

Trouble for the Theatre: 1

THE MUSE OF SELF-ABSORPTION

Rescript

with three Desperate Choices
and a Backfile

by

David Cole

1995

συγῶμ' ἄν ἤδη· σὸς γὰρ
οὐντεῦθεν λόγος

Euripides, Hippolytus, l. 336.

NOTE

The author requests--well, demands--that his readers skip over all the prefaced and appended material their first time through, and simply read the play. I wish this were because I believed that the work "speaks for itself," "stands on its own," etc.; but the truth is otherwise. The Preface ("Trouble for the Theatre") and Appendix ("Backfile") address themselves to a felt lack in the script proper. It is well that, before consulting them, one should first have read the script and felt the lack.

PREFACE

(But You Read It Afterwards)

TROUBLE FOR THE THEATRE

"Ever and always it has been made too easy for you. For to make a play for you, as plays are customarily made, is already to have made it too easy--and this, no less in the case of the 'difficult' masterpiece than the potboiler: we settle our business and only then are seen in your midst. But no more!"

It is with some such sentiments as these that the author hands along the following three desperate choices to be made by those who would produce his play, and serves notice that no production which has not sunk down in despair before them produces the play.

DESPERATE CHOICE 1 (p.20)

Does THE STENOGRAPHER (otherwise a mute personage) speak the single word "Here!" or does she keep silent?

DESPERATE CHOICE 2 (p.51)

Is the singing voice heard on the tape at the close that of the actress playing THE STENOGRAPHER or is it someone else's?

DESPERATE CHOICE 3 (pp. 21, 28, 41, 50, 52 and Appendix, pp. 53-61)

Is the material in the Backfile (pp. 53-61) to be accorded a presence in the production; and if so, what manner of presence?

Fp.iii

These may seem rather small matters if you come to them from wrestling with (say) whether Iago has or lacks sexual feelings for Othello, whether The Cherry Orchard is or is not a comedy--i. e., from the usual run of great interpretive dilemmas.

But, in fact, these choices are of another order of difficulty than those demanded of us by the classic dramatic texts.

Fp.iv

For, unlike interpretive questions, which can always be answered some way or other, these questions would never have arisen if it were not now already too late for answers. What each compels is not interpretive activity upon the text (though of this, too, The Muse of Self-Absorption stands in need; how should it not?), but rather: pained re-enactment of just those moments in the writing process when every answer failed.

Fp.v

Since I do not wish to be thanked, I offer what none will thank me for: my unsolved problems to be your own. Not in the hope that you will solve them for me, but from a conviction that to write for actors is, precisely, to extend this offer.

Fp.vi

A script is not, or ought not to be, the solution of certain writing problems. (Solved, a writing problem no longer cries out for the actor; the text of solved problems stands free of the theatre.) A script is, rather,

the form in which insoluble difficulties are passed along for theatre work. A script, in other words, is, or ought to be, so much

Trouble for the Theatre

But, after all this fanfare, what is so "insoluble" about any of the three choices propounded above? Each seems to call for nothing more than a straight up-or-down decision between clearcut alternatives. In all three instances, however, one cannot long "ponder the options" without coming to see that one possesses none, that whichever way one goes, one goes against the script, that in reality one never stood before certain choices in confronting which writing the play then seemed, and producing it now seems, to consist.

Fp.vii

DESPERATE CHOICE 1 (p.20)

Does THE STENOGRAPHER (otherwise a mute personage) speak the single word "Here!" or does she keep silent?

Choose speech, and a powerful convention will have been violated. Choose silence, and a magnificent opportunity will have been lost. Here is trouble enough, one might feel; but, in fact, the problem lies deeper.

If there is one situation this play seems bent on exploring, it would appear to be the struggle of writing (THE STENOGRAPHER) to establish itself as, in reality, the source of a voice (THE AUTHOR's) that claims to be its source/

And yet, merely by virtue of containing this moment, the script is debarred from representing any such dilemma. For, let THE STENOGRAPHER but once open her mouth, and writing must forgo its claim to have given voice to the tale "without speaking a word." If, on the other hand, she fails to speak even a single time, then writing's claim to have given voice to the tale does not receive so much as a syllable of confirmation. Thus, the sole proof writing can give of its power to bring forth words independently of voice is--by voicing a word. The single act that might validate writing's claims is also the one thing that voids them.

Well, and is not theatre happiest when busy about just such undecidable struggles? Think so if you like; but what is "undecidable" here is not the conflict between opposed claimants but the distinction between opposing claims. The Muse of Self-Absorption cannot depict the clash between "voice" and "writing"--the very situation it longs most to be about--because this moment of its action, however staged, collapses all distinction between a voiced and a written claim.

DESPERATE CHOICE 2 (p. 51)

Is the singing voice heard on the tape at the close that of the actress playing THE STENOGRAPHER or is it someone else's?

Alone onstage, THE AUTHOR has dictated the conclusion of his story into a tape recorder. The tape is now played--and we hear a woman's voice.

The only woman anywhere in evidence is THE STENOGRAPHER.

If the voice caught on the tape is recognizably that of (the actress playing) THE STENOGRAPHER, then one can only conclude that THE AUTHOR's seeming act of dictation was somehow "ventriloquized" by her, that in reality THE AUTHOR has been no more than a conduit or mouthpiece for this more primary (female) voice we now hear.

If, on the other hand, the voice on the tape is recognizably not that of (the actress playing) THE STENOGRAPHER, then it would seem that THE AUTHOR--whose own voice this cannot be, since it belongs to a woman (but not, on the present supposition, to THE STENOGRAPHER, the only woman in sight)--must somehow have created this "other" (female) voice--which, consequently, only appears to be "alive on its own," "independent of himself," etc.

Well, and in what but a clash between these alternatives

does the entire "drama" consist? And to what end if not to suggest the outcome of such a clash, has the present moment been included? But it cannot do this.

For consider: depending on the option selected in Desperate Choice 1, either the audience will never have heard THE STENOGRAPHER's voice or, at most, they will have heard it speak the single word "Here!" Now, since you cannot recognize a singing voice you have either never heard or, at most, have once briefly heard speak, it follows that the audience will not be able to identify the voice on the tape as either that of (the actress playing) THE STENOGRAPHER or someone else's.

But this is as much as to say, there is no way for this crucial moment to represent either of the clashing alternatives it has been introduced solely to represent, much less "suggest the outcome" of the clash.

DESPERATE CHOICE 3 (pp. **21, 28, 41, 50, 52** and Appendix, pp. **53-61**)

Is the material in the Backfile (pp. **53-61**) to be accorded a presence in the production; and if so, what manner of presence?

The Backfile (pp. **53-61**) gives the texts of five documents either composed or introduced at designated moments in the play. Each document contains material that clarifies, enriches, or, in one instance, only first makes sense of the stretch of action in the course of which it appears.

Fp.xiii

One might well wish the Backfile to figure in any production of a script it thus elucidates. But how to bring this about is by no means obvious.

The Backfile is neither clearly in the script you hold nor clearly out of it (it appears as a kind of Appendix* on pp. **53-61**). The borderline position of these pages forecasts the difficulties that must attend all efforts

Footnote
on
p. xiii
↓

*What further complicates matters is that something called a "backfile" is present in the script--it is referred to in the dialogue on pp. **23, 41** and **49**--so that, from the moment these lines are spoken, something called a "backfile" will be present (albeit not physically present) in the production. But this merely alluded-to backfile cannot be identical with the actual, appended Backfile that now concerns us, since this other one is said (p. **41**) to be composed of various notes, drafts and background material already in existence before the play commences, whereas (the greater part of) the actual, appended Backfile only gets written over the course of the play: we see THE STENOGRAPHER writing it on pp. **21, 38-41** and **51-52**. Of course, the actual, appended Backfile also contains some material written prior to the start of the play (see pp. **28** and **50**), so it is possible that the contents of the two collections overlap to some extent.

1

either to include in or exclude from production the material they contain.**

If you share these pages with actors and audience, you encumber their memories, diffuse their attention, constrain interpretation of certain key passages and, in general, throw up barrier after barrier to a direct encounter with the stage events. If, on the other hand, you withhold these pages, you deprive actors and audience alike of information without which long stretches of the script do not make (or do not make enough) sense. One should not have to master a dossier in order to attend a play; one should not have to tackle this play without benefit of dossier. Such is the intractable dilemma with which the Backfile presents those who would perform The Muse of Self-Absorption.

Well, but suppose one simply cuts the Gordian knot and declares: The Backfile contains essential information;

But surely Document V, which gives the notes of a tune to be sung at a specific moment in the play, unequivocally makes part of the playscript, and is, therefore, certain to figure (i. e., certain to be heard) in any production of it? Note, however, that Document V is offered not (or not unequivocally) as what the recorded voice sings on pp. **51-52, but, first of all, as a transcript of what THE STENOGRAPHER writes while the recorded voice sings at that juncture.

Fp.XIV

Fp.XV

Footnote
or
p.XIII

it must, therefore, be present in production. How, exactly, might such a text be present "in" a production? As a script is present in a staging of the script? As transcripts of the House Unamerican Activities Committee hearings are present in a performance of Are You Now or Have You Ever Been . . . ? As the novel Don Quixote is present in the ballet Don Quixote? As supertitles are present over the proscenium of an opera stage? As the text of Our Town is present in the cornerstone of the Grover's Corners Bank?***

Fp. xvi

In no two of these examples does "in" describe the same relationship, yet all are instance of how a text may be present in the theatre. If there is no end of ways for texts in general to be present in production, this suggests there might be no lack of ways for the text of the Backfile to be present in a production of The Muse of Self-Absorption. It could be mailed out in advance to ticket purchasers. It could be printed in the program. It could be tacked up on the walls of the auditorium, or read over the sound system, or projected onto a scrim Alternatively,

[Fp. xv
note]

***STAGE MANAGER. The Cartwright interests have just begun building a new bank in Grover's Corners And they've asked a friend of mine what they should put in the cornerstone I'm going to have a copy of this play put in.

Thornton Wilder, Our Town, Act I

the Backfile might be hidden in the production:
 confided to the actors but not to the audience;
 displayed in a locked showcase in the theatre lobby;
 tucked away somewhere in the mountainous, "Watts Tower"-like
 heap of papers on the set, upstage-left (see stage
 direction, p. 1). Any of the preceding is
 a possible, and none the inevitable answer to the
 question of how such a text as the Backfile might be
 made present "in" the theatre. Thus, the mere resolution
 of Desperate Choice 3 in favor of an included Backfile
 does not, by itself, take us very far. For,
 having so resolved, one still stands before a bewildering
 variety of specific solutions, no one of which
 clearly has it over all the rest.

Cf course, "in practice," any one of these three
 "desperate" choices can be made in a moment--perhaps
 by flipping a coin (as is customary when considering
 alternatives between which there is nothing to choose)
 or, more likely, on pragmatic grounds: e. g., Is the
 actress playing THE STENOGRAPHER capable of singing the
 music on the tape (Desperate Choice 2)? Will rumors
 of "required reading" frighten away the customers
 (Desperate Choice 3)? Etc. And, of course, this being
 the theatre, there is sure to be much sage discussion
 of which "works," what "plays."

But, my friends, in each of the present instances^{Fp.xviii}, neither works, nothing plays! In every case, however one chooses, something that must not be lost is certain to be lost; and to produce this play is to consent to reproduce these losses in one's own work.

"Your trouble is my trouble"--not until he has, in all sincerity, proffered this traditional assurance to the sorrowing author may the actor be said to have joined him in the work of the dramatic text. To act this script (and how many another besides?) is to re-enact the discovery that its writing problems are insoluble--and my own.

Is it any wonder that a play which seeks to draw the actor into so fundamental a complicity with itself should come accompanied by the following proviso:^{Fp.xix}

THE SILENCE OF THE MUSE

Under no circumstances is the "mute" role of THE STENOGRAPHER to be played by a mime or dancer. She is silent with an actor's silence; or rather, what her silence represents, only the silence of the actor can represent.
 †

THE MUSE OF SELF-ABSORPTION

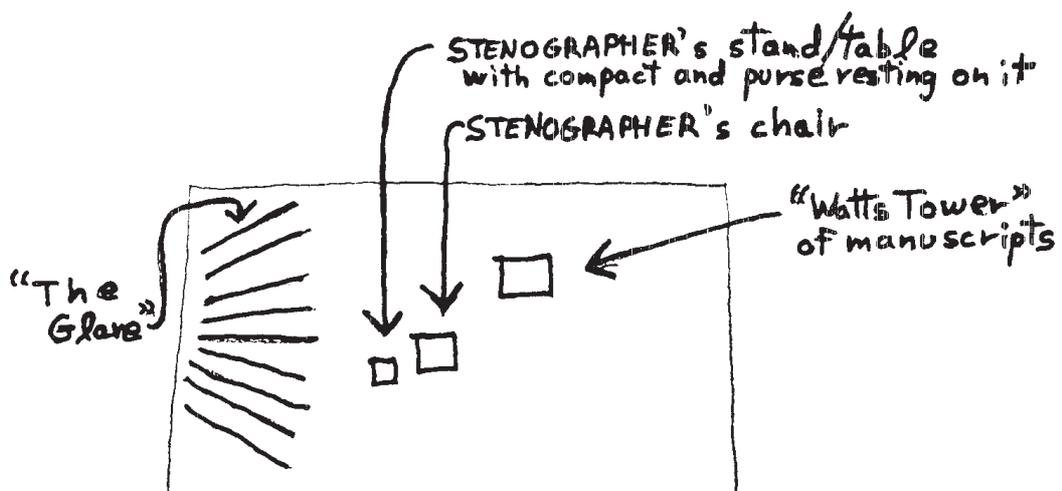
(THE AUTHOR and THE STENOGRAPHER on the scene of writing, set to resume.

THE STENOGRAPHER is seated on a spindly chair, right of center, facing out, notepad and pen at the ready. Just down-right of her is a narrow, stand-like table, on which rests a brown tortoiseshell compact and a purse.

THE STENOGRAPHER is dressed in the manner of an Edwardian office-girl: full-length dark, prim dress with high collar and long sleeves. THE AUTHOR, by contrast, is fitted out after somebody's idea of the contemporary writer: blue workshirt, leather vest, corduroy pants, etc.

Just upstage-left of THE STENOGRAPHER rises a teetering Watts Tower-like pile of manuscripts and manuscript folders that looks as if a breath would topple it.

From off-right, a spill of streaky red-orange light falls across the stage. This light,--which will henceforth be referred to as "The Glare"--suggests at once sunset pouring through a window, a lighting effect left over from some earlier scene, and a backstage work-light inadvertently left on.



Fp.3

At rise, THE AUTHOR is standing down-left, facing, like THE STENOGRAPHER, out. But a moment after the lights come up, and as if jolted into action by their coming up, he wheels around toward THE STENOGRAPHER.)

THE AUTHOR

We take up where?

(THE STENOGRAPHER thrusts her rigid left arm out and up, lifting the notepad to a height where THE AUTHOR can read it without stooping. She averts her face from her own gesture as she makes it.

THE AUTHOR takes the notepad out of her hand and reads aloud from it:)

Fp.4

"She seemed, for a moment, on the point of response (her lips, indeed, were already parted in reply). But, then, for all answer, she thrust the yellowing leaves into his hands, flung from the room, and so passes from view.

"He now lifts away page and there, in his own hand, sees staring back at him the title . . . the title . . . "

(He lets his hand with the notepad in it drop to his side and paces up and down, "thinking."

Fp.5

Meanwhile THE STENOGRAPHER, availing herself of this delay, lays down her pen, snaps open the compact lying on the adjacent stand/table, and sets about checking her hair in its mirror.

In the course of his pacing, THE AUTHOR turns and catches sight of the primping STENOGRAPHER. "Inspired," he quickly crosses back toward THE STENOGRAPHER, thrusts the notepad into her hands and, scarcely giving her time to set down the compact and take up her pen, begins to dictate:)

And there, in his own hand, he first makes out the title--6-point Delphic Open, small caps, centered--"The Muse of Self-Absorption"; turns over the page; and begins to read.

Fp.6

(Note: Between here and p. 11, THE STENOGRAPHER will sometimes get behind and--more surprisingly--will sometimes appear to "get out ahead" of THE AUTHOR's dictation; at moments she will seem to be deafened by, at other moments to be straining to catch, the sound of THE AUTHOR's voice. To accomodate her, THE AUTHOR will speed up or slow down, dictate louder or softer, as necessary. But with each such adjustment, his confidence that his words are being accurately transcribed seems further shaken, until finally, having received one such jolt too many (p. 11), he demands to have a look at the transcript thus far (p. 11).

THE AUTHOR now squints into The Glare, and dictates:)

Fp.7

Imagine a Muse whom no voice any longer invokes. Her art--dithyramb, suppose we make it--at no time exactly what you would call a crowd-pleaser, is losing ground fast, as its practitioners--the poor, good "dizzy ramblers," as she is accustomed to nickname her singers in her thoughts--seek out fresh paths.

To find oneself no longer called up or called in--could aught sadder befall a Muse?, you might reasonably ask. Yet for the girl herself, at least on her better days, the situation did not lack charm. For, after all, was it not "something" to have brought one's art to the point where (at least for now) things could go no further, to have inspired a whole course of development to run its course?

Fp.8

Still, the afternoons are long; and the question of

how one was to fill the hours of the "Great Disuse" (as this era of dithyrambic downturn has come to be known) grows hourly more acute. She makes the rounds, offering her services here and there, but, predictably, the takers are few. For, among singers of other stripes, rare was the bard who could manage to hear in dithyramb--that one-string, non-dramatic offshoot of drama--a voice speaking to him.

Just to keep her hand in, the Muse tried rallying the sun to shine and the breeze to blow, but, alas, with ever-diminishing results. The day she couldn't inspire a river to chafe against its banks, she knew it was time to be moving on.

(THE STENOGRAPHER seems to be falling behind the dictating voice. THE AUTHOR slows down.)

Fp.9

Not for her the twilit existence of an archaic survival; she would re-group, re-train, return as the goddess of something else, as something else than a goddess

Fp.10

But the more the unsung Muse pondered her options, the plainer her course appeared. She knew only the writing dyad; it was script or be scripted, be written or be written off. (That's "dyad" with a y. Retain as variants: "duo" and "couple.") So, partly to view the damage from a fresh angle, but chiefly for want of other resource, she began . . .

(THE STENOGRAPHER's pen, "jumping in" as THE AUTHOR pauses, seems for a moment to "get ahead" of the dictating voice.)

. . . to dash off some impressions, to scribble some views, to--as at some point it no longer availed to hold off naming it--well, to write.

Fp. 11

"And what more natural for a Muse?" you may think. But think again! A Muse, after all--has no Muse! (Note-to-self: be sure and do something here with self-invocation:

(THE STENOGRAPHER appears suddenly deafened by the sound of the dictating voice, and cringes away.)

"Who's the goddess supposed to hail in--herself?" etc.) Then, too, authors are told to "write from experience," and a Muse, being a pure source, won't have had what you or I would call experiences--other than the experience of coming before an author, and that is more a position than an experience. Worst of all,

Fp. 12

(THE STENOGRAPHER is falling behind. THE AUTHOR slows down to let her catch up.)

the girl had ever to struggle against the conviction that nothing was so far beneath her as writing--make that: lower than writing. For, after all, seen from the Muse's end of the transaction, the literary life is only so much cocking an ear,

(THE STENOGRAPHER seems to be straining to hear. THE AUTHOR speaks more distinctly.)

and, as such, is best left to those without a whole heck of a lot to say for themselves or to others (our girl had plenty). In fact, from where the goddess sits, "writing" resembles nothing so much as (ellipsis, italics) . . . taking dictation--a resemblance that no doubt explains the mirth of her fellow-muses--they, whose springs, unlike the fountains of dithyramb, as yet gushed clear--upon word of our friend's new line reaching them. "What a comedown!" exclaimed the Sister Arts (to employ our heroine's little private name for her colleagues): "From Muse to Stenographer!"--and laughed till it hurt. To which, for all reply, our lass

(THE STENOGRAPHER appears suddenly deafened by, and cringes away from, the dictating voice.)

only hunkered down deeper over the waiting page, and entered: "To write is no longer to distinguish the Muse from the Stenographer in oneself"--a tableau that inspired Onemene, Muse of Dismissive Characterizations, to one of her best efforts: "Ladies, I give you--

(The pen of THE STENOGRAPHER, "jumping in" as THE AUTHOR pauses, seems once more to "get ahead" of the dictating voice.)

