

Alfred and Lucie Dreyfus in the Phantasmagoria

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P U B L I S H I N G

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THEMATIC GUIDES

FOR THE PERPLEXED READER

Now this state of mind, in which a man is straining to see, thinks he sees, but does not see—in which a man is forced to construct thoughts out of presentations, which befool and mock consciousness like will-o'-the-wisps or marsh vapours—in which a man fancies that he perceives inexplicable relations between distinct phenomena and ambiguous formless shadows—this is the condition of mind that is called Mysticism.

—Max Nordau¹

La lecture est rire et jeu, pratique « poétique » au sens où il lui revient d'éveiller et de réveiller (dans la parole) toute la signification temporelle de la langue, d'en attaquer les sédimentations sémantiques pour entendre quelque chose des objets du monde.

—Marc-Alain Ouaknin²

As in a dream within a dream, the president of the court-martial showed him the old familiar *bordereau* and asked whether he recognized it. He did not.

—Nicholas Halasz³

¹ Max Nordau, *Degeneration*, trans. from the 2nd ed. of the German work, 4th ed. (New York: D. Appleton & Co., 1895) p. 57. No translator is named. The original edition of *Entartung*, appeared in 1892.

² “To read is to laugh and play, a practical ‘poetics’ in the sense that it returns to awaken and stir up (in the word) all the temporal signification of language. To attack the semantic sedimentation in order to understand a little of the things in the world”, Marc-Alain Ouaknin, *Lire aux éclats: Éloge de la caresse*, 3^{ème} ed. (Paris: Quai Voltaire, 1992), p. 54.

³ Nicholas Halasz, *Captain Dreyfus: The Story of a Mass Hysteria*. (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1955) p. 221.

Ce qui fait le sublime de ces anciens héros, c'est leur ignorance même, leur aveugle, leur résolution désespérée....Ils allaient comme les yeux fermes et dans la nuit. Ils étaient effrayés, ils le disent eux-mêmes, mais n'en démordaient pas. Les tempêtes de mer, les tourbillons de l'air, les tragiques dialogues de ces deux océans, les orages magnétiques qu'on appelle aurores boréales, toute cette fantasmagorie leur semblait la fureur de la nature troublée et irritée, la lutte des démons.

—Jules Michelet⁴

Rabbi Yehuda the son of Simon opened: “And He revealed deep and hidden things.” [San. 2:22]. In the beginning of the creation of the World, “He revealed deep things, etc.” For it says, “In the beginning God created the heavens,” and He did not interpret. Where did He interpret it? Later on, “He spreads out the heaven like gossamer” [Isa. 40:22]. “And the earth,” and He did not interpret. Where did He interpret it? Later on, “To the snow He said, be earth” [Job 37:6]. “And God said, let there be light,” and He did not interpret. Where did He interpret it? Later on, “He wraps Himself in light like a cloak.” [Psalms 104:2]

—*Bereshit Rabbah*⁵

To put to a judge a question that he cannot answer is to evoke “motivated thinking,” the form of cognitive delusion that consists of credulously accepting the evidence that supports a preconception and of preemptorily rejecting the evidence that contradicts it.

—Richard A. Posner⁶

⁴ “What made those ancient heroes sublime was their own ignorance, their blind courage, their desperate resolution....They went blindly into the night, their eyes tightly shut. They were frightened and said so themselves but never held back, Hurricanes at sea, cyclones in the air, the tragic dialogue of two contending oceans, the magnetic storms known as the aurora borealis, the whole phantasmagoria seemed to them the madness of a deranged and furious nature, the warfare of demons.” Jules Michelet, *La Mer*, 5^{ème} ed. (Paris: Michel Lévy Frères, 1875) p. 84.

⁵ Cited by Daniel Boyarin, *Intertextuality and the Reading of Midrash* (Bloomington & Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1994) p. 17.

⁶ Richard A. Posner, “The Incoherence of Antonin Scalia” a review of Antonin Scalia and Bryan Garner, *Reading Law: the Interpretation of Legal texts*

And then the next thing was the Dreyfus affair, that is anti-semitism and that is a very strange thing in connection with medievalism and nineteenth century and how a century is so hard to kill, anything is so hard to kill, thank heaven.

He can read acasias, hands and faces. Acasias are for the goat, and the goat gives milk, very necessary these days and hands and faces are hands and faces, and dreams when one is dancing and falls asleep are real, and all this has this to do with anti-semitism that it is true and not real and real and not true.

Through and through.

There is a strange delusion.

—Gertrude Stein⁷

(Thomson/West, 2012) *The New Republic* (15 September 2012) posted in *Sephardic Heritage Updates* (6 October 2012) at david.shasha.shu@gmail.com

⁷ Gertrude Stein, *Wars I Have Seen* (London: B.T. Batsford, 1945) p. 35. The spelling, punctuation and syntax are as Stein wished.

INTRODUCTION

IN THE CONFUSING GLARE OF HISTORY

We are dealing with a phantasmagoric parallel universe, one in which the laws of reason have been suppressed and all mental and emotional energy is harnessed to the cause of anti-Semitism.¹

The meditations on *orblutes* and Icelandic crystal that open this third book in the series on Dreyfus² are part of the way in which we will create a complex machine-for-seeing, being seen, and thus of reflexivity (an ophthalmoscope) through which to study Alfred and Lucie further.³ The

¹ Matthias Küntzel, “Iranian Holocaust Denial and the Internet” *Israel Journal of Foreign Affairs* 6:1 (2012) 48.

² The first volume is entitled *Alfred Dreyfus: Man, Milieu, Mentality and Midrash* (Brighton, MA: Academic Studies Press, 2011) and the second *In the Context of his Time: Alfred Dreyfus as Lover, Intellectual, Poet and Jew* (Brighton, MA: Academic Studies Press, 2013). These two studies were based on close-reading of the letters of Alfred and Lucie Dreyfus and on the prison cahiers of Alfred while on Devil’s Island between 1895-1899. Unlike most books on the subject of the Dreyfus Affair, their main focus was on the intellectual, emotional and spiritual life of the couple, not on the legal and political battles. This new book goes over some of the readings given earlier but from new angles, yet I remind readers that these new books do not attempt to be history or sociology or even philosophy. Gradually, in the footnotes the theory and methodology will be explained.

