, property, community and God. The final page of *Prisoner of Love* is left transparent because at that moment Genet achieves the breakthrough into the reality of 'involvement, fertile in love and hate; in people's daily lives; in silence, like translucency, punctuated by words and phrases' (CA 12/PL 3). The economy of



Ercole de' Roberti's *Pietà*, Walker Art Gallery, Liverpool.

betrayal, within which the writing of *Prisoner of Love* circulates, is broken by a redemptive moment of transcendence that cannot be comprehended in writing and, precisely because of this, is able to comprehend the truth of the Palestinian revolution. Writing the truth of the revolution is a writing of the truth of what lies outside of writing: redemption, reconciliation.

Palestinian *Sittlichkeit*: Genet becomes Hegel

But what is the meaning of this scene of reconciliation? Genet's redemption into the truth – what I called above his inverted Nietzscheanism – privileges love, family, home, property, community and divinity. Reconciliation is the dream of a community of presence, of co-presence; a community of self-recognition in otherness, where the other becomes an object of my amorous cognition; a Christian community bound by the bond of Holy Spirit and rooted in the Holy Family, of which each empirical family is an echo; an existing ethical community rooted in substantial customs and practices and through which the individual finds actual and not merely abstract freedom. In short, the political truth that transcends Genet's writing is the dream of a *polis* of Palestinian *Sittlichkeit*, that is to say, a free ethical life rooted in the substantial customs (*Sitten*) of the community: family, marriage, love, heterosexuality, fecundity, property and divinity (cf. PR 105–10).

The interesting paradox here is that it is precisely this concept of Hegelian *Sittlichkeit* that Derrida attempts to displace in *Glas*. The focus of Derrida's reading of Hegel is the concept of the family, which constitutes the first moment of *Sittlichkeit* in the *Philosophy of Right* (PR 110–22). Derrida's 'critical displacement' (GL 6/GLtr 5) of the Hegelian system begins from a reading of the family, and his claim is that any displacement of the family will have deep implications for both the concept of *Sittlichkeit* and the Hegelian system as a whole (GL 5–6/GLtr 4–5). Now, Derrida juxtaposes a commentary on Hegel with a text on Genet in order to aid this critical displacement and, alluding to Genet, he calls his methodological procedure in *Glas* 'a bastard course' (GL 8/GLtr 6). A commentary on Genet – the bastard, the thief, the homosexual, the unfree enemy of communal morality – intertextually displaces the values inherent within Hegelian *Sittlichkeit*. The question is: has Genet, the enemy of European *Sittlichkeit* become Hegelian in *Prisoner of Love*? In one of the strangely autobiographical passages in *Glas*, from which a fragment was quoted above, Derrida writes:

Not to stop the path of a Genet. For the first time I am afraid, while writing, as they say, 'on' someone, of being read by him. Not to stop him, not to draw him back, not to bridle him. Yesterday he let me know that he was in Beirut, amongst the Palestinians at war, the encircled outcasts. I know that what interests me always takes (its) place over there, but how do I show it? He almost never writes anymore, he has interred literature like no one else, he leaps wherever it (*àà*) leaps in the world, wherever the Absolute Knowing of Europe takes a blow, and these stories of *glas*, *seing*, flower and horse must really piss him off (*doivent le fair chier*) (GL 50–51/GLtr 36–37, translation modified).

Would *Glas* really piss Genet off? How can Derrida show that what really interests him takes place over there, in the concrete actuality of revolution or political resistance? How can Derrida show this interest through the writing of *Glas*? How can he too write the revolution? As has been shown, Genet's path was not

stopped by *Glas* – indeed, epistolary evidence suggests that Genet was very appreciative of Derrida's work (VE 304) – and he writes the revolution in *Prisoner of Love* as a testament or souvenir of his blows against the Absolute Knowledge of Europe. Yet, paradoxically, the book's truth is the postulation of Palestinian *Sittlichkeit*, a form of political life which, whilst challenging the Absolute Knowledge of Europe, implicitly replicates its ethico-religious hierarchy: God, property, community, home, family, love, heterosexuality. *Prisoner of Love* is a replacement of that which was to be displaced by *Glas*. As such, *Prisoner of Love* enacts a profound inversion of the ethically privileged terms of Genet's earlier writing: homosexuality, betrayal, theft, solitude, alterity, abjection, and, most importantly, saintliness. As Jean Cocteau, cited by Sartre in 1952, remarked, 'Sooner or later it will have to be recognized that he (Genet) is a moralist' (SG 584/SGtr 558). This was and remains true; but what takes place in *Prisoner of Love* is a collapse in Genet's ethical vocabulary which produces an inversion of values: from an ethic of saintliness which respects the other's alterity through an experience of aestheticized abjection, to an ethic of family and community, where the other is my mother or brother and is recognised as an object of loving cognition to whom I am captive. With characteristic irony, it appears that Genet had the last laugh against both Derrida and Sartre.

And yet, this community is not *wirklich*. The Palestinians remain without a homeland, the community remains a promise of community, and freedom remains abstract and Kantian. Genet writes a book of memory, the memory of an absent or disappearing community. His narrative voice is one of resistance and hope, but one which speaks, as it were, at dusk, when the owl of Minerva spreads its wings (PR 13). *Prisoner of Love* is the fragmentary remembrance of a disappearing community, and as such the book offers only the promise of community, a promise deferred. To this extent, Genet's book resembles the *Bible* or the *Iliad*, and indeed all books that are written in remembrance and promise. As Edmund White remarks in his introduction to the English translation of *Prisoner of Love*, 'in a thousand years people will know of the Palestinian exodus only in his version' (PL xix).

Abbreviations

- CA – Jean Genet, *Un Captif amoureux*, Paris, Gallimard, 1986.
- CQ – Jean Genet, 'Ce qui est resté d'un Rembrandt déchiré en petits carrés bien réguliers, et routé aux chiottes', in *Oeuvres Complètes*, Vol. IV, Paris, Gallimard, 1968, pp. 19–31.
- GL – Jacques Derrida, *Glas*, 2 volumes, Paris, Denoël-Gonthier, 1981.
- GLtr – Jacques Derrida, *Glas*, translated by John P. Leavey and Richard Rand, Lincoln and London, Nebraska University Press, 1986.
- JV – Jean Genet, *Journal du voleur*, Paris, Gallimard, 1949.
- OLF – Jean Genet, *Our Lady of the Flowers*, translated by Bernard Frechtman, London, Paladin, 1988.
- PL – Jean Genet, *Prisoner of Love*, translated by Barbara Bray, London, Pan Books, 1989.
- PR – Hegel, *Philosophy of Right*, translated by T. M. Knox, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1952.
- SG – Jean-Paul Sartre, *Saint Genet. Comédien et martyr*, Paris, Gallimard, 1952.
- SGtr – Jean-Paul Sartre, *Saint Genet. Actor and Martyr*, translated by Bernard Frechtman, London, Heinemann, 1988.
- TJ – Jean Genet, *The Thief's Journal*, translated by Bernard Frechtman, Harmondsworth, Penguin, 1967.
- VE – Jean-Bernard Moraly, *Jean Genet. La Vie écrite*, Paris, Editions de la Différence, 1988.

Notes

This text forms part of an ongoing commentary on Derrida's *Glas*, a part of which has already appeared as 'A Commentary on Derrida's Reading of Hegel in *Glas*' in the *Bulletin of the Hegel Society of Great Britain* 18 (Autumn/Winter 1988), pp. 6–32. Together with a discussion of the methodology of Derrida's reading of Genet and a critical comparison of *Glas* and Sartre's *Saint Genet*, it is hoped that this commentary will eventually be published in its entirety.

1 A remark of Levinas's transcribed in *Autrement que savoir*, Paris, Editions Osiris, 1987, p. 72.

2 In this article I shall remain within the parameters of the legend of Jean Genet. Jean-Bernard Moraly's *Jean Genet. La Vie écrite* (details above) powerfully contests the legend of Jean Genet: that he was simply an untutored homosexual thief who suddenly became a writer, out of boredom, and just as suddenly gave up writing when he had achieved his desires for liberty and wealth. This legend is most deceptively apparent in *The Thief's Journal*, where Genet writes, 'through writing I have attained what I was seeking.... To achieve my legend. I know what I want. I know where I'm going' (JV 217–18/TJ 170 – It is this legend that Derrida writes of at the beginning of his discussion of Hegel in *Glas*, GL 2/GLtr 1). In his conclusion Moraly writes:

What has the legend shown us? A rebel who, by chance, wrote five books in prison and, through boredom, inadvertently wrote five plays. The theatre? He hates it. The desire to construct *une oeuvre*? He despises literature and himself has never read and never written, or nearly. As hazardous as it may have been, our voyage in the realm of suppositions has the advantage of having shown Genet at work: ceaselessly reading and writing. (VE 339)

Moraly produces a great deal of persuasive evidence that there were unpublished or destroyed manuscripts by Genet, 'une oeuvre-iceberg' (VE 340) of which only the tip was published (Cf. VE 144). Contradicting the legend of Genet, Moraly constructs Genet's biography in terms of the problematic of writing, showing Genet's extensive acquaintance with literature – especially Proust, Gide, Dostoevsky, Rimbaud – and his obsession with the act of writing, finally asserting that 'Genet n'est qu'écriture' ('Genet is only writing') (VE 340). Moraly's thesis is supported by some challenging hypotheses and abundant empirical evidence, upon which I have largely relied for biographical information about Genet.

As a final remark on Moraly, it is interesting to note that, although the tone of Moraly's book is fashionably anti-Sartrean throughout (e.g. VE 95–110), he unwittingly employs Sartre's central concept of *metamorphosis*, a notion employed in existential psychoanalysis to explain the development of Genet's life and work. According to Sartre, Genet undergoes three metamorphoses – thief, aesthete, writer – on his ascent to liberty. For Moraly, it is writing that determines Genet's life, and the metamorphoses of that life are explained in terms of writing: Genet is first the prose pornographer, who secondly is metamorphosed into a playwright, and finally becomes a political writer (Cf. VE 127–28). The unity of these three metamorphoses establishes, in a thoroughly Sartrean manner, the unity of Genet's *oeuvre* (VE 149). But why should both Moraly and Sartre want to employ a triadic pattern of metamorphoses in order to impose unity upon Genet's work?

An interesting thesis on the authorship of *Prisoner of Love* and its relation to the Genet legend has recently been proposed by Laura Oswald in *Jean Genet and the Semiotics of Performance* (Bloomington, Indiana University Press, 1989). She argues (pp. ix–x) that *Prisoner of Love* was written by two different authors,

Having worked long and closely with Genet's literary language, I have the impression that *Un Captif amoureux*

was authored by two different writers. While one recognizes Genet in lyrical passages which seize the cruel beauty of human existence in paradoxical figures, one cannot identify the voice speaking in the more didactic passages, which give almost journalistic accounts of Middle East politics and the history of the Palestine Liberation Movement. It is not unlikely that Genet's last work, which has provoked a great deal of gossip in the press but not much critical reading, was written cooperatively, though the nature of such collaboration and Genet's part in it will never be known.

Although one must defer to Oswald's greater familiarity with Genet's literary language, intuitively I find no support for her thesis – why is it implausible for a book to have two or more narrative voices? It is hoped that this article will provide a reading of *Prisoner of Love* which will be parasitic rather than critical; which will not need to have recourse to any thesis of dual authorship in order to explain the inversion that Genet's work undergoes in *Prisoner of Love*.

3 Cited in Annie Cohen-Solal's *Sartre. A Life*, London, Heinemann, 1987, pp. 316–17. See also in this respect Genet's remarks in an interview with *Playboy* magazine, cited in Moraly's biography (VE 96).

4 I follow Genet here in describing the Palestinian insurgency as a revolution rather than resistance. Of course, it is at the very least questionable whether the Palestinian struggle is assimilable to the Western concept of revolution.

5 See David McDowell, *Palestine and Israel. The Uprising and Beyond*, London, I. B. Tauris & Co Ltd, 1989, pp. 31–33. For a more comprehensive account of the Palestinian question, see Edward Said, *The Question of Palestine*, London and Henley, Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1980.

6 In Kate Millet's *Sexual Politics* (London, Virago, 1977 [1969]), she argues that Genet '... appears to be the only living male writer of first-class literary gifts to have transcended the sexual myths of our era' (p. 22). The importance of Genet's work for feminism is that he reveals the arbitrary, non-natural status of sexual roles by replicating heterosexual power/sex relations in a homosexual context (pp. 18–19). Millet writes:

His critique of the heterosexual politic points the way toward a true sexual revolution, a path which must be explored if any radical social change is to come about. In Genet's analysis, it is fundamentally impossible to change society without changing personality, and sexual personality as it has generally existed must undergo the most drastic overhaul (p. 22).

There can be no liberation without liberation from sexual oppression, and Genet's work offers a path to that liberation. Is this yet another version of Sartre's thesis on Genet? In the closing pages of her book, Millet writes: 'Alone of our contemporary writers, Genet has taken thought of women as an oppressed group and revolutionary force, and chosen to identify with them' (p. 356).

However, if, as I will argue, Genet's work undergoes inversion in *Prisoner of Love*, then one might read the latter in terms of a shift from a writing of feminist resistance to the postulation outside of writing of a masculine, patriarchal and even heterosexual community. Even though the Palestinian women are idealized in *Prisoner of Love*, and Hamza's mother becomes a sort of *Passionara* figure, this is clearly not sufficient for the kind of sexual revolution envisaged by Millet. It would be extremely interesting to see what Millet would make of *Prisoner of Love* in the light of the reading of Genet proposed in *Sexual Politics*.

7 'C'est seulement ces sortes de vérités, celles qui ne sont pas démontrables et même qui sont 'fausses', celles que l'on ne peut conduire sans absurdité jusqu'à leur extrémité sans aller à la négation d'elles et de soi, c'est celles-là qui doivent être exaltées par l'oeuvre d'art.'

This is how the sentence reads in translation. However, parts of this sentence have not been translated from the French,

Le vieillard qui va de pays en pays, chassé par celui ou il se trouve autant qu'aspiré par les suivants – *Mozard enfant disait en entrant dans le nouveau: le royaume de derniere* – refusant le repos que donne la propriété, même modeste, connu l'étonnement de sa chute en lui-même, *il s'écouta, il se regarda vivre* (my italics).

This fact, combined with evidence of other untranslated phrases (for example on PL 166, the phrase, '*Le mot de songer ne voulant pas se substituer à celui de réfléchir*' (CA 229) is not rendered into English) leads one to suspect the reliability of the English translation, although a much more thorough examination would clearly be necessary.



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