Autohymnia" (Note-to-self: That's autos, "self," plus hymné, "singer" or "song"--am I on firm ground here?)

"Ladies, I give you Autohymnia, a.k.a., The Muse of Self-Absorption." At which, the laughter of the Muses

(THE STENOGRAPHER is suddenly deafened by, and cringes from, the dictating voice.)

broke forth anew, producing sudden but welcome infusions of comic energy into all the genres over which these sisters presided--a big improvement, in most cases, it was felt.

Fp.16 The newly crowned Muse went on writing; the new-minted name--as Onemene's coinages tended to do--stuck, reprised as it was at every return of the sisters--oh, and they were forever weighing in with a taunt: "Goddess! A worshipper!" they'd cry, thrusting an old votive mirror under her chin; or, "In what is Our Lady of Self-Absorption currently absorbed?"

(THE STENOGRAPHER appears to be straining to hear.)

Fp.17 Wait, don't tell me, it's coming," and so on. To the point where the Muse was driven to seek refuge in some unfrequented copse or fane where she might scribble away in peace--at least for a time, for the Sister Arts always did run her to earth eventually, such a sixth sense have Muses in these matters.

And in what fields of song did she now raise voice, our new-fledged aspirant to the lyre? Not, you may be sure, in her proper genre of dithyramb: you try whispering in your own ear! And not in any of the other going verse-forms, either. For, let her essay praise-poem, threnody, whatever, and infallibly it would bring the appropriate Sister Art shimmering in, who, the identity of the dabbler once known, took up the teasing afresh--and there went another good grove you could scratch off the list.

Fp. 18
 No, for now--at least till such time as some wholly new way of working should drop from the clouds (a secret hope)--our Muse, like many a young woman before and since, had to content herself with reflections, jottings--the "Eternal Notebook," as she more and more found herself alluding to it in her thoughts, of which, (Note-to-self:

(Once again, as THE AUTHOR pauses, the pen of THE STENOGRAPHER "jumps ahead" of the dictating voice.)

and here it will be possible to hold off no longer), of which, herewith a sampling:

(THE AUTHOR produces a sheaf of 10-12 strips of paper, each a different shade of grey, shuffles through them, brings one to the top of the pile, and dictates from it.

At each point marked by an asterisk (*) below, he switches to, and reads from, a new grey paperstrip.)

From the Muse's Notebook, First Series, 8-point Hellenic Wide, sans serif, small caps, indent-left. No--center. No--flush right.

(to STENOGRAPHER)

You see why I no longer work with a tape recorder.

(resumes dictating)

From the Muse's Notebook, First Series.

Fp. 19
 *A certain Muse rambled and rambled. One day she decided she'd like to listen for a while--and perhaps make some notes.

*A certain Muse kept back all her best ideas for herself. Such self-reliance proved an inspiration to all who knew her.

*A certain poet, feeling garrulous and overextended, besought his Muse for silence. She found she lacked the words in which to reply to so strange a request.

*Unsparing fecundity: why this and not this other? "From experience!" goes up the cry. But, of course, a Muse has had no experiences, other than the experience of coming before an author--and that is more a position than an experience.

(looks up from noteslip)

From which it may be seen that I have pilfered the Muse's notebook to tell her story--and that, neither for the first nor last time.

(resumes reading from noteslip)

*The Muse who inspired scant confidence.

*The Muse who made her poet
believe it was all his idea.

*The Muse who--

(THE STENOGRAPHER seems to be falling
behind the dictating voice.)

*I set each down as it presents
itself; then, stung by the
possibilities, exert a second,
more harrying attention. I
discover, in the courses of that
attention, my true subject.
I write my attention.

*"Alone at last!" cries a voice
in the great silence of writing.

(THE AUTHOR pockets the sheaf of grey slips
he has been reading/dictating from.)

To which silence, let us for the present leave our Muse,
and take up another thread.

Part Two/Section 2/Roman Numeral II.

One afternoon, the Poet Whose Muse Had Departed--

(All caps. No--initial caps. No--yes, initial caps.)

That afternoon, the Poet Whose Muse Had Departed sat on a
bench at a turning of the Allée, brooding over the desertion
of his one-time helper and friend. Was ever such perfidy?
For see! Eleven labors into his big Hercules poem,
off she had popped, leaving him with his crowning labor
yet to invent (not for this genius the traditional twelve).

Fp.23 And for all pretext--what? Had he made difficulties, pressed her beyond her strength, or even--as those wild-cards, the dithyrambists, were rumored to have done with their girl--turned from her voice (thereby bringing on the "Great Disuse," of which I earlier sung)? But no such thing! All his offense was to have urged a slight, and, to his way of thinking, highly positive alteration in their working arrangement. "Suppose, for a little, I tried putting it to you," he'd ventured. "Or better still: what if we were to take it by turns--you know, something more in the way of a conversation." To which, his vexed patroness:

"In other words,

(THE STENOGRAPHER's pen "jumps in" as THE AUTHOR pauses, seeming to "get ahead" of the dictating voice.)

it would now be you who dictates the terms of the relationship. Well, let me tell you, that's not how it works with a Muse"--and, so pronouncing, flung from the room; Hercules' last labor could just--

(to THE STENOGRAPHER, whose "jumping out ahead" on the last sentence but one has jolted his faith in the accuracy of her transcription one time too many:)

I wonder if I might just run my eye back over--

(THE STENOGRAPHER's left arm shoots rigidly out and up, lifting the notepad to where THE AUTHOR can read it without stooping; THE STENOGRAPHER averts her face from her own gesture as she makes it.

THE AUTHOR snatches the notepad out of THE STENOGRAPHER's hand and examines it.)

Hm! Actually, not so far afield as one might have--
 Oh, but wait: here at pericope 39, that should read
 "scribble," not "scribal." Funny: your predecessor was
 also much given to that confusion, albeit other way round.

(He hands the notepad back to THE STENOGRAPHER,
 allows her a moment to make the correction he has
 indicated, then resumes dictating.)

So: "Not how it works with a Muse," she offered, and,
 so pronouncing, flung from the room; Hercules' last labor
 could just invent itself.

Fp.25

(Note: From the time it is returned to her
 here through her "recapture" of it on p. 13 ,
 the notepad will be continually "getting away"
 from THE STENOGRAPHER (drifting off, sinking
 down, bouncing up, etc.); and THE STENOGRAPHER,
 without ever actually leaving her chair, must
 "follow after" and "bring it back," writing in it
 all the while.)

What follows in outline:

(The notepad "floats up" in a slow,
 semicircular arc over THE STENOGRAPHER's head,
 in a direction 180° away from The Glare.)

Poet at first given to making light of his loss. Comments
 along the lines of: "Projects of her own . . . these
 self-willed collaborators." And on in that vein.

Fp.26

But, for all that, is stuck:

(The floating notepad, held aloft by THE
 STENOGRAPHER's rigid arm, "gets stuck" out to
 one side.)

dismused, high-and-dry, "a stream without a source,"
 end-quote. So is all the while on the prowl for a stand-in.

(The notepad, "stuck" out to one side in THE STENOGRAPHER's hand, suddenly "sinks like a stone" to the stage floor--)

His method:

(--and begins to "bounce" slowly up and down, each bounce carrying it a little further around in front of THE STENOGRAPHER, in the direction of The Glare.)

to plunk down before the prospect--this might be a woman, a tape recorder, a light--and wait for the bolt. But never once. With the result that [NARRATIVE RESUMES:]

(On its final, slow, upward bounce, the notepad, held always in THE STENOGRAPHER's hand, continues "floating away" from her in the direction of The Glare.)

many a sunset found him, as now, slumped on a bench, at a turning of the Allée, his notebook weightless on his knee, about to put paid to the incompletions of the day, when all at once,

(THE STENOGRAPHER "recaptures" the notepad, pulls it down out of the air and clutches it to her breast, hunkering down so that it won't drift off again.

This sequence of movements has brought her facing around toward The Glare, off-right, with her back to THE AUTHOR.

Writing in this hunched-over, protective posture produces a trembling motion all up and down her back.)

there strikes his eye, across the Allée, a young woman seated on a bench like his own, facing off into the sunset and, to all appearances (so far as can be told from behind),

Fp.28 shaken by sobs at what she there beholds. (Note-to-self: Describe the tremors that run out and back along-- Better: describe the difficulties of such a description.)

Fp.29 And suddenly, himself shaken as never yet by the moilings of Herakles, the stilled poet entered upon the life of this unknown trembling before him. He imagined her sorrows, imagined her heart--and therewith found himself once more imagining. Whereupon, re-opening the long-disused notebook, he set about composing at altogether another pitch than had ever attended his labors on the high but (as it now seemed) empty Hercules saga. What was the draining of the Stymphalian marsh to that little movement about the gathers of her waistband, the cleansing of the Augean stalls beside those shudders propagated, like a wave in medium, down the side-seam of her skirt?

Fp.30 For hours, it seemed, the girl, facing away into the sunset, continued to tremble, the poet continued to write, and when at last he lifts away pen, he holds in his hands the makings of an utter new thing: a meditation of Cassandra, facing back upon Troy in flames, and trembling; or maybe, of Cassandra facing into a vision of Troy aflame, and trembling; or possibly, of some later woman, facing into her future with the clarity of Cassandra upon Troy, and trembling--it bore, at moments, a resemblance to all of these.

Here were not only the first lines from our singer's hand since his Muse's defection, here was verse that represented a whole new departure in his poetic career. (Note-to-self: henceforth refer to the Allée-poet's Cassandra-fragment as the "New Departure.")