³ As seen in the first two volumes on Dreyfus already published in this series, my midrashic way of writing often develops as a conversation or debate between different voices –sometimes my own, sometimes those of the authorities cited, sometimes other versions of my own commentary—in the main body of the text and those in the footnotes. These lines at the bottom of the page therefore should not be read simply as a means of establishing sources for the comments made above nor as additional or complementary comments on the main argument; they are vital counter-texts and anti-texts (as explained in those earlier books, the text- and counter-text relationship offers competing perspectives, valid oppositional versions of the themes presented, either of which could stand alone but neither of which allows the other to do so; while the text- and anti-text relationship is far more radically oppositional, since recognizing one or the other would invalidate the premises of the other and neither would accept as legitimate the opposition

question of light belongs to several distinct fields of inquiry, ranging from the science of light itself—what is it and how does it function—to that of optics, wherein the performance of light through a variety of physical lenses and atmospheres or substances, including the mechanisms of the organic human eye, can be studied, to psychology which examines the processes in the brain and the mind wherein the sensory stimulation of light coming through the eye is perceived, recognized, adjusted and recreated, and even further to various artificial and artistic means of registering, arranging and interpreting light are made. On the other hand, when we approach this set of images and concepts from a Jewish point of view, the little dancing lights—and later rhythmic fragments of sound—raise questions about the sparks (*netzrozim*) that were scattered in the immediate aftermath of creation when the vessels or husks (*kellipot*) containing the original energy of the Word broke apart or shattered (*shevirat ha-kelim*) and about the more coherent and larger phenomena of *sephiroth*, the mysterious globes of brilliance that stand between the Infinite Unknown of *Eyn Sof* and the meditational point of contact between the physical universe and these metaphysical spheres.⁴ They are manifest as

point-of-view or version of logic). Even more disturbing would be the presentation of un-texts and non-texts: these kinds of text not only oppose the validity but the reality of the other statements, the very articulation of the one in the presence of the other makes it impossible to read or understand the second discourse; while a non-text goes to the point of destroying itself through juxtaposition or even allusion to the other. When Dreyfus confronts the charges against him presented in court—only some of which he and his lawyer were made privy to—they tried to argue against them on grounds of improbability and mistaken contextualization. When the secret dossier was finally made public, the second court martial persisted in finding Dreyfus guilty, though the documents revealed were either complete fabrications or did not exist at all, so that once Dreyfus's case was made in open court, there were no charges to answer at all—yet the military judges could not see nor hear or believe in the version of the text that proved Dreyfus innocent. Or another example: Though many historians claim to have read the prison *cahiers*, they continue to treat Dreyfus as a dull, second-rate and unimaginative thinker; my argument, based on close-reading of those workbooks and my compilation of an index of all the books, authors and ideas he dealt with, reveals a completely other type of personality and a very different person (cp *In the Context of his Time*). Hence the need in this third book for me to present new information, new contexts, and new ways of interpretation through conversations and debates between the body of the text and the texts of the footnotes. This may be called a double refraction through a series of lenses or a polarization of light.

⁴ Sanford L. Drob offers another way of looking at these phenomena : « [Isaac] Luria, in contrast to previous Kabbalists who had forth a Neo-platonic

well in the primary alphabet of the Word as it communicates between human minds and the soul of the Creator. “Each *sephira*,” claims Marc-Alain Ouaknin, “represents a modality of the divine manifestation and, it follows, the acts of man himself.”⁵ Words in this sense are more than—not less than—sonorous particles of symbolic language⁶ in that they reflect, refract, and embody the great silence of the primary Word, the voice of which is always a transitory moment of interpretative commentary, an experience of the original energy of creation—rather than a symbol or part

‘emanationist’ view of creation, held that *Ein-sof* created the world through a negation, via an act of divine concealment, contraction and withdrawal. This act, known in the Lurianic Kabbalah as the *Tzimtzum* was necessary to ‘make room’ for the emanation of the worlds. In the act of *Tzimtzum*, the Infinite God withdraws himself from himself, leaving a void. This void, known as the *tehiuru* or *chalal*, is a metaphysically empty circle or sphere which *Ein-sof* surrounds equally on all sides. Once established, this void becomes the metaphysical ‘space’ where an infinite number of worlds will take form through a positive, emanative phase in the creative process. At this point a thin line (*kav*) of divine light (*Or Ein-sof*) penetrates the void but does not completely transverse it. From this line, as well as from a residue (*Reshimu*) of divine light, which had remained in the metaphysical void after the divine contraction, the first creative being, Primordial Man (Adam Kadamon), is formed” (“The Lurianic Kabbalah: An Archetypal Interpretation” Jung and Kabbalah online at www.newkabbalah.com/Jung3 (seen 12/06/21012).

⁵ « Chaque séfira représente une modalité de la manifestation du divin et, par suite, des actions de l’homme lui-même » Marc-Alain Ouaknin, *Concerto pour quatre consonnes sans voyelles : au-delà du principe d’identité* (Paris : Editions Balland, 1991) p. 17.

⁶ Ouaknin, *Concerto*, p. 80. The meaningful sound, however, is more than a phoneme, a particle of a language conceived in grammatical terms; it is a vibration of energy, a spark of light. Whereas a letter or other sign in some pictographic or hieroglyphic writing system can be measured and weighed by shape, size, volume, as well as in terms of the colour of the ink, the depth of the incision or the constituent units of its formation, the kabbalistic sound-image has a duration in the time of its existence, the distance it travels, the resonance of its effects after it has faded away, including a residual after-life in time and space. Concentrated and contracted through *tsimtzum* and *rikouz*, the energy of the original explosion creates space itself that shoots out in all directions, the sound drawn deeply inside its mass of silence (p. 85). What can be seen, heard and felt thereafter marks at once the absence of what has already existed and will continue to exist out into the future, but is not in itself a thing or a space or a sound, only the sign, memory or dream, as in a memory, an echo or a reflection. None of this means anything, however, until it is interpreted. Without interpretation, there exists nothing but nebulous bubbles of light and sound floating in empty space, echoing through the darkness; mere phenomena. A phantasmagoria without sense.

of the thing it represents, the word is an expression of the original act and a product of human understanding of what that means in the world.⁷

While in his prison *cahiers* Alfred Dreyfus neither seems aware of such a “kabbala of words” (*kabalat ha-otiyot*)⁸ or of the mystical thought that underpins it, his discussions of light and its reproduction as a way of maintaining his sanity in a world gone mad, do suggest that he has absorbed many pertinent Jewish ideas in the course of his education and especially through his marriage to Lucie Hadamard. For even when he writes specifically about photography and x-rays, he also alludes to the differences between natural sight (“the naked eye”) and artificial perception (prisms, lenses, historical and psychological reproduction of things seen) of the world, and implies far more than he actually says about memory, imagination, and the arts.⁹ In my study, these excursions into the various fields of light, optics, and psychology of perception belong partly to the world of actual facts and experiences, and partly to the metaphoric insights they generate as we read the life and times of Alfred and Lucie Dreyfus. In the two earlier books on the couple, we used the apparatus and figurative value of prisms and devices such as the kaleidoscope¹⁰ and the

⁷ Ouaknin, *Concerto*, p. 41.

⁸ Ouaknin, *Concerto*, p. 19.

⁹ Jean Renoir on his father’s method of painting on canvas: “I have already described how he worked on the whole surface of his canvas, and how the motif gradually emerged from the seeming confusion, with each brush-stroke, as though on a photographic plate” (*My Father*, p. 343). It should not be thought, as too many casual commentators do, that Impressionism was a reaction *against* the development of photography and its apparent reproduction of mirror images of reality, for not only weren’t the earliest images produced by mechanical means considered to be accurate and trustworthy, they were also not dismissed as at best aides de memoires for students wishing to learn about the masterpieces in places they could not visit or revisit or as visual prompts for accomplished painters to use. Jean Renoir recalls the views expressed by his father and his associates: “The Impressionists attached considerable importance to the latest developments in photography. Their friend Charles Cros saw in it a means of studying the problems of the analysis of light and, in consequence, of making further experiments with Impressionism. Seurat, whom my father knew only slightly, believed that movement could be studied through photography. He was very much interested in the ‘photographic gun’ invented by Marcy” (*My Father*, p. 161).

¹⁰ Note here how Max Nordau describes the optical instrument as a real fairground entertainment and as a metaphorical lens through which to see and evaluate the subject of his description: “Thus Ibsen’s drama is like a kaleidoscope in a sixpenny bazaar. When one looks through the peep-hole, one sees, at each shaking of the cardboard tube, new and part-coloured combinations. Children are amused at this

phantasmagoria,¹¹ referring to the development of cameras, cinema, and other mechanical illusions.¹² As in rabbinics and kabbalah, the ideas we

toy. But adults know that it contains only splinters of coloured glass. Always the same, inserted haphazard, and united into symmetrical figures by three bits of looking-glass, and they soon tire of the expressionless arabesques. My simile applies not only to Ibsen's plays, but to the author himself. In reality, he is the kaleidoscope. The few paltry bits of glass which for thirty years he has rattled and thrown into cheap mosaic patterns, these are his obsessions" (*Degeneration*, p. 404).

¹¹ While the phantasmagoria can refer to something hallucinatory or confused, it may also be a way of describing an exciting revelation of natural wonders suddenly appearing to the observer because of some clarification in his or her attention or some shift in the atmosphere or angle of vision. The term therefore can range from a specific spectacle staged in a theatre with all sorts of paraphernalia—a veritable embodied synesthesia, such as Wagner thought he was producing and his adoring patrons believed they were experiencing—or fizzles out into a completely negative metaphor, as when Max Nordau cites Hans Merian's remarks when speaking of the Young Germany artists at the end of the nineteenth century: "Speighagen makes it appear as though he had drawn the fundamental ideas and conflicts in his novels from the great questions which are stirring the present time. But closely examined, all this magnificence evaporates into a vain phantasmagoria" (cited in *Degeneration*, p. 530 from Hans Merian, *Die sogenannten 'Jungdeutschen'*). Be this as it may, in the superficial discourses of Realism and Naturalism, the fading away of sights and sounds does not mean that they disappear as vital components of one's memory, or at least of the traces of that memory on the mind out of which a sensitive soul with an analytical skill can generate restored photographs or phonograph records. Thus Louis Begley writes: "A year or two after World War II ended, when I first read *Pan Tadeusz*, Adam Mickiewicz's great verse epic about Lithuania, written in 1834, I thought that I recognized very faintly, in that supremely beautiful elegy for the perished way of life of the provincial Lithuanian gentry, as the poem remembered it from the time of Napoleon's campaign, something like an almost forgotten melody that haunts one, something so attenuated that one wonders whether it was once heard or only imagined. It was, I eventually realized, the summer and autumn of my grandparents' property. What a prodigious feat on my part of self-aggrandizement, imagination, or empathy" ("My Europe, *The New York Review of Books* [5 April 2012] online at www.nybooks.com/articles/archives/2012/apr/05/my-europe-begley/?pagination=false&printp. [seen 30 March 2012]). This kind of imaginative, reconstructive, and speculative memory is at work in the mind of Dreyfus when he composes his cahiers in prison; and the wonder of it all is compounded by the way in which I came to read the novelist's essay online a week before it was officially printed in the magazine. This too must be taken as a phantasmagoria.

are dealing with are dynamic, creative and often transgressive of received opinions. It is time to delve deeper into history and imagination. Or rather using the metaphor of archaeology of knowledge, the dig, it might be better to say let us strike the rock of cultural norms and scholarly convention with the mallet of midrash and follow the sparks that fly out before they disappear.¹³

¹² Franz Kafka, during a railway journey on behalf of his insurance company, stopped at small hotels along the way, in one of which he is entertained by a magic lantern show. His comments become increasingly pertinent as he meditates away from the pictures shown on the slides—actually first from a newspaper or magazine with photolithographs) to a comparison of the stereoscopic coloured slides with cinema and then on the nature of our perception of reality in a world where such artificial imagery is becoming familiar, though not yet normal. First he writes: “An old man reading a volume of the *Illustrierte Welt* [The Illustrated World] at a little table lighted by a lamp was in charge of everything. After a while he showed magic-lantern slides for me. Later two elderly ladies sat down at my right, then another at my left. Brescia, Cremona, Verona. People in them like wax dolls, their feet glued to the pavement. Tombstones; a lady dragging the train of her dress over a low staircase opens a door part way, looking backward all the while. A family, in the foreground a boy is reading, one hand at his brow; a boy on the right is bending an unstrung bow. Statue of the hero, Tito Speri: his clothes flutter in enthusiastic neglect about his body. Blouse, broad-brimmed hat” (Franz Kafka, “Trip to Friedland and Reichenberg, January-February 1911” from *Travel Diaries*. trans. Martin Greenberg, with the cooperation of Hannah Arendt, in *The Diaries of Franz Kafka, 1910-23*, ed. Max Brod (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1972; 1964 [*Tagebuch von Kafka*, 1948-49]) p. 430. These secondary comments spin off into new dimensions of speculation: “The pictures [are] more alive than in the cinema because they offer the eye all the repose of reality. The cinema communicates the restlessness of its motion to the things pictured in it; the eye’s repose would seem to be more important. The smooth floors of the cathedrals at the tip of our tongues. Why can’t they combine the cinema and stereoscope in this way? Posters reading “Pilsen Wührer”, familiar to me from Bescia [two years earlier]. The gap between simply hearing about a thing and seeing lantern slides of it is greater than the gap between the latter and actually seeing the thing itself” (p. 430).

¹³ Michelet, *La Mer*: “‘Nos prairies, nos forêts de terre, dit Darwin, paraissent désertes et vides, si on les compare à celle de la mer.’ Et, en effet, tous ceux qui courent sur les transparentes mers des Indes sont saisis de la fantasmagorie que leur offre le fond. Elle est surtout surprenante par l’échange singulier que les plantes et les animaux font de leurs insignes naturels, de leur apparence.... » (Livre deuxième, Chapt. IV). « Our prairies, our earthly forests, says Darwin, appear deserted and empty, if one compares them with the sea. And in effect all those who sail on the transparent seas of the Indies are struck by the phantasmagoria which it

Orblutes

The reactions music evokes are not feelings, but they are the images of feelings. Dreams, memories, musical reactions—all these are made of the same stuff.

—Paul Hindemith¹⁴

At the close of the second book in this series, we cited a passage from George Sand's autobiography about certain hallucinatory experiences she played with as a very young child in Madrid. While there, Aurore Dupin, as she was still called,¹⁵ would play on the roof garden of the palace where

offers them in its depths. It shocks above all by their natural signs, their appearance..." Michelet often uses the figure of the phantasmagoria in order to describe the wondrous profusion of life throughout the natural world, sometimes with the sense of a great mystery and even a profound sense of tragedy. For instance, in Chapter IX of the second volume of *La Mer* he writes: "Maintenant, il me faut entrer dans un monde bien autrement: la guerre, le meurtre. Je suis obligé d'avouer que, dès le commencement, dès l'apparition de la vie, apparut la mort violente, épuration rapide, utile purification, mais cruelle, de tout ce qui languissait, traînait ou aurait languï, de la création lente et faible dont la fécondité eut encombre le globe » (I must now enter into a very different world: war, murder. I am obliged to maintain that, since the very beginning, since the origins of life, violent death, purification and putrefaction, rapid and useful, but cruel, and all the sickens and languishes, in the the slow creation and feeble decline, whose foul fecundity has encumbered the globe.) In other place, Michelet also speaks of the world of illusions (*le monde de l'illusion*) where strange lights, dreamy mirages, and shimmering crystals hanging in the air over the northern seas offers an entertaining display of such magnitude it surpasses all the wonders of the ancient world; these too he calls *fantasmagories* (Livre Trois, Chapter IV). In the conclusion to the whole of *La Mer*, he writes: "Trois formes de la nature étendent et grandissent notre âme, la font sortir d'elle-même, et voguer dans l'infinie. Le variable océan de l'air, avec da fête de lumière, ses vapeurs et son clair-obscur, sa fantasmagorie mobile de créations capricieuses, si promptement évanouies.... » (Three forms of nature extend and increase our soul, the fount emerging from itself, and sails into the infinite. The variable ocean of the air, with its festival of lights, its vapours and its chiaroscuro, its phantasmagoria of moving and capricious creations quickly dissipated...). The other two forms are the fixed oceans of the earth and the oceans of water.

¹⁴ Paul Hindemith, *A Composer's World* (New York: Anchor Books, 1961) p.545; cited in Anthony Storr, *Music and the Mind* (London: HarperCollins, 1992) p. 76.

¹⁵ Her full name was Aurore Amantine Lucile Dupin, and her married name title was Baronne Dudevant. On the journey from her aristocratic baptismal names to

the family was living. Aurore recalls her first experience of a visual phenomenon that she would return to many times in her later life as a novelist.¹⁶

A ma droite, tout un côté de la place était occupé par une église d'une architecture massive, du moins elle se retrace ainsi à ma mémoire, et surmontée d'une croix plantée dans un globe doré. Cette croix et ce globe étincelant au coucher du soleil, se détachant sur un ciel plus bleu que je ne l'avais jamais vu, sont un spectacle que je n'oublierai jamais, et que je contemplais jusqu'à ce que j'eusse dans les yeux ces boules rouges et bleues...¹⁷

On my right, along the side of the place was filled by a church with a massive architecture, at least it is thus traced into my memory, and surmounted by a cross planted in a golden globe. This cross and globe sparkling in the setting sun detached itself from the bluest sky I have ever seen, made a spectacle I will never forget, and that I contemplated until I had these red and blue bubbles in my eyes.¹⁸

Reflecting back on this optical illusion in her infancy, George Sand turns her attention to the appropriate word for this phenomenon which she believes is more universal than the absence of a correct modern French term would suggest. She finds the best word available is a local dialect (Berrichon) derived through Old French ultimately from Latin.¹⁹

her gender-neutralizing *nom de plume* see Marianne Czarniak-Duflot, "D'Aurore à George, itinéraire d'une femme libre" online at www.ac-rennes.fr/pedagogie/lettres/joint/confsand (seen 2 April 2012).

¹⁶ Within the same few pages where Sand recalls this experience of the *orblutes*, she also speaks of how she first came to recognize echoes, thus suggesting—as she herself discusses hundreds of pages later when she describes the beginnings of her career as a novelist and how important imagination and memories are to her writing—an intimate relationship between sound and sight for aesthetic purposes. This is not the same thing as Max Nordau's negative view of synaesthesia, a form of decadent and degenerative poetic style, as we shall point out later in this book. What is important is the way these hallucinatory experiences, based on real phenomena in the world and on imaginary tropes, resemble one another in dreams, memories and aesthetic feelings.

¹⁷ George Sand, *Histoire de ma vie*, ed., Brigitte Diaz (Paris: Le Livre de Poche, 2004) pp. 163-164.

¹⁸ My translation.

¹⁹ A useful general guide to George Sand's use of local dialects can be found in L. Vincent, *La Langue et le style rustiques du George Sand dans les romans champêtres* (Paris: Librairie Ancienne Honoré Champion, 1916).

...que par un excellent mot dérivé du latin, nous appelons, dans notre langue du Berry, les orblutes. Ce mot devrait passer dans la langue moderne. Il doit avoir été français, quoique je ne l'ai trouvé dans aucun auteur. Il n'a point d'équivalent, et il exprime parfaitement un phénomène que tout le monde connaît et qui ne s'exprime que par des périphrases inexactes.²⁰

... which we call, by an excellent word derived from Latin, in our dialect of Berry, *orblutes*. This word could pass into our modern language. It could have been French, although I have never found it in any author. It has no equivalent, and yet it expressed perfectly a phenomenon that everyone knows and which can only be expressed by inexact periphrasis.²¹

The experience is manifold: on the one hand, Aurore enjoys the phenomenon itself as a kind of magical game she can play by herself; on the other, George Sand considers the absence of an appropriate modern term and the lack of a scientific explanation for its occurrence as part of the education she was acquiring as a person preparing to be the writer of fiction she was to become, an author sensitive to psychological activities in the *sensoria* and in the inquiring mind.²²

²⁰ Sand, *Histoire de ma vie*, p. 164. If the derivation is from *orbluces*, it can yield on the one hand *orb* (globe) + *lux* (light), i.e., globes of light, or as in the Old French *orb*, from *orbum* = bereft, something like blind, obscure or dark and so: bright blinding light. Cp. Kenneth Urwin, ed., *A Short Old French Dictionary for Students* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1963) p. 67.

²¹ My translation.

²² A variation on this phenomenon of the *orblutes* appears in François Jacob's autobiography *La statue intérieure* (Paris: Odile Jacob, 1987); the narrator describes the attempt to recapture the memories of his early childhood using the figure of the *ignis fatuus*: "Mais cette vie, comment la saisir? Comment même la décrire? Par une séquence d'événements, une série de situations, d'anecdotes insérées dans une chronologie? Mais la mémoire ne restitue pas la vie et son déroulement. Elle jette des feux follets sur la féerie d'une fête brève tandis qu'elle enveloppe d'une nébuleuse de tristesse la tranquillité d'un travail prolonge. Sous un invisible projecteur, elle allume des continents inconnus. Elle fait surgir des terres insoupçonnées Certaines reflets les éclats de l'imaginaire. D'autres, les éclairs du passé" (p. 22). (But how does one grab hold of this life? How does one describe it? By a sequence of events, a series of situations, of anecdotes inserted into a chronology? But this memory does not reconstitute life and its unrolling. It throws fairy sparks {the *ignis fatuus* or *will-o-the-wisp*} on to an imaginary screen in a brief festival while it wraps in a cloud of sadness the tranquility of a prolonged labour. Using an invisible projector, it lights up unknown continents. It makes unsuspected lands rise up. Some of these wisps reflect the flashes of the

Ces orblutes m’amusaient beaucoup, et je ne pouvais pas m’en expliquer la cause toute naturelle. Je pensais plaisir à voir flotter devant mes yeux ces brûlantes couleurs qui s’attachaient à tous les objets, et qui persistaient lorsque je fermais les yeux, Quand l’orblute est bien complète, elle vous représente exactement la forme de l’objet qui l’a causée ; c’est une sorte de mirage. Je voyais donc le globe et la croix du feu se dessiner partout où se portaient mes regards, et je m’étonne d’avoir tant répété impunément ce jeu assez dangereux pour les yeux d’un enfant.²³

These *orblutes* gave me a great deal of pleasure, and I could not explain their natural cause. I thought it enjoyable to watch these burning colours that were attached to all the objects float before my eyes, and which continued when I shut my eyes. When an *orblute* is finished, it represents to you exactly the form of the object that created it; it is like a mirage. I could thus see the globe and the cross of fire making pictures of themselves everywhere and carried them in my perceptions, and I am astonished to have repeated this dangerous game so often without harm to my infant eyes.²⁴

Sand adds a footnote to her text suggesting a slight orthographical change to allow the word to enter into standard French.

Pour que le mot fût bon, il faudrait changer une lettre et dire orbluces.²⁵

To make the word acceptable, one need only change a single letter and say *orbluces*.²⁶

imagination. Others the gleams of the past.—my translation.) Jacob seems to be describing one of George Méliès’ phantasmagoric films or at least a craftily pantomimed performance of a fairy tale.

²³ Sand, *Histoire de ma vie*, p. 164.

²⁴ My translation. Thelma Jurgau edited a group translation of the book for SUNY Press in 1991; she chooses to leave *orblutes* in its original form, but translates mirage by “after-image”. Mirage, however, carries the sense of a displaced and distorted image, rather than a lingering blurry picture before the eyes; on the other hand, George Sand does connect the experience of discovering the phenomenon of an echo with that of the optical trick, and making both a metaphor for a psychological illusion: “that I was double and there was another ‘me’ nearby, which always saw me since it always answered me. I concluded that all things and all people had their reflection, their double, their other ‘me’. And I wished keenly to see mine.”

²⁵ Sand, *Histoire de ma vie*, p. 164, note *.

²⁶ My translation.

The modern editor of the *Histoire de ma vie* adds her own note to point towards two further novels in which Sand employs the word in the sense first found here in these childhood memories.

George Sand emploie ce mot dans *La Petite Fadette* et *Les Maîtres sonneurs*, dans un sens assez proche de l'expression populaire « berlue ».²⁷

George Sand uses this word in *Little Fadette* [1851] and *The Master Pipers* [1853] in a sense very close to the popular expression “burlue”.²⁸

²⁷ Diaz in Sand, *Histoire de ma vie*, p. 164, n.1.

²⁸ My translation. The English title of *La Petite Fadette* could either be something along the lines of *The Imp Maiden*, following the various meanings assigned to the word *fadet*—hobgoblin, elf, imp or other fairy-type creature of the region—or, since the child is given the diminutive of her mother's name, I have chosen the simplest version, *Little Fadette*. The pipers referred to in the other title are the bagpipe (*cornmeruse*) players of Berry, near the village of Nahaut where George Sand spent many years of her girlhood staying with her grandmother and playing with the local peasant children. In *Promenades autour d'un village*, Sand describes the *fadette* in these terms: “Le *follet*, *fadet* ou *farfadet*, n'est point un animal, bien qu'il lui plaise d'avoir des ergots et une tête d'un coq; mais il a le corps d'un petit homme, et, en somme, il n'est ni villain ni méchant, moyennant qu'on ne le contrariera pas. C'est un pur esprit, un bon génie connu en tout pays, un peu fantastique, mais fort actif et soigneux des intérêts de la maison” (p. 52) (The *follet*, *fadet* or *farfadet* is not at all an animal although it is pleased to have the spur and head of a cock; but it has the body of a little man, and all in all it is neither naughty nor wicked, on condition that it is not opposed. It is a pure spirit, a good little genius of the place known in all countries, a bit fantastic, but very active and concerned for the interests of the house). In Berry, however, the impish creature does not live inside the house or do household chores, and does not fall in love with the women around the hearth. “Il hante quelquefois les écuries comme ses confrères d'une grande partie de la France; mais c'est la nuit, au pâturage, qu'il prend particulièrement ses ébats. Il y rassemble les chevaux par troupes, se cramponne à leur crinière, et les galoper comme des fous à travers les prés. Il ne paraît pas se soucier énormément des gens à qui ces chevaux appartiennent. Il aime l'équitation pour elle-même; c'est sa passion, et il prend en amitié les animaux les plus ardents et les plus fougueux. Il les fatigue beaucoup, car on les trouve en sueur quand il s'en est servi; mais il les frotte et les pes panse avec tant de soin, qu'ils ne se s'en portent que mieux. Chez nous, on connaît parfaitement les chevaux pansés du follet. Leur crinière est nouée par lui de milliards de nœuds inextricables” (p. 52) (Sometimes it haunts stables as its equivalents do in the greater part of France; but it is at night in the pasture where it plays most of its tricks. It rounds up the horses into groups, grabs hold of their manes, and gallops away madly across the fields into the night. It doesn't seem to care very much for

The use of the term *orblutes* in George Sand's other pastoral novel *Les Maîtres sonneurs*²⁹ it is less developed and appears in the text with neither the author herself nor the modern editors offering any gloss.³⁰ The narrator

the people to whom the horses belong. It enjoys the equestrianism for its own sake. It's his passion, and it becomes friends with the most fiery and mettlesome horses. But it wears them out, as is seen in their sweat when they are serviced in the morning; but it dresses and grooms them with great care, so they comport themselves all the better. With us, it is known that some horses are *rubbed down by the follet*. Their manes are twisted into thousands of inextricable knots." Alfred Dreyfus, who loved to have a gallop in the morning before going to work in the army headquarters, may have heard the grooms in the stable at the Bois de Boulogne whispering strange tales about such little fantasy creatures.

²⁹ Vincent points out that this is the novel whose language is most distant from modern French (*La langue et les style rustique*, p. 15). He sees this novel as "l'apogée des ses essais rustiques. C'est dans ce roman qu'elle s'éloigne le plus de sa manière d'écrire habituelle...elle la cherche des sites de style plus encore que dans les romans précédents" (Vincent, p. 39). ; « the highpoint of her rustic exercises. It is in this novel that she distances herself most from her normal way of writing. She seeks out such sites here more than her former novels." It is not just a matter of occasional local words or idioms but much more of capturing the syntax and rhythm of speech. Sand travelled through the regions close to Nohant and spoke with local folk, sensitive to the nuances between the speakers in one village and another (Vincent, p. 21). Though she did not conduct scientific surveys of the various versions of the patois and indeed often played with the lexicon and grammar she listened to, she was almost unique among nineteenth-century French novelists in taking seriously the sensibility and culture of the country people she engaged with. Balzac and Flaubert, for example, used dialect as part of the background for local colour and still treated the folk as comic characters (Vincent, pp. 35 ff.).

³⁰ The experience is alluded to early in the novel without the use of the term *orblutes*. The narrator recounts an episode from his childhood while he is riding through the forest in the darkness and suddenly hears a sound he does not recognize and thinks he sees a large herd of mules: "Il y avait peut-etre bien deux cents de ces bêtes, mais j'en vis au moins trente mille, car la peur me galopait rude, et je commençais a avoir des étincelles et des taches blanches dans la vue, comme la frayeur en donne a ceux qui ne s'en défendent point" (George Sand, *Les Maîtres Sonneurs*, éd, Marie-Claire Bancquart [Paris : Gallimard 1979] p. 100). (There were perhaps two hundred of these beasts, but I saw at least thirty thousand because I was roughly seized with fear and I began to have sparks and white spots in my vision, as a fright gives to those who cannot keep it away." The strange and bizarre experience of the muleteers and the bagpipes in the middle of the night creates an hallucination in the child's mind manifest in the dancing sparkles of light in front of his eyes.

of the thirty two evening conversations constituting the book finds himself in the middle of the forest, some distance from his own native area where woodcutters and hemp collectors live, among muleteers and more unsavoury types, and make their livings. He is there with his female cousin Brunette, and on a festival evening at a celebration, the young woman is insulted by one of the roughnecks, a giant by the name of Mazak, who has approached her too familiarly. Instead of Tinned defending her honor, the local host Muriel literally takes up the holly cudgel in her defense, the one-on-one combat according to the rules of that part of the forest. The fight occurs in near darkness with only two wind-blown torches providing light and it is almost impossible for the narrator to see who is knocked down after a crushing thud is heard.

Lequel était-ce? Je ne voyais plus, j'avais des orblutes dans les yeux ; mais j'entendis la voix de Térance qui disait : —Dieu soit béni, mon frère a gagné !³¹

Which one was it? I could no longer see, as I had some *orblutes* in my eyes; but I heard to the voice of Terence say:—Bless the Lord, my brother has won!³²

In this scene, *orblutes* represent at least two kinds of blurring of the speaker's vision during the fight: first, physically, the darkness, the swaying flames of the torches, and the sweat in front of his eyes create the small particles of light; second, in a more psychological sense, anger, fear and confusion at the nature of the combat generate an hallucinatory experience embodied in the appearance of spots or specks of light.³³

³¹ George Sand, *Les Mâtures Sonneurs*, p. 200. In this modern edition, the events occur in the fifteenth evening conversation. An earlier edition published in 1857 by Librairie Nouvelle in Paris places this whole episode into the fourteenth evening (p. 159).

³² My translation.

³³ Some days later, in the seventeenth evening narration, as the visitors are departing the forest of the muleteers where the cudgel fight occurred, Joseph recalls how he was unable to see what had happened to the contestants, especially to the defeated Malzac. It is not quite clear here whether he is describing his actual condition at the time or whether he is only pretending in order to hide from the young women the death of the giant:

En voyant hier notre Huriel se battre si résolument, les jambes m'ont manqué, et, me sentant plus faible qu'une femme, j'aurais, pour un rien, perdu ma connaissance; mais, en même temps que mon corps s'en allait

Before we explain the phenomenon of *orblutes* and related *orblute*-like visions, it is useful to point out that this discussion does not stretch our main argument out to a totally irrelevant point beyond the horizon. Nor is it merely a useful metaphor that is being followed through its trajectory during the nineteenth century, sometimes passing by scientific and sometimes literary exempla that help us to understand the state of mind Alfred Dreyfus claims to have experienced during his lengthy period of confusion and rage against the world. The same sense that underlies the phenomenon, response and metaphorical enhancements that centre on the *orblutes* per se also can be found at work in *orblute*-like phenomena that are associated, explicitly or indirectly, with aesthetic processes. This will be seen to occur around the development of impressionistic theories of painting, music and other arts, wherein the shimmering, ephemeral and stimulative effects modify older aesthetic principles of mimetic, narrative and moral representation, based on momentous or timeless paradigms to be embodied or enacted; whereas the impressionistic concern is for the instantaneous, usually unrepeatable but obsessively sought-after experience of feelings as they break through set-patterns, fissure fixed paradigms of signifying, and leave meaningful gaps and traces of a presence that is lost before it has been registered on the sensoria or recorded in memory. J.W. Mackail, for instance, introducing one of

défaillant, mon cœur devenait chaud et mes yeux ne lâchaient point de regarder le combat. Quand Huriel a abattu son homme et qu'il est resté debout, il m'a passé un vertige, et, si je ne me fusse retenu, j'aurais crié victoire, et même chanté comme un fou ou comme un homme pris de vin (*Les Maîtres Sonneurs*, p. 286).

Seeing yesterday our Huriel striking so resolutely, my limbs gave way, and, feeling myself more weak than a woman, I would, for nothing, have lost consciousness, but, at the same time as my body was giving way, my heart became warm and my eyes would not focus on the combat at all. When Huriel had beaten his man and he remained standing, I experienced a vertigo, and if I had not controlled myself, I would have cried victory, and similarly sung like a madman or like a man in his cups. (My translation)

The phenomenon of *orblutes* is here very much a physical rather than a psychological response to the overwhelming feelings raised by the sight of this mortal struggle. The general feeling of weakness, hot flushes, dizziness and exaltation makes him fear he is like a woman.

Maurice Maeterlinck's "spectral plays", *Aglavaine and Selsette*, remarks that their characters

...flicker on the verge of embodiment, like a flame in the doorway...articulate phantoms...hollow masks shaped into a sort of human likeness, and seen like lights in a blur of mist...³⁴

Maeterlinck's style is called degenerate and irrational by writers such as Max Nordau because the vague, insubstantial and confusing dramatizations and fragmentary, impressionistic speeches do not fit with the classical ideal of the well-made and proportioned work of art. But Mackail praises the Belgian dramatist for the capture of impulses and feelings caught in their "freshness" of minds caught up in the swirl of experience³⁵

Evidence now shows that from his early days of his confinement as a convicted traitor and spy, he was reading books and trying to keep his mind focused, sane and healthy. After leaving Paris and before departing for Devil's Island, Dreyfus spent thirty-six days (from 17 January to 21 February 1895) at the penitentiary of Saint-Martin-de-Ré. Subject to the regime of close scrutiny by guards who were not permitted to speak to him, he suffered from terrible headaches (according to newspaper reports, "Le condamné se plaint de cerveau, du système nerveux" [The condemned man complained of pains in his head and in his nervous system] and was taking two spoons of bromide per day.³⁶ Over the more than five weeks he was in this prison on the coastal island, all his activities were strictly monitored and recorded, and it is reported by Florence Muel:

Il lit beaucoup, trente-trois livres, en tout pendant son séjour. Il a reçu l'autorisation de choisir des ouvrages dans la bibliothèque du dépôt, qui sont bien sur fouilles avant de lui être remis. Il lit de tout : Jules Verne (*L'Île Mystérieuse, Cinq semaines en ballon*),³⁷ George Sand (*La Petite*

³⁴ J.W. Mackail, « Introduction » to Maurice Maeterlinck, *Aglavaine and Selysette : A Drama in Five Acts*, trans. Alfred Sutro (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1915; orig. 1897) pp. x-xi.

³⁵ Mackail, « Introduction » pp. viii-ix.

³⁶ Florence Muel, "La Charente inférieure et l'affaire Dreyfus" Documents du temps passé Evénements (25 June 2007) online philippepoisson.unblog.fr/category/evenements (seen 07/05/2012).

³⁷ It is tempting to see in these early science-fiction narratives a presentiment of his own long ordeal on a mysterious island, most troubling because he cannot understand why he has been sent there against the normal code of military justice and because his whole life has become an incomprehensible enigma to him. It is as though he were lifted out of all that was familiar and ordinary to him and made to

Fadette), des récits de voyage, Charles Dickens (*David Copperfield*), mais aussi une histoire de l'Amérique, des méthodes d'anglais et d'italien.

He read a great deal, thirty-three books in all during his stay. He received authorization to choose works from the institutional library, books that were carefully searched before being given to him. He read all of: Jules Verne (*The Mysterious Island* and *Five Weeks in a Balloon*), George Sand (*Little Fadette*), travellers' tales, Charles Dickens (*David Copperfield*), but also a history of America and lessons in English and Italian.

These books seem to conform to the request Alfred was later to make to his wife to send him light reading, as though he felt he could not bring to bear enough attention for something more substantial. His interest in travel to distant parts of the world, both in novels and historical works, indicates that he was probably looking beyond the years of exile and isolation that lay before him and also already thinking of perhaps leaving France if and when he were released. Most significantly here is his choice of *La Petite Fadette*, suggesting that the ideas and images of this novel would remain with him and provide insights into his own condition.

The prison officials also noted the following facts about his state of mind, indications of the relevance of the figure of the *orblutes*, however much its significance remains at a mostly unconscious level for Dreyfus.

Il dort beaucoup, et va jusqu'à ronfler. Son sommeil est souvent agité. Il lui arrive de se lever vers les onze heures du soir pour manger du pain et du fromage, et ensuite se recouche. Il pleure, surtout la nuit ; lui-même écrira plus tard : « J'ai dû, pour qui les gardiens ne m'entendissent pas, tant j'étais honteux de ma faiblesse, étouffer mes pleurs sous, mes couvertures. Il a des mauvais rêves : ainsi, dans la nuit du 19 janvier 1895, croit-il qu'il est enlevé dans une voiture. Il parle tout seul : les gardiens relèvent ses paroles, comme lorsqu'il dit le 4 février 1895 : « On finira bien le trouver le misérable. »

He slept a great deal, up to the point of snoring. His sleep was often agitated. He would get up at around eleven o'clock in the evening to eat some bread and cheese, and then go back to bed. He himself later wrote: "So that my guards would not hear me, I was so ashamed of my weakness, I muffled my tears under the blankets." He had bad dreams; thus on the night of 19 January 1895, he believed he was being taken away in a

float above the world of politics, domestic security and his own career in the military. Dickens' *David Copperfield* may have appealed as a story of a young man, lifted out of what seemed normality, who must fight against adversity and, facing the mysteries of life, create his own success.

carriage. He talked to himself and his guards noted his words, as when he said on 4 February 1895: “*It will end well when they find the miserable one [that is, when the real culprit is found].*”

On the whole, the conditions in Saint Ré were relatively mild compared to what Dreyfus would find on the other side of the Atlantic, although the rehearsal for his silent treatment and tortures can also be seen here. Dressed in civilian clothes and kept away from other prisoners, being searched every time he went out for exercise in the yard and returned to his cell, he was clearly not like the other military prisoners on their way to Cayenne. But it is also possible to see in Dreyfus’ reading and nervous anxiety the pattern of his own future response to exile. Muel continues her summing up of various journalists’ reports and prison records:

Ses plus grandes occupations sont sans contexte l’écriture et la lecture de son courrier. Les consignes concernant ses correspondances changent au cours de son séjour. Tout est strictement contrôlé par le Directeur du dépôt ou par le directeur de l’Administration pénitentiaire. Dans sa cellule, il n’a à sa disposition ni papier, ni plume, ni encre. Il lui faut les demander. Il ne peut écrire que deux jours par semaine et seulement à sa femme, qui, selon le Directeur de l’Administration pénitentiaire, « *peut se charger de donner des nouvelles à toute sa famille* ».

His main unstructured occupations were writing and reading his mail. The restrictions on his correspondence changed in the course of his stay. All was strictly controlled by the director of the military depot or by the director of the prison administration. In his cell, he had at his disposition neither paper nor pen nor ink. He had to ask for them. He could only write on two days of the week and only to his wife who, according to the prison director, “*could pass on news to the rest of her family.*”

Then comes another humiliating restriction imposed on Dreyfus that shows the mean-spiritedness of those charged with his care:

A partir du 29 janvier 1895 pour quelques jours, il est privé de recevoir des nouvelles de sa femme. A cette annonce, il s’écrie que s’il est abandonné de sa femme autant le tuer, que la vie pour lui n’est plus rien. Ultérieurement, ces mesures sont assouplies. En trente-six jours à Saint-Martin-de-Ré, Dreyfus envoie vingt-huit lettres, essentiellement à sa femme, mais aussi à des ministres (de la Marine, de la Guerre, des Colonies). Il reçoit soixante missives : une par jour de sa femme, de ses frères et sœurs, mais également de Washington et de Norvège. Certaines provoquent des réactions de colère, ou de désarroi.

For a few days from 29 January 1895 he was deprived of news from his wife. When this was announced, he shouted that if were separated from his wife he would rather die as life would no longer have any meaning for him. Finally the measures were relaxed. Over thirty-six days in Saint Martin de Ré, Dreyfus sent twenty-eight letters, mostly to his wife, but also to ministers (of Marine, War and the Colonies). He received sixty missives: one a day from his wife, his brothers and sisters, but equally from Washington and Norway. Some of them provoked angry or wild reactions.

It should already be clear that without Lucie, Dreyfus could not have survived the long years of exile, just as without books to read he could not have maintained his sanity. As the various officials in Paris and in the prisons in which he was incarcerated realized his mental state, they were able to use censorship and delays in his receipt of mail as a way of adding to his torture.

Further discussion of Alfred's condition and efforts to keep himself in a positive state of mind and Lucie's and the rest of the family's efforts on his behalf will be deferred to subsequent chapters of this book. What should be clear is that Dreyfus was thrust into a strange nightmarish world beyond his full reckoning and that much of what he saw, wrote, did and remembered belong to the ambiguous phenomena associated with *orblutes*, both as uncanny events in the harsh real world and in the more inner-directed experiences of hallucination.

Another example of the phenomenon, but without any specific term, occurs in a German text from a period closer to Dreyfus's own experiences. Max Nordau cites Gerard Hauptmann's short novel *Bahnwärter Thiel* (The Signalman)³⁸ as exemplary of the modern realistic degeneracy in literature:

The Scotch firs... rubbed their branches squeaking against each other,' and ' a noisy squeaking, rattling, clattering, and clashing [of a train with the brake on] broke upon the stillness of the evening.

The problem with this novelistic text, says Nordau, is that "One and the same word [is used] to describe the noise of branches rubbing each other, and of a train with the brake on!" As is typical of this philosophical critic, with his special concern for psychological lapses in the innovative

³⁸ The translation of *Bahnwärter Thiel* by Wallace Johnson made in 1989 is available online at [www.dmoz.org/ Arts/Literature/Authors/H/ Hauptmann Gerhart/Works](http://www.dmoz.org/Arts/Literature/Authors/H/Hauptmann_Gerhart/Works) (seen 14 March 2012).

developments in nineteenth-century thought, Nordau tends to show little or no appreciation of wit, imaginative play or even traditional literary ploys.

The critic goes on to cite several other related passages in Hauptmann's novel:

Two red round lights [those of a locomotive] pierced the darkness like the fixed and staring eyes of a gigantic monster. The sun...sparkling at its rising like an enormous blood-red jewel. The sky which caught, like a gigantic and stainlessly blue bowl of crystal, the golden light of the sun. The sky like an empty pale-blue bowl of crystal. The moon hung, comparable to a lamp, above the forest.'

In response to these colourful and descriptive lines, the German critic asks almost disingenuously, "How can an author who has any respect for himself employ comparisons which would make a journeyman tailor who dabbled in writing blush? Besides, what countless slovenlinesses!" But are these lines written without skill or insight into the nature of the modern experience of rapid trains hurtling through the night or of the hallucinations of man driven into murderous rage by his aggressive and cruel second wife? Nordau's sense of what is right and proper, classically controlled and conventionally normal in perception, themselves fall flat when he attacks Hauptmann's prose and calls him a degenerate author. His own *fin-de-siècle* positivism fails to appreciate the nature of the experience Hauptmann attempts to record.

When the psychologist *cum* critic continues with his quotation from this novel about a railway guard, and he uses terms that bring us back to our earlier discussion of George Sand's rescue of the archaic term *orblutes* to designate a psychological phenomenon she sees as crucial in her own childhood development as an artist: "Before his eyes floated pell-mell little yellow points like glow-worms." This is a hallucination generated partly by the physical experience of the event and partly by the strangeness of the signalman's mental reception. Yet with literal-minded obstinacy, Nordau complains: "Glow-worms do not give out a yellow, but a bluish, light." This statement, however, as we shall see, brings up another question, apparently subordinate to the question of realism, but actually much more central to our understanding of what Alfred Dreyfus was able to think about under the intense pressure of his imprisonment and the profound shock of realizing his whole view of the world was now rocked off its original foundation. What are colours at the end of the nineteenth century,

after the Impressionist revolution in seeing and in the middle of the post-Impressionist transformation of aesthetic and philosophical thought?³⁹

Here is the complete passage in Wallace Johnson's more recent translation, and by carefully looking at it and contextualizing it in terms of nineteenth-century aesthetics and psychology, we may be able to use it to appreciate better not what Dreyfus was feeling in his horridly hot and cramped imprisonment on Devil's Island but how he struggled in his own mind to maintain his sanity against all the odds of humiliation, exile and shame. Thiel the Signalmann has brought his wife into the field along the railway tracks where he works. While she digs potatoes into the ground the railway company has granted permission for the worker to use, Thiel has been coerced into leaving his son by a first marriage with this huge bullying woman supposedly to look after her own baby whom she favours. The signalmann has premonitions about something terrible that will happen, as he has already seen this second wife Lene beat and berate little Tobias, but was powerless to stop her. Now he realizes that the boy, excited on his first outing into the fields and fascinated by the railway lines and the telegraph wires that hum above it, will not be properly looked after by the step-mother. As throughout the text of the novella, the narrator follows the rhythm of thinking and feeling in Thiel and the other characters: virtually primitives cut off from the modern industrial world, though modern science and technology pass through along with the steam engines that hurtle down the tracks, images, emotions, and events occur which are not immediately grasped, which skim by almost without registering, and are only grasped—and then at a distorting angle—several lines or paragraphs later. Unable to understand the strange and bizarre things around him and the intense feelings inside his body, Thiel confuses hallucinations, fantasies and his own emotions. Hence this passage which follows his gradual awareness that something untoward has happened when the passing express comes to an unexpected halt, travelers stick their heads out the windows, and officials step down to inspect something on the ground, all amidst sounds of surprise, horror and sympathy. Someone comes to bring him to the place where everyone else's attention is fixed:

He ran with the messenger, he did not see the deadly-pale, shocked faces of the travellers in the train windows. A young woman shouted out, there was a business traveller in a fez, a young couple, apparently on their

³⁹ These questions, complex in their ramifications beyond the person and ordeal of Dreyfus, must be put off until we complete our next major study of the Jewish imagination and how it challenges and changes the world.

honeymoon. What was he concerned about? He did not pay any attention to the contents of this rattling box, his ears were filled with Lene's howling. Swimming around before his eyes, he saw innumerable yellow spots, like glow-worms. He recoiled, he stood there. