Edmond Jabès and the “Writer’s Mission”: An Introduction

Steven Jaron
In 1942, as Germany and Italy advanced onto North Africa, the poet Edmond Jabès briefly left Egypt for Mandate Palestine. From as early as 1933, Jabès had engaged in anti-Fascist activities aimed at opposing the rise of National Socialism, a position that jeopardized his safety with the attempted occupation of German Field Marshal Erwin Rommel. While in Jerusalem, he wrote of an existential precariousness with greater self-awareness than any categorical political position:

I’m looking for
a man I don’t know,
who’s never been more myself
than since I started to look for him.¹

The poem, “Song of the Stranger,” first included in Chansons pour le repas de l’ogre [Songs for the Meal of the Ogre] (1947), anticipates themes of questioning oneself and one’s society prominent in Jabès’s works following his forced departure from Egypt in June 1957, in which the fate of the Jew, in his exile, is explored.

Edmond Jabès was born in Cairo in 1912 to a well-off, French-speaking Jewish family. He married in 1935 and had two daughters, and he died in Paris in 1991. Jabès began writing in his late teens and, with his older brother, founded a short-lived Egyptian-French cultural journal, L’Anthologie mensuelle [The Monthly Anthology], later renamed L’Alliance universelle [The Universal Alliance], in which his first poems appeared. His poems from this time first evince his commitment to narrow the cultural divide between what he saw as a distant cultural centre and his provincial home. Much of his earliest poetry, dating from the 1930s and published in both Egypt and France, is playful and marked by a neo-Romantic aesthetic. His poetry dating from the Second World War and afterwards shows the traces of a Surrealist style, although Jabès, mistrusting group affiliations, dissociated himself from the movement. In the late 1940s, he

founded with Georges Henein the imprint, *La part du sable* [*The Sand’s Share*] and, on his own in the mid-1950s, *Le chemin des sources* [*The Sources’ Path*]. During this time, Jabès was also active with the *Groupement des Amitiés françaises* [Association for French Friendship], a cultural organization that hosted many literary and cultural evenings with French writers visiting Cairo.

Before beginning his long-term project, *Le Livre des Questions* [*The Book of Questions*] (1963–1973), Jabès marked the end of his Egyptian years by gathering his poems into *Je bâtis ma demeure, poèmes 1943–1957* [*I Build My Dwelling, poems 1943–1957*] (1959). The volume included a preface by the critic Gabriel Bounoure, whose friendship sustained Jabès through the perplexing years around his settling in France. The title’s defiant, affirmative tone belies the sense of dispossession aroused by war and expulsion: the *dwelling* was one that would be but built *in words* and, as such, impervious to any physical threat or attack.

Edmond Jabès was hopeful upon moving to France, a country he knew well through his education and travels. Walking through the Odéon neighbourhood one night, however, he came across some graffiti illuminated by a car’s headlights, the first line in French and the second, oddly, in English:

*MORT AUX JUIFS*

JEWS GO HOME¹

He was bewildered, devastated. What troubled him more than the abhorrent call of death to the Jews and the exhortation to return to a country whose government had driven him out, was that the graffiti appeared to have been there for some time. No one had thought it sufficiently important to remove it. The neighbourhood’s inhabitants became tacitly complicit in the


graffiti’s author’s act. It was at this point that Jabès began work on *The Book of Questions*, his fragmentary poem-novel in which two adolescent survivors of Nazi killing centres, Sarah Schwall and Yukel Sefari, work through their loss against the backdrop of the reflections of a vast colloquy of rabbis. Jacques Derrida wrote of it:

> If absence is the soul of the question, if separation may only arise in the rupture of God—with God—, if the infinite distance of the Other may only be respected in the sands of a book in which wandering and the mirage are still possible, then *The Book of Questions* is at once the interminable song of absence and a book on the book.4

The first volume of *The Book of Questions* alludes to what Jabès called the “writer’s mission”: “He receives it from the word, which bears his suffering and hope in it. He examines the words that examine him, he accompanies the words that accompany him.”5 A moral duty to question and further to be put into question was part and parcel of the Jew’s and the writer's unending task and burden: “...the difficulty of being a Jew...merges with the difficulty of writing; for Judaism and writing are but the same waiting, the same hope, the same wearing down.”6

This fundamental problem was further explored twenty years later in “Judaïsme et écriture” [Judaism and Writing], Edmond Jabès’s inaugural speech for the 1983–1984 course of study, delivered on November 30, 1983 at the Institut Universitaire d’Études Juives in Paris.7 Jabès, however, was nearly prevented from giving it. The then Israeli ambassador, Ovadia Soffer, stood at the podium and, without acknowledging him, spoke before

him. The editors of the journal in which the speech appeared, *L’Écrit du temps*, summarized the events that disturbed all present:

To an audience who had come to listen to an author whose entire oeuvre is a meditation on writing’s relationship to Judaism, there was an effort that evening to impose a slant aiming at assigning a highly particular political and territorial framework to Judaism. An entirely inappropriate perspective, one would have thought, in this meeting place and in relation to the names it bears.⁸

Unreservedly engaging in polemics was uncharacteristic of Edmond Jabès, save for when others, particularly those unable to defend themselves, were concerned.⁹ Nevertheless, the editors noted that in his speech Jabès had reflected on the “splits” or “rents” making up Judaism, as well as the splits between those discussing Judaism. He was conscious of the divisions and contradictions intrinsic to any group identity, even when there was an attempt to downplay or simply ignore them.

Parts of “Judaism and Writing” were rewritten and incorporated into Edmond Jabès’s 1985 book, *Le Parcours [The Journey]*. This later version of “Judaism and Writing” appeared in English in *Midrash and Literature*, an anthology of modern texts on Jewish biblical exegesis. The volume’s editors described Jabès’s text, along with Jacques Derrida’s commentary on Paul Celan, “Shibboleth,” as “latter-day midrashim…the open word, the open door, through which we are always just passing.”¹⁰

The reader of *The Journey* will not find any direct reference to the circumstances of the address of November 30, 1983. The introductory statement, for example, is removed. The book’s preliminary section nevertheless does allude to it, and in terms that demonstrate Edmond Jabès’s ceaseless commitment to

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⁹ See, for example, Jabès’s letter of January 16, 1988 to Catherine David defending Paul Celan during the Heidegger and Nazism controversy, in *Europe: revue littéraire mensuelle*, no. 954 (October 2008), 310–311.
what he understood as the writer’s mission:

These pages of reflections, of persistent interrogations—reflecting and questioning being, perhaps, useful merely for throwing to the mercy of thought, a reflection—are but leaves reserved for a book on hold within the book itself in which certainty has, as its adversary, certainty; in which, destitute, Jew and writer, through their common submission to the text, venture in search of their truth.\footnote{Edmond Jabès, \textit{Le Parcours} (Paris: Gallimard, 1985), 15.}

**Bibliography**


Translator’s Introduction to

*Judaïsme et écriture*

Philippe Mesly
Composed after the publication of his larger literary cycles, “Judaïsme et écriture” [Judaism and Writing] both summarizes and reflects upon the meditative questioning characteristic of Jabès’s work in connection with his personal relationship to these two themes. With typical candor and self-examination, Jabès begins this lecture with an account of his process composing it. This account leads to his announcement of the main theme that guides his lecture and opens the way for researchers to follow.