Fp.31 His heart full, the restored singer longs to embrace his benefactress--is, indeed, already on his feet to do so, when suddenly

(THE STENOGRAPHER, who has been facing off-right toward The Glare as she writes, now swings partway back around so that she faces the audience.)

Fp.32 the girl faces round toward him, and there on her lap he makes out a notebook, near-cousin to his own, aslant whose darkening leaves she drives her pen along in the last of light, seeking, ere vision fade, to leave her mark upon the blackening page. It is this raining-down of quick stabs that has set her body atremble. And it is this trembling, seen wrong way round, of which our poet has made so much. Seen, now, aright, her "trembling" has been writing.

Well! Let it have been jack-hammering, it has given our singer his finest song yet; he can't afford to let the trembler slip away--and he'll have to act fast: the girl is already packing up her things.

(From here through the asterisk (*) on p. 16 THE AUTHOR half-acts-out vis-à-vis THE STENOGRAPHER the sequence of actions which he recounts the Allée-poet as taking vis-à-vis the woman in the Allée.)

Fp.33 At a bound, he is with her, explaining how having her there, toiling away before him, has somehow made all the difference to his own efforts, and offering a deal. Clearly, she could do with some fairer ground than a park-bench to pursue her labors; while he--well, he could scarcely do better than the sight of her.

(THE STENOGRAPHER's pen seems to be running dry. She shakes it a couple of times and resumes writing.)

Suppose she were to come to him . . . oh, as a kind of "secretary," they might agree to call it; though in fact her sole duty would be to go on, as today, writing in his presence--and always, as today, facing off: so that, whatever it was in the spectacle of her toiling ever on with averted eye that so held him, he might henceforth hold ever in view.*

Fp.34 The Muse of Self-Absorption--for, of course, it was she--had not been so long out of the game but that she recognized an Invocation to the Muse when she heard one; and frankly, it felt like a throwback:

(Again THE STENOGRAPHER's pen goes dry; again she shakes it out and resumes writing.)

if there was one laurel she no longer cared to garner, it was "inspiration to all and some." Still, she did need a Sister-proof refuge--only yesterday, Endemia, Muse of Ill-Judged Persistence, had been sighted over the treetops of the Allée--where one might hope to write away

in the absence of (correction, make that: "write away
 the absence of") every passing Muse. So, for reasons
 which she imagined to be hard-nosed in the extreme--but,
 listen, who knows, maybe also a little because she missed
 the poor "dizzy rambler"--home with her singer she hies
 and sets up shop in the window-seat of his work-room,
 facing ever away. (Note-to-self: wouldn't she want to know
 what type of thing she was being brought in to inspire?
 No; I'd think of that, she'd never think of that.)

At first, the resemblance of the arrangement to her
 old way of life--a blocked author, she hovering about,
 the hope of the situation--played havoc with her concentration.

(THE STENOGRAPHER's pen goes dry again;
 again she shakes it out.)

And especially, this perpetual facing off--which she
 regarded as an unacknowledged borrowing from the Orpheus
 material (Muses hate borrowings)--got on her nerves.
 Soon, though, she forgot where she was or what she was in
 the presence of--this, too, is characteristic of Muses--and,
 drawing forth the "Eternal Notebook," went back to
 putting down her reflections, as before. (Note-to-self:
 Do I want to hint at something sexual between them?
 Trust to the overtones of the language to do my work here.)

Well, so here is "the successor Muse"--as her singer
 (strictly in jest!) delights to hail her--settled by the
 window-seat: do we now enter a period of unexampled fecundity?

(THE STENOGRAPHER's pen is out of ink; she stuffs it into her purse on the table and takes out another one.)

Alas, in his euphoria, our poet had (rather comically, it may seem) forgotten something: he now knew--

(THE STENOGRAPHER turns over the page of her notepad and--it is the last. From here through the asterisk (*) below, she frantically flips back through the notepad, searching for a bit of blank space and falling further and further behind.)

Fp.38 --knew, that is, that what trembled away there in the window was not a suffering heart but merely writing with its eye elsewhere. Had he seriously expected the power of the spectacle to survive the comedy of its unmasking? If so, he soon learned better: for, strive as he might to regard the girl as a source, he found he could only manage to regard her as the source of a misunderstanding--

(*THE STENOGRAPHER locates a clear patch on one of the already-written-on pages of her notepad and resumes taking notes in a tiny, cramped hand.)

Fp.39 --seen into the life of things? one had no more than seen around writing!--and, under the circumstances, to continue writing was only to continue to misunderstand.

(THE AUTHOR once again draws forth the sheaf of grey paperslips from his pocket, sifts through them, and pockets all but one, which he consults periodically as he dictates the following:)

Fp.40 Alas for Cassandra! The prospects for that plaint only grew dimmer on each perusal, until at last this promising "New Departure" (as once it seemed) began to look

a poorer thing, even, than unaccomplishing Hercules, whom now it joined, unaccomplished, on the work-room floor.

(THE AUTHOR turns the grey slip over; the verso is blank. Absently, he lets his hand, with the grey slip in it, fall to his side.

THE STENOGRAPHER, meanwhile, is completely out of space in her notepad. Availing herself of this brief pause in the dictation, she stuffs the filled notepad into her purse and draws forth a fresh notebook, identical or very similar to the one THE AUTHOR will bring out on p.24.)

Fp.41 Well, as you may conceive, the presence of her who had brought him to this pass (and now seemed unlikely to bring him anything else) soon grows unendurable; and all the singer's thought is of how he may end their arrangement--a move, be it said, for which the girl herself, scratching away cheerfully by the window, had given scant grounds.

Nor for a long while gave any

Fp.42 (He trails off, uncertain how to continue.

The grey noteslip drops, unnoticed, from his hand.

THE STENOGRAPHER picks up the noteslip and rustles it to get his attention. He cocks his ear, as if to ascertain what this sound is and where it is coming from.

THE STENOGRAPHER rustles the slip louder. At this point one of two things happens:¹

1. See PREFACE, Desperate Choice 1, pp. iii - iv.

EITHER:

THE AUTHOR turns, catches sight of THE STENOGRAPHER rustling the slip, takes it from her hand, stuffs it into his pocket--and suddenly seems to know how to go on.

OR:

THE STENOGRAPHER, despairing of getting THE AUTHOR's attention by rustling the slip, very distinctly says:

"Here!"

and thrusts the paper out at him. THE AUTHOR turns at the sound of THE STENOGRAPHER's voice, takes the proffered noteslip, stuffs it into his pocket--and suddenly seems to know how to go on.

THE STENOGRAPHER now resumes "taking dictation," but from here through p.21 what she seems to be setting down are variations on a single mark (word? sign? hieroglyph?), which she writes out over and over again at different sizes, with different flourishes, etc.)

Fp.43

And then one day the balked poet made a chance discovery that cast things in a whole new light. Happening (by what Muse inspired, I know not) to rest his gaze on the girl--faced, as ever, away; writing, as ever, away--he conceived the fancy that what she was setting down in her notebook at that instant was the next line of his long-since-abandoned Hercules poem. Whereupon--

This final toil: to devise a final toil

--and there it was: the next line of his long-since-abandoned Hercules poem, suddenly present to thought: Hercules' Last Labor--to invent himself one! Dazzled, he looks away from the scribbling girl for a moment; dazzled, looks back, and--

Labor that alone shows all the Twelve
what Twelve they are

Fp.44 Bless me if it is not the line after that, if it is not . . .
the stilled song in motion once more! Joy floods him--to which,
however, a dark thought succeeds: Could the girl just now
actually have been writing the words he had imagined her
as writing--and then, somehow, in the trembling of those
back and shoulders, telegraphed them across, in a sequence
he had but to pick up and set down?

Fp.45 (THE AUTHOR suspends dictation, in order to
work out this "telegraphing" image on his own
body.

When, after a time, he turns back to resume,
he is startled to see that THE STENOGRAPHER
has been furiously writing all the while.²

At sound of THE AUTHOR's dictating voice,
THE STENOGRAPHER leaves off this private writing
and returns to "note-taking" of the sort she has
practiced since p.20, i. e., the compulsive
setting down of variations on a single mark.)

And might it not--dreadful thought!--have been even some such
telegraphy went forward that afternoon in the Allée:
the girl not so much evoking or eliciting his Cassandra-song
as flat-out conferring it, a touch at a time? Was the
"New Departure"--already, it will be recalled,
under suspicion as a misunderstanding, but, heaven me!,
at bare least, one's own misunderstanding--possibly
no more than a message sent and received?

2. For what THE STENOGRAPHER has been writing here, see
BACKFILE, Document I. See also PREFACE, Desperate Choice 3,
pp. vi-x.

Fp.46 Could it be his poetic output with which that notebook of hers, virtually (it only now strikes him) indistinguishable from his own, steadily fills? He has got to see what is in that notebook! So from that hour his watching the girl "for inspiration" (as yet he claims) assumed more and more the character of watching one's moment.

Fp.47 For a long while, however, no path into the young woman's pages presented.

(The mix of reds, yellows and oranges in the offstage Glare alters slightly.)

And then one afternoon, the toiling girl mistook a glimmer at the window for . . .

(THE AUTHOR moves right and squints off into the altered Glare, as if trying to bring something "out there" into focus.)

. . . Deeorama, Muse of Scenography.

(THE AUTHOR remains staring off into The Glare.)

As if "freed" by his sudden silence, THE STENOGRAPHER drops her compulsive re-inscribing of the single mark, and, new notebook and pen still in hand, comes up round behind THE AUTHOR and peers off over his shoulder into The Glare.)

Fp.48 It was, in fact, a particularly drastic sunset. But Autohymnia, accustomed to take no chances when sisterly overflights threatened, promptly sought the seclusion of an inner chamber, leaving all her materials where they lay. Here was the poet's chance!

(THE STENOGRAPHER is suddenly "flung back" by what she sees "out there" in The Glare. Her new notebook and pen go flying from her hand and during what follows she staggers back toward her chair, searching for them. She retrieves the notebook but not the pen.)

In a bound, he is upon her notebook, outwardly so like his, and, in brief space, has made its contents his own. Imagine his relief to come upon nothing remotely resembling any piece by him written or projected--no laboring of Hercules, no forth-peering Cassandra--indeed, no finished work of any kind, but merely . . . a jumble of dicta, which, far from revealing the "true origins" of his poem, bore only the faintest relation to it, and concerning which the sole mystery was why the transcribing such stuff should have produced in the transcriber that extreme bodily agitation he had picked up in her that afternoon in the Allée--a mystery of which the following extracts allow us to feel the force.

(THE AUTHOR produces the sheaf of grey paperslips and sifts through them, but apparently does not find what he is looking for, and pockets the lot. To THE STENOGRAPHER:)

The material fails me. Let's try what a quick foray into the Backfile might or might not-- You may want to avail yourself of this brief interval to take yourself one more time back through--

(THE AUTHOR points to her transcript. THE STENOGRAPHER signals that she has plenty to occupy her. THE AUTHOR exits.)

THE STENOGRAPHER, whose search for her dropped pen has become increasingly frantic, darts back to her chair, takes a drawing pencil or felt-tipped pen from her purse, turns over a clean page of her new notebook, and begins feverishly to lay down marks upon it.

Though one cannot say for certain, what she is doing looks more like diagramming or sketching than writing. Occasionally, she squints back off in the direction of The Glare, as if to check what she is now setting down against what she earlier (p. 23) saw "out there."

THE AUTHOR re-enters, sees THE STENOGRAPHER apparently sketching, and watches her for a few moments.

THE STENOGRAPHER becomes aware of THE AUTHOR, guiltily tears out the sketch-page and slips it between two other leaves of her new notebook.

THE AUTHOR notices THE STENOGRAPHER's dropped pen, which THE STENOGRAPHER herself has been unable to locate. He picks it up and holds it out to her.

She accepts the pen, hurriedly stuffs the drawing pencil or felt-tipped pen into her purse, and makes a great show of being at the ready to resume note-taking.

THE AUTHOR produces a notebook identical or very similar to the new notebook THE STENOGRAPHER has been writing in since p. 19, and reads from it.

For a while--from here through p. 26 --THE STENOGRAPHER transcribes conscientiously.)

So, to resume: Immense relief of the singer to spy in the girl's notes no common ground whatever with the song into which he had been spurred by her making them; rather, if anything-- But you may form your own judgment from the extracts that follow.

From the Muse's Notebook, Second Series, 2-point
Avenir Roman, small caps, flush-right:

Fp.52

The Unstilled: Fragments
of a Colloquy Between a Voice
and its Faltering

"This tale I bear--"
--Why adduce? Why so much as
a mention in the formalist memoir
of one's dealings therewith?

"They come before me--"
--They come to be written.
Therefore, mark their every move;
catch their every cry; see them
in a whole new light. Feel free
to make notes.

"I would relate--"
--Writing is not a relation,
but a self-relation. To have
arrived at the telling is
already to have gone too far.

Fp.53

"And the 'great human themes'?"
--O experience of writing,
ever and anon taken for experience!

"And all the various scene--?"

--Of writing.

"Unthinkable to abide cheerfully
within--"

--The impulse to depart from
writing must also be written;
or rather, what is "writing"
but a shorthand in which
to render that departure?

"Brought, for all subject, down--?"

--To a silence-upon-subjects,
badly kept; to a fall-into-silence
some otherwise told than as
a falling still.

(THE AUTHOR flips hurriedly through his notebook
as he dictates the following.)

THE STENOGRAPHER, meanwhile, draws forth
the sketch-page she was obliged to hide away
in her new notebook back on p.24, and sets about
clandestinely transcribing its contents onto a
blank page of that notebook. She works on this
transfer sporadically from here through p.33,
giving it her full attention whenever THE AUTHOR's
eyes are elsewhere and hastily concealing the
sketch-page every time he looks her way.)

Such the maunderings of the Muse, which her poet,
finding thus unexpectedly within his grasp, turns over and
over in his hands.

Fp.54

Fp.55

more or less what one had sought from the first--and her lips fell shut. So it was that The Muse of Self-Absorption acquired her first reader. Of course, with mere readers the Muse will not long abide, so forth from his presence she stole; nor was the matter at any future time alluded to between them.

(THE AUTHOR closes and pockets the notebook.)

When next the singer fell to his song, it was as one reborn. The sheer unlikeness of every word in the Muse's notebook to all present or likely utterance of his gave him back hope that he had, after all, in the spectacle of a writing-that-withholds-its-face, learned to make out his own: it asked only a touch of . . . autosuggestion. So, now, taking up his post to windward of the Muse as she writes, he whispers himself: "it is my own goes forward there"; and--

And the trick holds! Now as erst, he finds he has only to imagine the girl writing away at his poem to be imagining his poem.

(THE STENOGRAPHER strikes out and rewrites something.)

Especially in those passages where she would veer back, alter and resume--especially did this silent corrective process "speak" to him as had never yet the chirrings of her long-gone (and now but dimly recalled) predecessor. Not, to be sure, in the matter of Cassandra and her sky: not since that afternoon in the Allée had anything further been sighted along that horizon. But if the "New Departure" was going nowhere, it was quite otherwise with Self-Belaboring Hercules, on whose final labor the singer sensed he was closing fast. Naturally, now no further thought was given to packing off her who made all this possible. Peaceably, the two authors scribbled away side by side.

Part Three/Section 3/Roman Numeral III.

So things went on till one day--

(Offstage, The Glare flickers several times, as if asking for attention. Startled, both THE AUTHOR and THE STENOGRAPHER turn toward it.)

THE AUTHOR takes his notebook out of his pocket, leafs through it, rips out a page³ and hands it to THE STENOGRAPHER, saying:)

To be included among the material I'm about to let you have, under the title: "Cvertones to Impart."

(THE STENOGRAPHER takes the page and stuffs it into her notebook without looking at it. THE AUTHOR pockets his notebook and resumes dictating:)

3. For the text of this page, see BACKFILE, Document II. See also PREFACE, Desperate Choice 3, pp. vi -X.

So things went on till the day Deeorama, Muse of Scenography, having at last tracked our lass to her lair, dropped by to call. Caught, this time, without lead-time or hiding-place, Autohymnia braced herself for a round of the usual heavy-handed teasing--such having always hitherto been the aim of these sisterly fly-bys--but, no, Deeorama, it seemed, needed to talk. Her genre, too, apparently, was now on the downskid, and she seemed to feel The Muse of Self-Absorption should drop everything and condole, even though, when the shoe was on the other foot. Deeorama herself had proved something less than the perfect confidante. (Indeed, only Realia, Muse of Surface Plausibility, had had crueller things to say on the subject of her sister's new path.) Yet now here was the scenic muse running on about "how it must have been for you," "only now did one grasp"--and much else in that vein; to all which our heroine--like most muses, something shy of the perfect listener--gave but half her mind, until a chance remark of her sister's brought her up short: "Of course," sighed Deeorama, "your field and mine have always flourished each at the expense of the other. So, from the recent comeback dithyramb seems to be making, any halfway knowledgeable observer might have predicted the downturn in scenic art."

Fp.60

Fp.61

L

Fp.62 Thus it was that Autohymnia first learned her **old genre** was enjoying--as, listen, in time the most disused of genres will enjoy--a revival. Or at least: many wished to see it revived--for how exactly to compass this when, as was generally conceded, (quote) "the Muse had departed" (end-quote), none could well say.

On learning this news, The Muse of Self-Absorption (as Our Lady of Dithyramb had long since got in the way of thinking of herself--if not, indeed, as having simply gone over from "Muse" to "Author" altogether) felt herself torn. Her first reaction was: "Let them go fish! It could decline without me, it can resurge without me--I'm a working writer now!" In point of fact, though, never had she felt less the writer than in this callow disregard of her fellow-scribes' plight. Well, but (she thought), make it a question of what one "owed" authors, and wasn't she more than holding up her end right here by the window-seat--where, moreover, one had but to go on writing the while? Never more the Muse than when given up to one's musing--there was a speculation worthy of the name; yet one which, she could not help but feel, sank of its own weight. For if "the singers came first," there could be no real question which singers: who if not her own poor "dizzy rambles" (as ever in her thoughts she named them) held prior claim?

Fp.63

Fp.64

Deeorama, meanwhile, with a vague sense of having dropped she knew not what bombshell, marvelled afresh at her sister's boundless capacity for drifting out of conversations; and, pronouncing her "unresponsive today, even for you," stole from the scene.

Fp.65

When next the poet came to his task, he found the Muse to all appearances--so far, at least, as might be judged from that quivering back--already at work. But when, suddenly, she turned, as never yet, her face full upon him, her face was bright with tears: this one time, it seems, her "writing" had been trembling. She was, moreover, dressed for travel with a packed bag at her feet.

"Not leave me now?" burst from the bard, "so near labors' end!"--and followed it up with frantic offers to expiate on the spot whatever fault or ill-usage now prompts her flight. But for all answer she refers him to a Letter of Resignation that, she promises, he will soon receive from her hand, and flings from the room.

Fp.66

Part Four/Section 4/Roman Numeral IV.

So now back into circulation comes the Muse, albeit under the distinct impression of having nothing to say to anyone--a conviction only strengthened the first time she plunks down before one of the old dithyrambic crew, opens her lips to speak, and brings forth--nothing! Silence!

Imagine, then, her astonishment when, even as her jaw fell shut, the hand of her dithyrambist falls to the page, writing, writing--in a perfect frenzy he writes. And she, glancing over his shoulder as he works,

(THE AUTHOR, having come up round behind THE STENOGRAPHER, tries to see over her shoulder what she is writing.)

THE STENOGRAPHER hurriedly slips the sketch-page she has been transcribing since p.26 into her notebook, only drawing it forth to resume work when THE AUTHOR has moved off again.)

sees dropping from the pen of this rather fourth-rate practitioner of her craft what it is little enough to call his best work, but lines reminiscent of her art's highest flowering in the era before the "Great Disuse"--in short, a masterpiece, the only objection anyone could think to raise against which might be to find it a tad out-of-genre, given over, as it was, not to the usual dithyrambic themes--Dionysus, his birth and loves--but rather--

(Again THE AUTHOR tries to see over THE STENOGRAPHER's shoulder. When, as before, she reacts by stuffing into her notebook the sketch-page she is transcribing, he moves off, takes his own notebook out of his pocket, and leafs through it.)

But rather than summarize, let us place ourselves in a position to read over the Muse's shoulder as she reads.

(THE AUTHOR smooths down a page in his notebook, which he frequently consults while dictating the following:)

Fp.68 4-point Lucida Sans, verse-extract, center:

(blocks out title in the air)

Who Sings? Not the Muse!

--Hail, Muse, who stills the voice, that
 in the stillness
 And of the stillness may be born--

(Delete. Scroll up. Restart.)

--Hail, Muse, that bringest upon the voice
 that hails thee
 Silence from whence it hails--

(Note-to-self: Do I actually write this stuff? As verse?
 In summary? Best keep to a kind of translationese.)

So again: over the shoulder of her lesser dithyrambist
 the Muse reads:

(Once more THE AUTHOR tries to sneak a look
 over THE STENOGRAPHER's shoulder at what she
 is writing--and this time nearly succeeds.
 But at the last moment THE STENOGRAPHER crumples
 the sketch-page, which she has again drawn forth
 from her notebook to work on, and tosses it
 under her chair.

During what follows THE STENOGRAPHER re-reads
 and revises her completed expansion of the
 discarded sketch-page, now going over a line
 to make it more legible, now crossing out or
 emending a mark. At intervals, whenever she
 thinks the coast is clear, she cautiously attempts
 to retrieve the original sketch-page from
 beneath her chair, in order to check her copying
 against it. But every time, THE AUTHOR wheels
 back round on her just as she is about to
 lay hold of the discarded page.

Thwarted in his efforts to see over
THE STENOGRAPHER's shoulder, THE AUTHOR now
resumes dictating from his notebook.)

Long I labored at your voice;
So that, when you first fell silent,
"Speak!" I could only think to cry.
Of the silence that now met me
I could make but little till the hour
When--as by custom long instructed
In aught of thy bestowing--
I gave it out upon the page:
Your silence as erst your song.

O well-kept silence of the written,
That transcribes the tacit Muse's,
In your blest refusal to be uttered
I came on matter of utterance;
In giving heed to your silence
I first gave voice to my own.

O silence of the Muse--which her poet
Must take for solace, take for subject,
Must take, at day's end, for his own--
I sing thee. Sing me now in turn, you

(Apparently undecided about a last emendation
in her "fair copy," THE STENOGRAPHER raises her
pen over the page and holds it quivering there.

His eye caught by this gesture, THE AUTHOR now tosses out one after another variant, as if to see which one will bring the wavering pen down upon the page:)

Fp. 71

Who speak into my silence from your own.

(THE STENOGRAPHER's pen still hovers above the page.)

Who speak into my silence of your own.

(The pen still hovers)

Who speak into my silence with your own.

(Suddenly, THE STENOGRAPHER brings her pen down onto the page, makes the final change, and sets about reading over her completed transcription of the sketch-page.

THE AUTHOR closes and pockets his notebook.)

--even thus the o'erpeering Muse is tempted to prompt her singer to emend his song, when, lo! a quick glance over his shoulder reveals she has already achieved this by the simple expedient of keeping her mouth shut.

Fp. 72

At which, the goddess can but marvel: Whence this new knack?

(In the course of re-reading her transcription of the sketch-page, THE STENOGRAPHER comes to a passage she can't decipher. She tries holding the notebook out at different angles and distances.)

Was it her long vigil at the window-seat that had, somehow, conferred this power of inspiring in silence? Or had such ever been the nature of the excitation, always till now more volubly imparted than need was? And, strangest of all,

how was it that in thus falling silent before the other, she only first truly felt herself "the writer of the pair"--the very status from which, by all rights, silence should have debarred her? Such musings as these filled many quires of the Eternal Notebook, to which, need I add, the Muse remained a faithful contributor all the while she was helping the dithyramb fall silent once more, this time for good.

Fp. 73

Fine for it! Fine for her! But what about--?

(Back cursor delete.)

Part Five/Section 5/Roman Numeral V.

The Singer of the Allée. Post second Muse's flight.

The picture in outline.

("Taking off" from the latest odd angle at which it has been held out by THE STENOGRAPHER so that she may read the "illegible" transcript--passage from it, the notebook now once more "gets away" from THE STENOGRAPHER, as it did back on p. 12; i. e., it "floats off," weightless, and she--without ever actually leaving her chair--must "follow after," writing all the while, her every "recapture" of the volume seeming only to send it drifting off in a new direction, until finally she succeeds in "wrestling it down" on p. 37.)

Is stunned by the desertion. Grows silent in his turn.

Either cannot go on or, what comes to the same thing, imagines that he cannot. Ruefully notes: the tendency of all writing in her absence to become writing her absence; all imagining, so much imagining the worst.

Fp.74 All his hopes now ride on the Letter of Resignation which the Muse, in departing, had promised him: there, surely, were to be found . . . if not "the answers," some guidelines, at least? But the days wear on, and--nothing approaching a Letter of Resignation appears. Can he possibly have misunderstood? (The girl's exact words had been: "I am resigned, I'll write.") [NARRATIVE RESUMES:]

And then, one glare-struck afternoon,

(THE AUTHOR plucks from beneath THE STENOGRAPHER's chair the sketch-page which she crumpled and tossed away on p. 33 .

In what looks like a countermove, THE STENOGRAPHER, having finally gained control of the "floating" notebook, draws it in to her breast, as if seeking at once to anchor and conceal it.)

a discarded page lying below what had once been her place first struck his gaze; which, no sooner did he recognize as being from the Muse's notebook than he thought: "it has lain with me all this while!"--never for a moment doubting that here at last was the promised missive, or at least some crumpled effort at such a thing.

(THE AUTHOR smooths out and examines the retrieved sketch-page.)

Fp.75 And, unfolded, it did indeed prove to be a letter of some kind--albeit lacking in all salutation or address--which read as follows:

(THE AUTHOR continues to peruse the uncrumpled sketch-page as he dictates the following, so that he appears to be reading what he dictates off the page he holds.)

As if still protesting THE AUTHOR's appropriation of her material, THE STENOGRAPHER pays no heed to his dictation but, rather, goes on clutching her notebook stubbornly to her breast.)

"No doubt you believe yourself entitled to an explanation. But have you not often enough (in jest, to be sure!) hailed me your newfound Muse; and surely it is the Muse's part to offer, not explanations, but--"

(only now observing that THE STENOGRAPHER is no longer setting down his words:)

Friend to my voice, faithful old reel-to-reel, spinning on endlessly without care or comment--say, where are you now?

(looks about stage)

Actually, she's still got to be around here somewhere

Fp.76

(Taking the hint, THE STENOGRAPHER turns over a fresh leaf and resumes writing. But from here on, it is more as if she is making notes on, rather than taking notes from, THE AUTHOR.)

THE AUTHOR speaks the two phrases before the parentheses, below, as if "finding his place" on the crumpled sketch-page.)

" . . . entitled to an explanation . . . hailed me your newfound Muse . . . " (Letter resumes:) "But surely it is the Muse's part to offer, not explanations, but stories. If, then, I must leave you, let me leave you with a tale." Whereupon followed a brief account of the Great Disuse, the fall into "self-absorption" and the Eternal Notebook,

and the Sister Art's recent visit that changed everything;
 and concluding: "Though not unmindful of counterclaims,
 I have, at length, determined that my place is at their side--or,
 rather, at their ear--my poor 'dizzy rambler,' among whom
 I am now returned, and to whom I may hope to bring--but
 it is for them to say what I bring them. Wishing you
 all possible success in future ventures--ventures in which
 it grieves me that I shall play no part, I remain, Sir,

Yours,

Autohymnia

Muse of Self-Absorption"

(Still seeming to take notes on rather than
from him, THE STENOGRAPHER rises and begins
 slowly to circle THE AUTHOR, observing him
 from various angles and setting down one note
 per new position, until, by p. 40, she is
 almost on top of him.)

Of this parable--for a parable of some sort he never doubted
 it to be--our "maker" could make but little: perhaps something
 to do with every poem being in the way of a "letter of
 resignation" from the Muse. Or maybe it was all the girl's
 roundabout way of confessing she was in love with him.

(She was, of course, in love with writing; but the love-interest
 never had figured among this singer's strengths, as must be **clear**.)

Now if the recipient of these reflections appears
 slow to grasp what to you or me, reading over his shoulder,
 seems plain enough--namely, that in them he reads
 the proof of his abandonment by the Muse all over again--

Fp. 79

--please to remember that nothing in his prior experience of muses could have led him to recognize this tight-lipped pen-pusher as one (her decamped predecessor had scarcely ever so much as come up for air). And, of course, the girl herself--set as her sights now were on bigger things--had always hitherto kept her background her secret.

But of Muses it has been well and truly said:

by their absences ye shall know them; and as the unwritten days heaped round, the truth grew too plain to ignore.

Fp. 80

His goddess flown, nothing came in; nothing went out. The pen hung becalmed over the page. The Herakleian pile broke off in air, always that labor shy; Cassandra's dark chant--that erstwhile "New Departure" (into misunderstanding, as it had proved)--flared and went out; and the contriver of them both once more knew himself for "the Poet Whose Muse Had Departed," this time for good.

Fp. 81

(THE AUTHOR looks up and sees THE STENOGRAPHER almost on top of him. She is making a note. To STENOGRAPHER:)

Suppose we leave off there, it's about as far as, realistically, one might--

(He notices that THE STENOGRAPHER is still writing.)

Uh . . . might one--?

(He indicates that he wants to examine her notebook. She opens her mouth to speak, thinks better of it, closes her mouth and thrusts the notebook out toward him with her rigid arm, averting her face from her own gesture as she makes it.

He rips out and inspects the page she has been writing on since p.38⁴, occasionally juxtaposing it with the crumpled page he earlier (p.37) retrieved from beneath her chair and consulted while dictating the "Letter of Resignation" on pp.38 - 39..)

Fp.82

But . . . this isn't at all as I-- Is this what I--?

(points to different parts of the page)

Here . . . and that . . . and those It would seem to represent a departure, at every turn, from all one-- I mean, last time I looked, we were still stumbling on vaguely in tandem with-- Well, or at least in the same general universe as-- But . . .

(points to page)

look at this: whole regions of the material simply dropped from view, and in their place--

(musing)

In their place . . .

(to STENOGRAPHER)

Bring the Backfile in here! (You'll find it lying open to my last foray.) I need you to dredge me up--I don't know, Muse-lore, dithyramb-dope, pre-draft drafts--anything that might give a clearer idea where one was headed with this material. I want it all out on the table before you disappear for the day. Do you think you can manage so much, at least, without--?

(She makes a note and starts to exit.)

1

4. For what THE STENOGRAPHER has written here, see BACKFILE, Document III. See also PREFACE, Desperate Choice 3, pp. vi - X.

Fp.83

Remember: everything!--or, everything that escaped your predecessor's hand. I expect you to go through it all!

(THE STENOGRAPHER makes a final note, squints into The Glare, modifies the note, starts to leave, remembers her purse, returns and takes the purse from the table (but overlooks the compact just next to it) and exits.

THE AUTHOR waits to be sure she is really gone, then makes a beeline for the teetering "Watts Tower" of manuscript-files, up-center. Brusquely, he knocks away file after file until beneath it all there stands revealed a huge, ancient reel-to-reel tape recorder precariously balanced on a more compacted inner pile of manuscript-folders. He blows the dust off the recorder, grabs its microphone, pushes "record," and speaks into the microphone:)

Fp.84

Part Last/Section Last/Roman Numeral Last.

So all might have ended, but for a chance encounter which now at last I sense the power is in me to--

(He notices that he still has in his hands the two sheets from THE STENOGRAPHER's notebook, glances at each, claps them together, and stuffs them into his pocket.)

--which I shall now relate.

From this time forth the poet shuns human haunts. Not, be it said, from any aversion to his kind; it is only that, unable to write himself, the prospect of writing has grown unbearable to him--all those sentences going effortlessly forward!--and these days everyone is a writer. To hold at bay the spectacle of a pen in act, he keeps him far from anything approaching a lettered place. Cafés, printshops, bibliothecas--all vanish off the map of his unwritten and unwritable world.

Fp.85

And then one day, swerving into an alley to blot from view some letter-shaped cloud-wisps overhead, he is suddenly face-to-face with the transaction dreaded as none. There, before the stall of a professional letter-writer, a black-shawled old woman paces forth and back, confiding the vehemencies of her unlettered heart to a hand that skips and runs. Now, if from all occasions of writing a fugitive, of none more than any such outpouring to a hand does he go in fear; for how should such fail to be reminiscent of, how not evoke--? Well, it is the encounter he must ever flee; has, indeed, already turned to flee, when--

Figure of the Poet, Herakles, you, penning,
For a final toil, the tale of every other
 —and there it was: the long-sought finish to his Hercules poem (Labor Last: the Venturer writes his ventures) suddenly present to thought. Only, how--? "Who spoke me there?" he cries, and wheels round, half-expecting to have before him the well-known-- But before him is none but the patroness of the letter-scribe, upon whom, accordingly, he now only first casts Peers there not forth, from out that firm-drawn shawl, the features of his decamped (well, of one or the other of his decamped . . . ?) --but drops it as soon. For, whatever the exact purport of the urgent old lady's outpourings in that moment--actually,

Fp. 86

Fp. 87

88 something to the tune of "Child! When last so much as
 a line from your hand?"--it is in a tongue unknown
to the bard that the fierce old mother drives forward
 the hand of her letter-scribe, a hand that suddenly
 strikes the singer as in flight down unknown courses
 before the unmeaning cries. Whereupon--

Figure of the Poet, you, Cassandra, trembling

At a vision by few marked, by fewer heeded.

It wanted but this: a destination, as well, for the
 "New Departure"--Cassandra, no less than Hercules, grasped
 as a figure of the poet grasping her; and neither one
 nor the other splendor borne upon tongue, but each, somehow,
given in the hand of this common scrivener, working along
 other lines.

89 But now a wild hope dawns: If from such a hand,
from what hand not? The singer burns to make trial
 of the first scribbling to present; and bang out of the alley,
 he happens upon: a tout marking up a scratch sheet,
 a kid chalking putdowns on a gate, and, of course, always,
 those eluded letter-forms in the clouds. And, at sight of each,
 on the verse comes! So, then, it was true! Well might there
 be--little enough to say: other views of writing
 that conferred writing, but, scarcely, such a thing
 as one that did not. By nothing was that scene in the Allée
 distinguished save as the occasion when one woke to the power

of every such scene. Nor never let me hear of any "miracles" by the window-seat: All that pother of coming to look on other writing as "one's own, but, somehow, inexplicably, confoundedly . . . "--one had but to look on other writing; set oneself down before the deed to find oneself setting down indeed: bring me where a scribbler muses, and you have brought the scribbler his muse.

Fp.91 As fiercely as erst he shunned, now he seeks-- (Start again.)

He now plunged as never before into the world of his time, "all the various scene" (as he was wont to name it) "of writing." He sought out public meetings for the minute-taking; monastic scriptoria for the copying-fair--in short, wherever a sign was to be given, or a mark made, he made one. Not since that hour in the Allée, when he fashioned to trembling, had he felt himself so "gone" in the human material. He was a writer, no act of human inscription was alien to him--

(THE STENOGRAPHER's brown tortoiseshell compact, which she has left behind on the table, catches THE AUTHOR's eye. He takes it in his hand, snaps it open, and lifts it into the light.)

--leastways, not till the hour it dawned on him (and O, Friend, Fp.92 how should there not have struck such an hour?): "If I everywhere look out on my own, why look out at all?" One had but, he **reflected**, to hold the mirror up to writing.

Whereupon, propping up a small votive mirror, forgotten of the Muse, just north of his writing hand, he now proceeds to--

(Unseen by THE AUTHOR, THE STENOGRAPHER appears upstage, dressed for travel. She carries what at first glance looks like a small suitcase but on closer inspection proves to be a portable document-file.)

Suddenly, THE AUTHOR switches off the tape recorder, snaps the compact shut, and replaces it on the table.)

No. Stop at the mirror.

(He switches the tape recorder back on to "record.")

Ff 93 In a word, he had learned--if not precisely how to do without The Muse of Self-Absorption, at least: to hear her voice everywhere; correction, make that: to see her hand in everything.

(Still unglimped by THE AUTHOR, THE STENOGRAPHER sets down her file/bag.)

Let her be hence, she was nigh. Let her fall mute, she whispered him out of every act of writing he had in view. And knowing himself thus addressed on every hand, it grew so he could trace, in the courses of the writing that spoke him, the figure of the departed one; could hail, in writing itself, a Muse to writing, which finds in itself-- --which finds itself to be--all that it needs to write on.

Fp. 94 Now all this may strike you as a common enough outcome to the tale of Poet and Muse; but know that, in the career of this singer, it marked an epoch.

1

Fp.95 For it is in his notebook-musings upon these themes that we catch the first glimmers of his vast dramatic dithyramb,

(blocks out title in the air)

Who Sings Not the Muse?, the work which posterity has always been pleased to recognize as the stepping-off point to all his subsequent achievement, but which his subject herself, could these earliest gleams have found her, might be forgiven for viewing more in the light of . . . well, if not precisely "battle offered," shall we say: a parting shot. To which, let the following extracts testify.

(As on earlier occasions, he produces the notebook from his pocket--but then simply remains staring at it, held out closed at arm's length, as he dictates into the microphone:)

Musings from a Notebook, Final Series, 9-point

Radiant Bold Condensed, flush right:

Fp.97 I lift my hand from off the
trembling strings. You write it.
I bring my plectrum down along
the lyre. You write it.
I plain out themes in many
a well-tuned strain. You write me.
You write: "a trembling hand
above the lyre." I tremble.

Poet and Muse--deem these no more
 than turns in the game played out
 between writing and sorrow,
 themselves, perhaps, no more
 than turns in a game

Fp. 98

But now inevitably comes the
 moment when there wants saying
 what none is present to speak.
 To write the voice that speaks
 in that crisis, that speaks for
 that crisis, whose speaking is
 that crisis. To write the haggle
 between silence and song to be
 the story of that crisis.

Fp. 99

So that, whether, at the last,
 you then wrote at my dictates
 or I only now speak in your writing,
 it will finally have been here,
 in writing, that I only first . . .
 that you even now . . . that
 you . . . that I . . .

Fp. 100

(stuffs notebook into his pocket)

Such the earliest soundings of Who Sings Not the Muse,

wherein admirers of the accomplished chant will recognize some one or other of its grandest moments in crudest form.

But the great poem lay far in the future. For now, nearer joys beckoned; and even as he confided these new beginnings to his notebook, the poet found his thoughts stray continually to the hour, now not far off, when Hercules: The Labor of the Labors and Cassandra Flares Out, bound as one, should smile back at him from bookshop windows, and all hail a new voice on the scene.

(THE AUTHOR goes over to the tape recorder, switches it off, turns--and only now catches sight of the returned STENOGRAPHER, upstage.)

You? I imagined you long since--

(THE STENOGRAPHER stoops down and starts to draw forth some brightly colored sheets of paper from her bag/file.)

Of course: your embassy to the Backfile. But--see!

In your absence the song is sung! Listen!

(She lets the sheets of paper drop back into the bag/file.)

THE AUTHOR, meanwhile, has pressed "rewind" on the recorder and speaks above the gibber of the rewinding tape.)

Oh, a rickety device, I grant you, and one by me long since consigned to a place-- And yet:

(seeming to savor the "rewind" noise)

For a voice on its own, self-conferred and self-conferring, imposing itself by sheer force of self-imposition on all one most--

Fp.102 Well, I wonder whether my whole future course may not lie along just such lines as-- You and I . . . could use a break.

By which understand no reflection upon your efforts:

these, at another time, under other skies

But as things stand, you have come to me to seem increasingly to represent-- Well, to the point where it becomes a real question what exactly you may be said to bring to the work.

Fp.103 (As if by way of reply, THE STENOGRAPHER reaches into her bag/file and this time draws fully forth a sheaf of papers resembling those THE AUTHOR dictated from earlier (see p. 8). Only these, instead of being different shades of grey, are dyed red, yellow and orange--the spectrum of The Glare.

She thrusts one of these pages⁵ out at THE AUTHOR, who peruses it without taking it from her hand.)

Fp.104 Ah. The "wellsprings"--and still with the glare of origins upon them--as if, to origins, either much were owing or much owed; as if, of origins, it had not long since ceased to be a question. Did I post you there,

(gestures toward the papers in her hand)

it was only that I might think in your absence what none can think with you by! And if, now, with results on a scale such as absolutely to beggar-- . . . well, one cannot but reflect: to what more sustained achievement might an absence still more sustained--?

(The tape-rewind clicks loudly off.

THE AUTHOR removes the reel from the recorder, lifts it into the light, scrutinizes it--and then suddenly lets the hand holding the reel drop to his side.)

[Fp.103] 5. For the text of this page, see BACKFILE, Document IV. See also PREFACE, Desperate Choice 3, pp. vi - X.

First, though, let's see what it all looks like on paper.

(thrusters the tape out toward THE STENOGRAPHER, who instinctively takes it.)

Fp.105

I want from you a transcript of the entire reel--minus, please, all the little blots and disfigurements in which your work is known to abound. Mark, now: the entire reel, on my desk, before you evanesce into this afternoon of glare.

Fp.106

(THE AUTHOR exits.)

THE STENOGRAPHER drops the reel onto the recorder, pushes "play," returns to her chair, arranges on her lap the sheaf of red, yellow and orange papers that she earlier offered THE AUTHOR, and sits with pen poised.

Out of the recorder comes a woman's voice⁶, vocalizing a wordless song on the syllable "Ah."

The tape plays. THE STENOGRAPHER writes down (or perhaps, writes to) the recorded song.

As she works, the offstage Glare grows steadily brighter.

For a time, THE STENOGRAPHER keeps on writing with The Glare in her eyes.

Fp.107

At last, though, the dazzle is such that she can scarcely see. In this state of near-blindness, her hand slips off the notesheaf to the right, plunging her whole upper body sharply downward "over the side" of the page she has been working on.

At the same moment, the notesheaf itself--as if "set free" by this mishap--begins to "drift away" from her, like a weightless object in space, as it did back on pp. 12 and 36. In contrast with those earlier occasions, however, this time THE STENOGRAPHER's pursuit is not confined to her chair. As the pages she holds "float away," she rises and sets out after them, catches up, and brings the point of the pen in her hand down onto the topmost page of the sheaf, to anchor it.

6. See PREFACE, Desperate Choice 2, pp. v - vi.

At the first touch of her pen, however, the sheaf "floats off" in a new direction.

Once more she follows after, and once more the first touch of her pen sends the paper-sheaf "floating off" at yet another angle.

Fp.108

With several further repetitions, this sequence of movements--notesheaf floats off; STENOGRAPHER goes after it; touch of STENOGRAPHER's pen sends sheaf floating off anew--begins to seem dance-like, choreographed, an inscribing of gestural patterns upon the space of the stage; but at no point is THE STENOGRAPHER trying to do anything more than recapture her "escaping" materials and get back to work.

She does finally recapture them--but in so doing, is brought facing around directly into The Glare, which, having continued to grow brighter all through her "dance," now blinds her.

She sets down the notesheaf and pen on her chair, switches off the tape recorder, and walks straight offstage into the light.

Freed, briefly, of language, action and human presence, the intensely lit stage seems to breathe for a moment.

Fp.109

Then a clatter is heard offstage and The Glare breaks up into a wild tumble of light and shadows.

THE STENOGRAPHER re-enters, carrying a small tripod-based studio lamp, whose swaying, as she walks, has apparently produced the tumbling light-and-shadow pattern, although the lamp itself seems far too small to have been, all this while, the source of the offstage Glare.

She sets down the lamp behind her chair, takes up notesheaf and pen, seats herself facing away from the audience toward the tape recorder, and pushes "play." Again, as on p.51, a woman's voice vocalizing a wordless song on the syllable "Ah" is heard.

By the work-light now cast over her shoulder by the studio lamp, THE STENOGRAPHER resumes writing down, or writing to, the unworded song.⁷⁾

END

7. For what THE STENOGRAPHER writes here, see BACKFILE, Document V. See also PREFACE, Desperate Choice 3, pp.vi-X, especially p.viii, note**.

BACKFILE

(Selected)

F.112

DOCUMENT I (see p.21)

Words of another, borne on other tongue.

Yet even insofar as one no more than put down the other, wrote the other--stands there not forth, even from such labors of pure transcription, a writing already so far beyond the merely transcriptive as to appear--

No! Flee the scene!

And how if one "flee the scene" of transcription by reconceiving it as a scene of writing? How if, at the last, the scene of writing should prove no more than the scene of transcription newly imagined, freshly transcribed?

L

Fp.113

DOCUMENT II (see p.28)

Overtones to Impart
(for eventual inclusion)

Theatre dreams of persuading writing to come forth and be for the event--be utterance, be action! Yet it is only by abiding, musingly, within itself that writing can be an event for theatre. What is theatre but the spectacle of writing keeping dramatically to itself?

Writing refuses itself to theatre, and theatre goes on to stage the refusal--is, indeed, nought else but the staging of this refusal.

Writing is a Muse that would have absolutely nothing to say to theatre, did not theatre draw endless inspiration from the spectacle of a Muse with nothing to say to it.

Fp.114

Theatre is a hastily arranged meeting between the Muses of Dithyramb and Scenography, over the course of which it becomes less and less clear to each girl why she should ever have consented to the rendezvous. To this becoming-less-and-less-clear we customarily give the name of "dramatic action."

[Fp. 114]

Theatre will not be dictated to by writing,
but may come to find, in the scene of dictation
it forgoes, the text it desires.

Fp.115

DOCUMENT III (see p.41)

Sister--

Yes, it is even as you foresaw: he elaborates a tale which is, in all essentials, that of your break with him; and the farther from this merely personal focus he seeks to range, the more surely does the personal character of the material assert itself.

For example: can one imagine a reader so simple as not to have grasped from the first that his two bards, Allée-Haunter and Dithyrambist, are one; that he is one with both of them; and that from behind the masks of "Hercules" and "Cassandra" peep forth--

Fp.116

But why belabor the obvious? He gives himself away at every turn, the only real mystery being this strange willingness he displays to unfurl before me--of your party and, for aught he knows, of your sending--a roman to which he cannot but be aware I hold the clef.

For, after all, it is not as if he possessed no nearer or surer means of transcription: Did I not myself, one glare-struck afternoon, having by chance roused my tight-coiled predecessor from her lair, proceed, in ever-gentlest tones, to lay down--? What, then, prevents--it is a question on which I find my thoughts more and more running--why on earth does he not simply "tell it to the machine"?

For this odd reluctance to avail oneself of a mechanism lying thus near at hand, I can conceive two explanations.

Fp.117

It may be simply that he requires, at whatever cost, a witness, an auditor, a second, such as that rickety device, traversed by all their voices, could never-- (I refer, of course, to that ancient reel-to-reel recorder of his, by me unearthed, and not, as might at first be carelessly supposed, to [ILLEG.] .)

Or possibly the answer is to be sought in the following fragment, dictated by him some while since for eventual inclusion, and subsequently forgotten:

"As in watching a particularly fine historical film, one may feel that it hews faithfully to every contour of the world it would depict, save in possessing such means of depiction (no steadicam trawled the hedgepaths of Edwardian Sussex); whereas the world one seeks always to record is precisely that which contains no mechanism for representing such a thing as itself . . . "

Fp.118

The explanatory power of these jottings, now I have transcribed them, seems less.

Yet even if here were the key--

[MS breaks off]

DOCUMENT IV (see p.50)

"Aux Sources du Poème"

[Dramaturgical Page]

I once asked the Muse, and she

Replied:

You will find it in the end.

Hölderlin, "I once asked the Muse"

[The Muses] bade me sing . . . of themselves

both first and last.

Hesiod, Theogony

The Eighth, Polyhimnia It was her invention that the musicians add to the verses that they sing hands and fingers, which spake more than tongue; an expressive silence; a language without words; in short, gesture and action.

Andrew Tooke, The Pantheon

Writing is an act of silence, allowing itself to be read in its entirety.

Edmond Jabès, The Book of Shares

Authentic saying [is] simply to be silent about silence.

Martin Heidegger, "On the Way
to Language"

Woman cannot speak because her silence, her absence
from, or eccentricity vis-à-vis, phallogocentric
discourse, allows for the edifice of male discursivity.

Rosi Braidotti, "Envy"

Writing on woman should be less writing on woman than
writing from, or on the basis of, what comes to me
from a feminine place.

Jacques Derrida, "Conference"

Saturday, December 3, 1988

In the Frick courtyard, a young woman over the way,
making notes. And for a moment, "to write"
presents itself as to write her writing.

An English arrangement of a French piece is
a pretty woman with her back turned.

Henry James, The Tragic Muse

In psychoanalysis, a patient comes to the analyst with
a story to tell. But the story is incoherent, full of

gaps, chronological reversals, mistaken causal relations Together, analyst and analysand must attempt to construct the better story The very presence of the analyst, even when he doesn't speak, creates "the dimension of dialogue" between the two persons in presence, makes the narrative discourse to be constructed a dialogic creation.

Peter Brooks, "The Proffered Word"

Fp.122 . . . the writing couple whose sustained encounter takes place on the grounds of a catastrophe.

Avital Ronell, Dictations

URANIA. I feed on sweet contentment of my thought,
And please my selfe with mine owne selfe-delight.

Spenser, The Teares of the Muses

PAROLLES. Simply the thing I am
Shall make me live.

Shakespeare, All's Well That Ends Well

Fr.123

DOCUMENT V (see p. 52)

THE UNWORDED SONG

$\text{♩} = 80$
4/4 *p*

WOMAN'S VOICE: Ah

cresc.

f *p*

pp

cresc. *pp*