“Both Judaism and writing,” he writes, “seem to me to participate in a single opening: the openness to a speech that we are called to live in its totality” (see below, 62). This opening, by virtue of opening onto something, is interpretation. It is the attempt to bridge the gap that separates the self from the other—even if that other is a part of oneself—which Jabès views as a lifelong undertaking. Jabès opens a view of Jewish existence as an interpretive process and of interpretation as ontologically creative. Constantly, he points to the everyday practice of interpretation and warns of the dangers of stagnation. Principal in this notion is the creative function of reading and the perpetual nature of the pursuit.

“Judaism and Writing” is both an attempt to describe the interpretive framework that guides his work and a case study in its application. His lecture centres on “the [key] that, having opened the greatest number of doors, had in the process of opening them become, an opening itself” (62). He turns the common emphasis on interpretation that he finds in writing and in Judaism on itself. This reflexivity belies one of the core elements in the understanding of interpretation that Jabès puts forth, namely, that interpretation is a necessarily unceasing process. An individual act of interpretation can only be a stage along the way, which latter must be critiqued by its own conclusions. Jabès writes:

to embrace the universe of a word is, on one hand, to apprehend it in the constant growth to which it is compelled by the terms that inhabit it and, on the other hand, to appreciate, relative to the new dimensions of the word, the progress of our reading; for reading is, perhaps, nothing but the substitution of one term for all those that have decrypted it (64).
Reading, in other words, is an exercise in mapping a shifting landscape of meanings—a desert. Jabès is not insensitive to the dangers of dogmatically holding onto one interpretation, having witnessed its effects both globally and personally.

Jabès often mentions the practicality of this interpretive process, specifically that it is lived out daily. And while he does give examples of this mode of interpretation, they remain, along with his discussion of the practice itself, abstract. This is especially true of a concept as frequent in his work as it is elusive: the Book. The concept of the Book answers the question, though it raises many more, as to what exactly is to be interpreted. But if it is to fulfill its role in Jabès’s work, the Book must remain unfixed and its meaning variable. The Book might be a specific discourse, a language, the infinite web of interlocked meanings that make up the human world, a culture, the perfect unity of meaning contained in or spoken by God, or perhaps, finally, just a book. Yet I am tempted to replace this notion with one equally elusive, yet more familiar: the Book is reality.

Reality, and not existence, not being, not truth, is what must always be retrieved and recreated. This is what it means to write, to recreate the Book by tracing one’s words over and from those of the Book. “Making the book, for a writer,” as Jabès notes, “is learning to read the book that is in the book” (68). Writing seeks to find reality even as it creates its own reality, by playing with the terms and silences offered in the world. Judaism is likewise defined by the Book, insofar as textuality is the mode through which the Jew communicates with God. So, in a discussion of the Shema prayer, Jabès writes: “The encounter with the text has replaced the encounter with God” (74). The text becomes, for Judaism, the highest reality. This leads again to the work of interpretation as manifest in interrogation. As he points out, “the question to Judaism is the question of the book; for how to formulate a question except by language?” (72) Both the writer and the Jew view reality in linguistic terms, and as such, existence for them is a process of reading.
It is because any one piece of writing is also only one reading of the Book that Jabès constantly returns to the negative space of works. The silences, margins, gaps, voids, Sabbaths, and deserts that occupy him are the sites of all that cannot be said, the indicators of all that was excluded to produce this particular object.

In writing this introduction, I am aware of all that I was unable to include. There are many connections and perspectives that remain occult, confined to the blank space that precedes even the question. If anything, I hope to have provided here a point of departure, an opening, from which the conversation must necessarily change, return, and begin all over again.

In closing, I would like to express my thanks to many people who’ve helped with this project. First, to Viviane Jabès-Crasson, Nimet Frascaria, and Steven Jaron for their enthusiasm and helpful suggestions. Second, to Julia, Olenka, the editors of the journal, and the anonymous translation reviewers for reading over the various versions and drafts of this introduction and the translation, and also for providing new words and new perspectives. Finally, to Carrie and Harry, with whom I began this project, in a different form and in a different place.
Edmond Jabès, who was born in Cairo in 1912 and died in Paris in 1991, was an Egyptian Jew who spoke and wrote in French. He is best known for his later works, such as the seven-volume The Book of Questions, and his for friendship and mutual fecundity with other prominent Jewish French intellectuals. In 1983 and to the inaugural assembly at the Institut Universitaire d’Études Juives, he delivered a lecture aptly titled “Judaism and Writing,” which weaves together personal reflections on his career with broader meditations on two significant themes of his work. The lecture serves as an excellent introduction to his life and work, since it gives a sense of his character and takes up topics that preoccupy his larger works, without delving into their more experimental style.

He uses his own position as a writer and a Jew to examine the relation between these two roles, or identities, finding larger metaphysical connections between the two. He begins by characterizing his lecture as an “opening,” taking this notion as characteristic of both Judaism and writing. This leads to a discussion of the ways that text is central to both. Refusing to make a single, coherent claim, he broaches this conversation by following and dropping different threads as they emerge, letting his own poetic meditations lead his thinking. In the process of examining the relation of judaism and writing to one another and to a recurrent concept he labels the “the Book,” he deliberates on identity, the desert, revelation, representation, time, and the law.
In response to the request made to me by the Membres du Conseil Scientifique of the Institut Universitaire d’Études Juives to deliver the inaugural lecture, my immediate impulse was to decline.

For a writer, whose only shelter is behind his writings, accepting such a charge is almost to attempt the impossible.

From the start, I was reminded of Emmanuel Lévinas’s admirable Talmudic lectures, so rich in lessons and reverberations, as well as other public lectures that I was fortunate enough to attend.

It is no doubt against this word, “lecture,” that I struggled. It couldn’t help but embarrass me; followed by the word ‘inaugural,’ it frightened me.

But little by little, the word “lecture” made itself less insistent, while the word ‘opening’ affirmed itself, each time, a little more.

I was, at the heart of this new institute, the one to whom was conferred the key that would open the first door: a door opening onto other doors that, in their turn, teachers, researchers, thinkers, each one the holder of an appropriate key, would gradually permit us to breach: successive doors of understanding regularly putting our acquired knowledge to the test.

I therefore persuaded myself that the first door had as its sole function to send us on to the others. The entrance door by which one must necessarily pass.

“What is expected of me,” I said to myself, “is simply to insert my key into the lock that has been reserved for me; once this is done, to turn it once or twice in the right direction, then to push open the hostile leaves of the door, now deprived of all resistance.”

But if my role suddenly appeared to me fairly well defined, I still had to determine which key I would use; for although I was being asked to open a door, I was left the task of finding the key all alone.

A la demande qui m’a été faite par les Membres du Conseil Scientifique de l’Institut Universitaire d’Études Juives, de prononcer la conférence inaugurale d’usage, mon immédiate réaction a été d’y répondre par la négative.

Pour un écrivain, ne pouvant s’abriter que derrière ses écrits, accepter pareille charge est presque une gageure.

D’emblée, me sont revenues à l’esprit les admirables leçons talmudiques d’Emmanuel Lévinas, si riches d’enseignement et de prolongements, ainsi que d’autres leçons publiques auxquelles il m’a été donné d’assister.

C’est, sans doute, contre le mot « leçon » que je butais. Il ne pouvait que m’embarrasser; suivi du mot « inaugurale », il m’effrayait.

Mais, peu à peu, le mot « leçon » se fit moins insistant, tandis que, de son côté, le mot « ouverture » s’affirmait, chaque fois, un peu plus.

J’étais, au sein de ce nouvel Institut, celui à qui l’on avait voulu confier la clé qui ouvrait la première porte: porte donnant sur d’autres qu’à leur tour, enseignants, chercheurs, penseurs, détenteurs chacun d’une clé appropriée, nous permettront, au fur et à mesure, de franchir: successives portes du savoir mettant quotidiennement à l’épreuve nos connaissances acquises.

Je me persuadais donc que la première porte avait pour seule fonction de nous renvoyer aux autres. Porte d’entrée par laquelle il fallait obligatoirement passer.

« Ce que l’on attend de moi—me disais-je—c’est tout simplement d’introduire ma clé dans la serrure qui m’a été réservée: ce geste accompli, de la tourner une ou deux fois dans le bon sens puis de pousser, devant moi, les deux battants hostiles, maintenant privés de toute résistance. »

Mais si mon rôle m’apparaissait, soudain, assez bien défini, restait à savoir de quelle clé je me servirais; car si on m’avait demandé d’ouvrir une porte, on me laissait le soin de trouver, tout seul, la clé.
The keys of which the writer makes use—quite the key ring—are those that have permitted him to enter into his books.

Of all the keys arranged before me, which would I employ?

I opted for the one that, having opened the greatest number of doors, had in the process of opening them become, an opening itself: as if the opening was itself a key; as if, finally, the opening, at a certain moment, assured passage for itself alone by opening onto itself.

What is to be opened, once open, opens. In this opening, in this series of openings, I am inscribed.

If I chose as the title of my intervention tonight Judaism and Writing, it is because both Judaism and writing seem to me to participate in a single opening: the openness to a speech that we are called to live in its totality.

The speech of a horizon-speech to which we are riveted since the first book: that book out of time that time, nonetheless, perpetuates without altering, perpetuating itself in it.

What is read is nothing other than what is written every day, by us, in the gaps of the book: gaps that are not its margins, but traces of words buried in the word; sign over sign that the gaze, dazzled by what these signs hide, whitens by excess of light; whitens like time, like hair, until it is transparent.

Thus the Jew leans over his book, knowing in advance that this book remains forever to be discovered in all its terms and its silences.

Les clés dont l’écrivain dispense—un vrai trousseau—sont celles qui lui ont permis d’entrer dans ses livres.

De toutes les clés rangées sous mes yeux, laquelle emploierai-je?

J’optais pour celle qui, ayant eu raison du plus grand nombre de portes, était, à force de les ouvrir, devenue, elle-même, ouverture: comme si l’ouverture était, elle aussi, une clé; comme si, enfin, l’ouverture, à un moment donné, assurait à elle seule le passage, en s’ouvrant à elle-même.

Ce qui est à ouvrir, une fois ouvert, ouvre. Dans cette ouverture, dans cette série d’ouvertures, je m’inscris.

Si j’ai choisi, pour titre de mon intervention de ce soir, Judaïsme et écriture, c’est parce que, tant le judaïsme que l’écriture me semblent participer d’une même ouverture: ouverture à une parole que nous sommes appelés à vivre dans sa totalité.

Parole d’une parole d’horizon à laquelle nous sommes rivés depuis le premier livre: ce livre hors du temps que le temps, cependant, sans l’altérer perpétue, se perpétuant soi-même, en lui.

Ce qui est lu n’est autre que ce qui s’écrit tous les jours, par nous, dans les manques du livre: manques qui ne sont pas ses marges, mais traces de mots ensevelis dans le mot; signe sur signe donc que le regard, ébloui par ce que ces signes cachent, blanchit par surcroît de lumière; blanchit comme le temps, le cheveu, jusqu’à la transparence.

Ainsi le juif se penche sur son livre, sachant d’avance que ce livre reste toujours à découvrir dans ses vocables et ses silences.
To read, in this case, would be, having reached the edge of its resemblance, to break, in the word, the barriers of our affiliations so as to render it intact to its initial and limpid purity.

Might God, as tangible proof of the voluntary effacement of His Name, have bequeathed to the Hebrew people a blank book? But how to read these words of whiteness if not through our words? But how to hear the silence of its pages if not through our silence?

Discovering, in the end, is creating.

Legibility has its limits.

We can only trust our eyes, our intelligence, in order to attempt to grasp all that is contained in the written; we can only approach the infinite of a speech that is to be read by the unbearable limits of a speech already read.

Such that it is always with an impossible speech that we collide and to which we sacrifice our own.

A word holds in a few signs, occupies the space of these signs. Inside, it is the size of the universe.

To embrace the universe of a word is, on one hand, to apprehend it in the constant growth to which it is compelled by the terms that inhabit it and, on the other hand, to appreciate, relative to the new dimensions of the word, the progress of our reading;

for reading is, perhaps, nothing but the substitution of one term for all those that have decrypted it.

This exemplary reading, the Jew has practiced for millennia.

Lire, dans ce cas, serait, venu à bout de sa ressemblance, briser, dans le mot, les barrières de nos appartenances afin de le rendre intact à son initiale et limpide pureté.

Dieu, comme preuve tangible de l’effacement volontaire de Son Nom, aurait-il légué, au peuple hébreu, un livre blanc?

Mais comment lire ces mots de blancheur sinon avec le cours de nos mots? Mais comment entendre le silence de ses pages sinon à travers notre silence?

Découvrir c’est, somme toute, créer.

La lisibilité a ses limites.

Nous ne pouvons faire confiance qu’à nos yeux, qu’à notre intelligence pour tenter de saisir tout ce qui est contenu dans l’écrit; nous ne pouvons aborder l’infini d’une parole à lire qu’à travers les insupportables limites d’une parole lue.

De sorte que c’est toujours à une impossible parole que nous nous heurtons et à laquelle nous sacrifions la nôtre.

Un mot tient dans quelques signes, occupe l’espace de ces signes. A l’intérieur, il a la taille de l’univers.

Embrasser l’univers d’un mot c’est, d’une part, l’appréhender dans le constant élargissement auquel le contraignent les vocables qui l’habitent et, d’autre part, apprécier, en fonction des nouvelles dimensions de ce mot, les progrès de la lecture que nous en avons faite;

car lire n’est, peut-être, que substituer à un vocable tous ceux qui l’ont décrypted.

Cette lecture exemplaire, le juif la pratique depuis des millénaires.
Leaning over a text that he must interrogate without respite because in it resides his truth, his interrogation occupies his entire life, not only because of all that it still has to teach him, but because of that very thing that, once learned, helps him to better formulate his next question.

The word outlives words by assuming the void that, disappearing, the latter have left in it.

It owes its magnitude to the failure of their attempt to circumscribe it.

Does the void resemble the void? They are differentiated one from the other, by the content of which they are the adequate, but hypothetical, space.

Could the totality fill the void?

What we designate by “the All” is but a part of the invisible totality—ungraspable—; one of its visible parts: the letter that the void uphold, as it carries the world.

The void is, thus, kingdom of Thought; advent of plenitude.

From this perspective, would the word God be the emptiest word of the vocabulary? Emptied so completely that the universe of man and the infinity of his soul could find there, at any moment, their place?

I am thinking, for example, of the transformations that the singing in the synagogue subjects this word to. The singer invokes God and, through the modulations that he draws from each of the letters of the divine Name, passing from sobs to glee, from revolt to recognition, we hear, in the gathering, our words silenced in that word which their silence fashions and which the psalmody restores to us.

Penché sur un texte qu’il lui faut interroger sans répit parce qu’en lui réside sa vérité, son interrogation a besoin de sa vie entière pour se développer non seulement à cause de tout ce qu’elle peut encore lui apprendre mais à cause de cela même qui, une fois appris, l’aide à mieux formuler sa prochaine question.

Le mot survit aux mots en assumant le vide, qu’en disparaissant, ceux-ci ont laissé en lui.

Il doit son ampleur à l’échec de leur tentative de le circonscrire.

Le vide ressemble-t-il au vide? Ils se différencient l’un et l’autre, par leur contenu dont ils sont l’espace adéquat mais hypothétique.

La totalité pourrait-elle combler le vide?

Ce que nous désignons par le « Tout » n’est qu’une partie de l’invisible totalité—insaisissable—; l’une de ses parties visibles: la lettre que le vide soutient, comme il porte le monde.

Le vide est, ainsi, royaume de la Pensée; avènement de la plénitude.

Dans cette perspective, le mot Dieu serait-il le mot le plus vide du vocabulaire? Vidé si complètement que l’univers de l’homme et l’infini de son âme y peuvent trouver, à tout moment, leur place?

Je songe, par exemple, aux transformations que le chant de la synagogue fait subir à ce mot. Le chantre invoque Dieu et, à travers les modulations qu’il tire de chacune des lettres du Nom divin, passant du sanglot à l’allégresse, de la révolte à la reconnaissanace, nous entendons, dans le recueillement, nos mots tus dans ce mot que leur silence façonne et que la psalmie nous restitue.
The song of resuscitated vowels, betraying the sealed underside of speech and speech seized to its beyond by way of this interior chant: sonority of something lived, of a covenant, of an infinity in the instant that evokes them.

Perhaps it falls to this song to express the unspeakable; to prolong the unspeakable of the spoken in its effacement; for nothing is ever effaced. We are effaced, to the extent that we efface, by that eternal effacement, as active as the instant that consumes us as it compels us to live it.

The meaning of the word is, perhaps, but opening to meaning.

The word ‘God’ does not have a meaning, nor several. It is meaning: the adventure of meaning and its collapse.

Referring myself to all this, I at one time advanced that Judaism and writing are but a single attempt, a single hope, a single usury.

The Jew, in the book, is himself book. The book, in the Jew, is, itself, Jewish speech; for the book, more than a confirmation, is, for him, the revelation of his Judaism.

Making the book, for a writer, is learning to read the book that is in the book: the book of his ambition, of his obsession.

That to which the Jew answers is, in the first place, his fidelity to the book which is but fidelity to himself.

In this perpetual one-on-one with the written, he recognizes himself: voice in the voice, song in the speech, in the name of a truth of which he is the frail and, yet, so robust tenant: at once oak and reed.

Chant des voyelles ressuscitées, trahissant l’envers scellé de la parole et parole saisie jusque dans son au-delà par le biais de ce chant intérieur: sonorité d’un vécu, d’une alliance, d’un infini dans l’instant qui les évoque.

Peut-être est-ce à ce chant qu’il appartient d’exprimer l’indicible; de prolonger l’indicible du dit dans son effacement; car on n’efface jamais rien. On est effacé, à mesure que l’on efface, par cet éternel effacement, aussi actif que l’instant qui nous consume en nous engageant à le vivre.

Le sens d’un mot n’est, peut-être, qu’ouverture au sens.

Le mot « Dieu » n’a pas un sens, ni plusieurs. Il est le sens: l’aventure du sens et son effondrement.

Me référant à tout cela, j’ai, une fois, avancé que le judaïsme et l’écriture ne sont qu’une même attente, un même espoir, une même usure.

Le juif, dans le livre, est, lui-même, livre. Le livre, dans le juif est, lui-même, paroles juives; car le livre, plus qu’une confirmation est, pour celui-ci la révélation de son judaïsme.

Faire le livre, pour un écrivain, c’est apprendre à lire le livre qui est dans le livre: livre de son ambition, de son obsession.

Ce à quoi répond le juif c’est, en premier lieu, de sa fidélité au livre qui n’est que fidélité à soi-même.

Dans ce perpétuel tête-à-tête avec l’écrit, il se reconnaît: voix dans la voix, chant dans le chant, parole dans la parole, au nom d’une vérité dont il est le frêle et, pourtant, si robuste tenant: à la fois, chêne et roseau.
His identity—like the writer, his—the Jew expects from the book. It is less to the coincidence of his birth that he owes his being Jewish than to the future that he forces himself to model down to the smallest details. There is his genius.

Judaism is a faith that is built not on faith alone, but in the test of the Jew's faith that the text makes it undergo indefinitely, on every word of this text that it assumes, putting it, in its turn, to the test.

Interminable questioning of which death is the term.

That is perhaps why the seventh day of the week, considered a day of rest, could equally be a day removed from the book; removed from the book but, no doubt, still in the book as immaculate space, as space between the lines. That day, the Jew is not in the words of the book but, following the example of the wanderer who, at the hour of high noon, seeks refuge beneath a tree, in their shadow.

The writer applies himself to discern the book that has already, without him knowing, mastered him. Its pages awake in him an anxiety from which he will never escape.

Being what one writes. Writing what one is. Such is the gambit.

The question that obsesses the Jew is this one: “What authorizes me to consider myself Jewish? In what sense are the things I say and do Jewish words and acts?”

Thus is formed in him, and is developed, a dual interrogation: that which is posed to doubt by his certainty, and that which to his certainty is posed by doubt.

And what if Judaism was but the becoming of this doubt filled with certainty?

But is it really doubt?—The necessity of weighing, each time, the pro and the contra, rather.

Son identité—comme l'écrivain, la sienne—le juif l'attend du livre. Aussi, c'est moins au hasard de sa naissance qu'il doit d'être juif qu'à l'avenir qu'il s'efforce de modeler jusque dans les moindres détails. Là est son génie.

Le judaïsme est une foi qui ne repose pas uniquement sur la foi mais, dans l'épreuve que lui fait subir indéfiniment le texte de sa foi, sur chaque mot de ce texte qu'il assume, en le mettant, à son tour, à l'épreuve.

Interminable questionnement dont la mort est le terme.

C'est, peut-être, pourquoi le septième jour de la semaine, considéré comme jour de repos, pourrait être également un jour retiré du livre; retiré du livre mais, sans doute, encore dans le livre comme espace immaculé, comme interligne. Ce jour-là, le juif n'est pas dans les mots du livre mais, à l'instar du promeneur qui, par temps de grand soleil, se réfugie sous un arbre, à l'ombre de ceux-ci.

L'écrivain s'applique à cerner le livre qui déjà, à son insu, l'avait maîtrisé. Ses pages révèlent en lui une angoisse à laquelle il n'échappera jamais.

Être ce que l'on écrit. Écrire ce que l'on est. Tel est l’enjeu.

La question qui obsède le juif est celle-ci: « Qu'est-ce qui m'autorise à me considérer juif? En quoi ce que je dis et fais sont-ils paroles et actes juifs? »

Ainsi se forme en lui et se développe une double interrogation: celle que pose, au doute, sa certitude et celle qu'à sa certitude pose le doute.

Et si le judaïsme n’ait que le devenir de ce doute empli de certitude?

Mais s'agit-il vraiment de doute?—De la nécessité de peser, chaque fois, le pour et le contre, plutôt.
Certainty being incapable of emerging except from this confrontation.

The ideal mean that drives the Jew to a deepening of his certainty; the latter confounding itself with that deepening.

The question to Judaism is the question of the book; for how to formulate a question except by language? The words of our interrogations confront the words of the responses that for its readers alone the book addresses.

All dialogue is dialogue of words. It gives existence to the universe and to man.

Issued from the book, questioning, for the Jew as for the writer, is primordial, and is, by consequence, a burning actuality; five thousand years old, for one; anchored in the future, for both;

for what is modernity without openness?—It is nothing but that.

Opening, for the Jew, was first that which the desert offered to the Speech of his God. An indispensable opening for such a Speech.

Without the desert, there would perhaps not have been, for lack of a space sufficient for its fulfillment, the Judaism which, passing through the Speech of God, passes necessarily through the book;

for, more than a barren region of sand, the desert is, above all, a desolate land of silence and of listening, where silence is intoxicated with all of its echoes, and listening, with all the sonorities captured in the heart of this silence; as death gets drunk on the sentiments of death and life, on the aerial lightness of life, flint and wind, sand and sky and nothing, nothing, nothing in between.

Nothing, if not the outpouring of an authoritative Speech that is collected by a wise man.

La certitude ne pouvant naître que de cette confrontation.

Moyen idéal qui conduit le juif à un approfondissement de sa certitude; celle-ci se confondant avec cette approfondissement.

La question au judaïsme est question du livre; car comment formuler une question sinon par langage? Les mots de nos interrogations affrontent les mots des réponses qu’à ses seuls lecteurs le livre destine.

Tout dialogue est dialogue de mots. Il donne existence à l’univers et à l’homme.

Issu du livre, le questionnement, pour le juif comme pour l’écrivain, étant primordial, il est, par conséquent, d’une actualité brûlante: de cinq mille ans, pour l’un; ancrée dans le futur, pour les deux;

car qu’est-ce que la modernité sans l’ouverture?—Elle n’est même que cela.

L’ouverture, pour le juif, fut d’abord celle que le désert offrait à la Parole de son Dieu. Ouverture indispensable à pareille Parole.

Sans le désert, il n’y aurait, peut-être, pas eu, faute d’espace suffisant à son épanouissement, ce judaïsme qui, passant par la Parole de Dieu, passe nécessairement par le livre;

car, plus qu’une aride contrée de sable, le désert est, avant tout, terre désolée de silence et d’écoute, où le silence se grise de tous ses échos et l’écoute, de toutes les sonorités captées au cœur de ce silence; comme la mort s’enivre des propos de la mort et la vie, de la légèreté aérienne de la vie, Silex et vent, sable et ciel et rien, rien, rien entre.

Rien, sinon le jaillissement d’une Parole autoritaire qu’un sage a recueilli.
But, in the desert of his absence, at the height of the nudity of a pulverized world, has God truly spoken? And, what if this Speech, to make itself heard, had willed itself more silent than silence in order to help us perfect our ability to hear; hearing being nothing more than delving into oneself.

The listening of the desert is that of life and of death. To listen to death is to no longer lose a moment of one’s life. To perceive the last words of life—each word of life is the last—is to have, already, entered into death.

God commands his people to listen: “Hear, O Israel...” but hear what? Hear the words of your God; but God is absent and His words without voice; by distance, cut off from their sounds. Hear the silence;

for it is in silence that God speaks to his creature; for it is with a speech nourished by this silence that the Jew responds to his God.

And what if it was to place it in the mouth of a receptive people that God divested himself of his own Speech in order to share with them, afterwards, his listening?

The imperative speech is always yet to be born. It gives free rein to our attentive words.

Waiting is the leaven of the question, for it is, in itself, attention toward the unknown, opening to hope.

But what if, daughter of the desert, the question to the unknown was, herself, but the desert of the question? She would longer be anything but the solitude of a question to the question of solitude: infinite solitude of the question of God to the tragic solitude of the question of man.

The encounter with the text has replaced the encounter with God. Listen to what is being written...

Two solitudes find themselves in the presence of one another: that from before and that from after speech.

Mais, dans le désert de son absence, au faîte de la nudité d’un monde pulvérisé, Dieu a-t-il véritablement parlé? Et, si cette Parole, pour se faire entendre, s’était voulue plus silencieuse que le silence afin de nous aider à perfectionner notre ouïe; ouïr n’étant que plonger en soi?

L’écoute du désert est celle de la vie et de la mort. Écouter la mort, c’est ne plus perdre un moment de sa vie. Percevoir les dernières paroles de la vie—chaque parole de vie est la dernière—c’est être, déjà, entré dans la mort.

A son peuple, Dieu commande d’écouter: « Écoute Israël... » mais écoute quoi? Écoute les paroles de ton Dieu; mais Dieu est absent et Ses paroles sans voix; par la distance, coupées de leurs sons. Écoute le silence;

car c’est dans le silence que Dieu parle à sa créature; car c’est avec une parole nourrie de ce silence que le juif répond à son Dieu.

Et si c’était pour la mettre dans la bouche d’un peuple réceptif que Dieu s’était défait de Sa parole afin de partager, ensuite, avec lui, son écoute?

La parole impérative est toujours à naître. Elle donne libre cours à nos attentives paroles.

L’attente est le levain de la question, car elle est, en soi, attention à l’inconnu, ouverture à l’espoir.

Mais si, fille du désert, la question à l’inconnu n’était, elle-même, que désert de la question? Elle ne serait plus que solitude d’une question à la question de la solitude: infinie solitude de la question de Dieu à la tragique solitude de la question de l’homme.

Le face à face avec le texte a remplacé le face à face avec Dieu. Écoute ce qui s’écrit...

Deux solitudes se retrouvent en présence l’une de l’autre: celle d’avant et celle d’après la parole.
That is why the relation to Judaism is strictly individual before understanding itself as—or willing itself to be—collective.

Nonetheless, is not privileging the question, already, establishing dialogue; is it not, without leaving it altogether, escaping in part from one’s solitude? In this liberated part, our associations reside.

If the Jew presents himself alone before his Judaism, each Jew could define this Judaism by the originality of his approaches, that is to say, by means of the reading he makes of his book.

If the book—because it is an open book—authorizes these diverse approaches, it justifies them at the same time. This justification inevitably entailing the questioning of the reader.

The Jewish being is nothing but the Jewishness of being. But what if, reading himself in his book, he read only his own desire to be read by himself, as if he were, before the letter, its unpredictable, as well as ineluctable, becoming?

Being attest only to having been. The future takes hold of what is devoted to prolongation in order to inscribe it in duration; imperceptibly transforms it day by day, so that to endure is nothing but to live, in astonishment, these daily metamorphoses. Thus to its different images of itself, Judaism opposes its absence of image.

Being a Jew, being a writer would be, perhaps, then, but the possibility granted them to attain to such a being. The beyond of words is still the beneath of being. Tomorrow is the core of their conciliation.

Do we not say, as it happens, of something negligible, uninteresting, that it has no future?
But to which familiar face shall one refer, to come to describe its features?
And what is a face that would owe its particularity only to all the other faces that recognize themselves in it?

And what if the face was, it alone, the book.
Youth of God. Old age of man.

Thus does Judaism interrogate Judaism, betting as much on this interrogation as on the sustainability of its foundation.

Is the law in the book or is it rather the book that is in the law?
Does every book have its own law, or every law, its book? In other words, are reading and writing, through the book, suffering the yoke of its law or, on the contrary, forging it little by little in order to submit the book to it?
The law is the invention of the book; invention of the book that would have the force of law.

And what if law was the desire of the book and the book, desire of the law to which it owes its articulation?
And what if the origin was but the Book’s desire for an origin? Would God be that origin?

Much more than its signs, it is the silence of the book that we interrogate: its signs being but the numbered traces of that silence.
Traces of the book’s desire for the book, as footprints in the snow or the sand, that the sand and the snow will cover again.
Words would be, then, but the reiterated cries of desire, cries of love or of distress, at the moment of their coagulation.

If all books do not share the same origin, they have in common the same silence.
"If we admit," I once wrote in one of my works, "that what worries, agitates, feverishly puts into doubt, is, in principle, profane, we might say that in a certain way, the sacred, in its disdainful persistence, is, on one hand, what freezes us in ourselves, a sort of perpetrated death of the soul, and, on the other hand, the disappointing end of language, its last petrified word.

"So also, in its relation to the profane and through it, the sacred gives itself expression, no longer as sacred but as the sacralisation of the profane drunk on excess; as indefinite prolongation of the minute and not as eternity, stranger to the instant;

"for death is the prerogative of time.

"Is it not, precisely, by the intervention of the word, powerless to appropriate the spoken for itself, that eternity becomes conscious of its incompatibility with language?

"Writing—being written—would therefore be, without our always realizing it, passing from the visible—the image, the figure, the representation, whose duration is that of the approach—to non-visibility, to non-representability against which the object stoically wrestles; from the audible, whose duration is that of listening, to silence where, docilely, our words come to drown themselves; from sovereign thought to the sovereignty of the unthought, remorse and supreme torment of the word.

"The sacred remains the unseen, the dissimulated, the protected, the ineffaceable; that is why writing is also the suicidal attempt to assume the term as far as its ultimate effacement, there where it ceases to be a term in order to be nothing but an overturned trace—an injury—of a fatal and common rupture: that of God with man and that of man with Creation.

"Divine passivity, irreducible silence in the face of the unforeseeable and perilous adventure of the word delivered to itself.

« Si l’on admet—ai-je écrit dans un de mes ouvrages—que ce qui inquiète agite, remet fébrilement en cause est, en principe, profane, on pourrait déduire que d’une certaine manière, le sacré, dans sa persistance dédaigneuse, serait, d’une part ce qui nous fige en nous-mêmes, une sorte de mort perpétrée de l’âme et, d’autre part, le décevant aboutissement du langage, le dernier vocable pétrifié.

« Aussi, est-ce dans sa relation au profane et à travers lui, que le sacré se donne à éprouver, non plus comme sacré mais comme sacralisation du profane ivre de dépassement; comme prolongement indéfini de la minute et non comme éternité étrangère à l’instant;

« car la mort est l’affaire du temps.

« N’est-ce pas, justement, par le truchement du mot impuissant à s’approprier le dire que l’éternité prend conscience de son incompatibilité avec le langage?

« Écrire—être écrit—serait donc sans que l’on s’en rende toujours compte, passer du visible—l’image, la figure, la représentation dont la durée est celle d’une approche—à la non-visibilité, à la non-représentation contre lesquelles lutte, stoïque, l’objet; de l’audible, dont la durée est celle d’une écoute, au silence où, docilement, viennent se noyer nos paroles; de la pensée souveraine à la souveraineté de l’impensé, remords et suprême tourment du verbe.

« Le sacré demeure l’inaperçu, le dissimulé, le protégé, l’ineffaçable; c’est pourquoi écrire est aussi la tentative suicidaire d’assumer le vocable jusqu’à son ultime effacement, là où il cesse d’être vocable pour n’être plus que trace relevée—blessure—d’une fatale et commune rupture: celle de Dieu avec l’homme et celle de l’homme avec la Création.

« Passivité divine, irréductible silence face à l’imprévisible et périlleuse aventure du mot livré à lui-même.
“Anterior to the profane, it is the arbitrary immoderation that pushes back unceasingly against any limit. “Sacred. Secret.
“Does the sacred confound itself with the eternal secret of life and death?
“There is an after-day, an after-night to which day and night are invariably confronted.
“They are the promises of the aurora and the certainty of the next twilight. Life and death, profane and sacred, as sky and earth convinced that they form a single universe, come together and intermingle.
“The original prohibition confers on non-representation its sacred character. The language of God is language of absence. The infinite tolerates no dams, no walls.
“We write against this prohibition, but is it not, alas, in order to throw ourselves against it more violently? Speaking is only ever defeat to the unspeakable and thought but denunciation of the unthought.”

God, in making his people, through the Law, a people of priests, made them, through the book, a people of readers. In giving to His creature His book to read, He required of it that, in return, it teach Him to reread it with human eyes. Maybe, therefore, we will be able to say that if the Jew is a Jew by God’s choice, God is a Jew by interposed creatures.

The Jew lives in intimacy with God and God in intimacy with the Jew at the heart of the same months: a divine page. A human page and, both have, as their author, God and, both have, as their author, man.

Whence, for the Jew, the familiarity with God that is never dictated by disrespect but due to the singularity, to the specificity of their relations; to the punctuality of their exchanges.
God needed man so that his Speech would be heard beyond its immediate understanding, inasmuch as man is alone faced with himself and with man.

Every reader is a potential writer. He makes of the book, his book. He rewrites it for himself. And who cares if that book never sees the light of day! Over the transparency of his words are aligned the printed words of the book over which he is leaning. Such that the book buried in the book is, at one point, this dreamt book, matchless, inimitable, to which I have already alluded, and at another point, this unique book, the book that, through its articulation and the essence of its speaking, vainly tries to resemble the other; our perishable book.

That is why, for my part, meditating on my condition as Jew and my condition as writer, I was able to note: “I believed at first, that I was a writer, then I realized that I was a Jew, then I could no longer distinguish in myself the writer from the Jew, for the one and the other were but the torment of an ancient speech.”

Referring to these lines, some had deduced that I had turned the Jew into a writer and all writers into Jews; meanwhile I had simply authorized myself to underline their common relation to the text.

To no one better than to the Jew does the following appreciation apply: “He talks like a book.” And not by some game or pedantry, which would justify the irony of such a remark, but because the Jew never leaves the book, even when he believes he has abandoned it.

Deprived of liberty. Deprived of territory, it is normal that the Jew should seek refuge in the book having become, right away, the permanent site where his liberty could be exercised.

Dieu avait besoin de l’homme pour que Sa Parole soit entendue au-delà de son immédiat entendement, jusqu’où l’homme est seul face à lui-même et à l’homme.

Tout lecteur est un écrivain en puissance. Il fait du livre, son livre. Il le récrit pour lui-même. Et qu’importe si ce livre ne voit jamais le jour! Sur la transparence de ses mots s’alignent les mots imprimés du livre sur lequel il s’est penché. De sorte que le livre enfoui dans le livre est, tantôt, ce livre rêvé, inégalable, inimitable, auquel j’ai déjà fait allusion et, tantôt, dans ce livre unique, le livre qui, à travers son articulation et l’essentiel de son dire, tente vainement de lui ressembler; notre livre périssable.

C’est pourquoi, méditant, pour ma part, sur ma condition juive et ma condition d’écrivain j’ai pu noter: « J’ai cru, d’abord, que j’étais un écrivain, puis je me suis rendu compte que j’étais juif, puis je n’ai plus distingué en moi l’écrivain du juif, car l’un et l’autre ne sont que le tourment d’une antique parole. »

Se rapportant à ces phrases, certains ont pu en déduire que j’avais fait, du juif, un écrivain et, de tout écrivain, un juif; alors que je m’étais simplement autorisé à souligner leur relation commune au texte.

A nul, plus qu’au juif, ne sied cette appréciation: « Il parle comme un livre. » Et non par jeu ou par pédantisme, ce qui justifierait l’ironie d’une telle remarque, mais parce que le juif ne quitte jamais le livre, même lorsqu’il croit l’avoir abandonné.

Privé de liberté. Privé de territoire, il était normal que le juif se réfugiat dans le livre devenu, aussitôt, le lieu permanent où sa liberté pouvait s’exercer.
As it is for the writer with the writer, the Jewish relation with the Jew is concretized by an exchange of books.

Between self and self, there is the other; not the human obstacle but the ideal mediator.

And if the other were, already, the book?—the other, as book; the book as other?

This would no longer imply that we were the guarantors of a single speech but the witnesses of the resonance that this speech had in us, of the experience, in a way, of this speech behind which our own history slides.

Dialogue is vital. The book of the living can only be the book of dialogue.

Dialogue alone is capable, for an instant, of cheating death. Claimed by two voices, struck between two fires, it half escapes nothingness; for, granted they are victims of the same flames, it is never together that these two voices are extinguished; a time of survival being always accorded to the other.

Thus, it is of a speech torn from speech that we die and of a silence to which it delivers us, that we live.

In a dialogue, the two partners are in an equal position. Possess the same rank. Possess, for the other, the same consideration.

Dignity of man—as if God wanted His creature to be at the height of His message—and also necessity, for the latter to intervene and to judge.
What fascinates me about this God/man relationship, at the heart of Judaism, is that man imposes his language on God. It is no longer what God says that prevails but what, in the silence of divine speech, man says.

He speaks this Speech indefinitely with the words that have received it. He enterprises to lose it, in order to better rediscover it at the end of his loss. Virtue of the Jewish commentary that is never a vulgar commentary on the text but a deepening of an interior speech confronted with the indecipherable of the text. There, God is silent, lets his creature speak and measures his listening.

The simplicity and difficulty of being Jewish; difficult simplicity—I would say—; but from where does it come that the Jew, questioned on his identity, does not hesitate for a second to respond: “Jew?” Does he so quickly forget his difficulty in being unanimously a Jew? From where does it come that the non-believer, as much as the believer can, to take advantage of it, reclaim the same Judaism? Is it because their past and their future are the same? Is there a Jewish destiny?

There is the destiny of the book; the past and the future of a book where an origin is dissimulated that is so ancient that it is no longer but injury, barely a scratch left by a moment of audacity of silence toward silence that, from thence, envelops it.

The origin of Jewish speech.

“Enter, with your words, into each of my words,” so the book appears to command. “You have your place here; a place where I can welcome you with your past and your future; for I have the age of time and the absence of age of eternity; for I am eternity in time and eternal time.”

Ce qui, au cœur du judaïsme, me fascine dans cette relation Dieu/homme est que l’homme impose son langage à Dieu. Ce n’est plus ce que Dieu dit qui prime mais ce que, dans le silence de la parole divine, l’homme dit.

Il dit indéfiniment cette Parole avec les mots qui l’ont reçue. Il s’ingénie à la perdre, pour mieux la retrouver au bout de sa perte. Vertu du commentaire juif qui n’est jamais vulgaire commentaire du texte mais approfondissement d’une parole intérieure confrontée à l’indéchiffrable du texte. Là, Dieu se tait, laisse parler sa créature et prend la mesure de son écoute.

Simplicité et difficulté d’être juif; difficile simplicité—dirais-je—; mais d’où vient que le juif, interrogé sur son identité, n’hésite pas une seconde à répondre: juif? Oublie-t-il aussi vite sa difficulté à l’être unanimement? D’où vient que le non-croyant, autant que le croyant peuvent, pour s’en prévaloir, se réclamer d’un même judaïsme? Est-ce parce que leur passé et leur avenir sont pareils? Y aurait-il un destin juif?

Il y a le destin d’un livre; le passé et l’avenir d’un livre où se dissimule une origine si ancienne qu’elle n’est plus que blessure, à peine l’égratignure laissée par un moment d’audace du silence au silence qui, désormais, l’enveloppe.

Origine de la parole juive.

« Entre, avec tes mots, dans chacun de mes mots semble nous recommander le livre. Tu y as ta place; une place où je peux t’accueillir avec ton passé et ton avenir; car j’ai l’âge du temps et l’absence d’âge de l’éternité; car je suis l’éternité dans le temps et le temps éternel. »
And what if this difficulty in being totally Jewish was but the difficulty of every man in being wholly man?

The greatness of man is in the question; in the questions that he is able to pose, posing them to his peers. Questions to the universe as well.

There is, in the text, an unperceived that haunts us; a keyword that obsesses us.

Death is a whirlpool of words to which life exerts itself to give a meaning, forgetting that they will drown it.

The ocean will die of the ocean and there will be, anew, the desert.

The history of the Jews is, perhaps but the history of the sea become sand in order that, of that sand, of the moving immensity of that sand, a speech may surge and make itself book.

Tonight, I did not deliver a lecture, much less a lesson. Nothing of what I have been able to say will appear to anyone to be a teaching.

To the remark of an interrogation followed by work after work I have, at best, shed a bit of light on what I can only call my Jewish itinerary and my writer’s itinerary.

Certainty is, perhaps, but the motivation of every question. It would be, in that case, formulated as the ultimate question.

It happens to me, still now, to ask myself if I really ever did leave the greyness of the first book; if I ever woke up.

Et si cette difficulté à être pleinement juif n’était que la difficulté de tout homme à être intégralement homme?

La grandeur de l’homme est dans la question; dans les questions qu’il est capable de se poser, en les posant à ses semblables. Questions à l’univers aussi.

Il y a, dans le texte, un imperçu qui nous hante; un mot-clé qui nous obsède.

La mort est un tourbillon de mots auxquels la vie s’exerce à donner un sens, oubliant qu’ils l’engloutiront.

L’océan mourra de l’océan et ce sera, à nouveau, le désert.

L’histoire des juifs n’est, peut-être que l’histoire de la mer devenue sable afin que, de ce sable, de l’immensité mouvante de ce sable, une parole surgisse et se fasse livre.

Je n’ai pas, ce soir, prononcé une conférence, encore moins une « leçon ». Rien, de ce que j’ai pu dire, ne saurait, à quiconque, apparaître comme un enseignement.

À la remarque d’une interrogation poursuivie d’ouvrage en ouvrage j’ai, au mieux, jeté quelque lumière sur ce que je ne puis faire autrement qu’appeler mon itinéraire juif et mon itinéraire d’écrivain.

La certitude n’est, peut-être, que motivation de toute question. Elle serait, en ce cas, dans la formulation de l’ultime question.

Il m’arrive encore, maintenant, de me demander si je suis vraiment sorti de la grisaille du premier livre; si je me suis réveillé.
Sleep is not always loss of consciousness. God put the world to sleep in order to create it and put himself to sleep in Creation in order to be, Himself, by her, created.

We close our eyes to melt into the universe in order to be awoken by it.

We can only gamble on awakening. The future of man is in the eyes. It is, perhaps, but the secret waiting for an infinite gaze.

And if, up to extreme legibility, writing was, in the dependence on words, but the espousal of that gaze?

Le sommeil n’est pas, toujours, perte de conscience. Dieu endormit le monde pour le créer et s’endormit dans la Création afin d’être, Soi-même, par elle, créé.

On ferme les yeux pour se fondre dans l’univers afin d’être réveillé par lui.

On ne peut miser que sur l’éveil. L’avenir de l’homme est dans les yeux. Il n’est, peut-être, que la secrète attente d’un regard infini.

Et si, jusqu’à l’extrême lisibilité, écrire n’était, dans la dépendance des mots, qu’épouser ce regard?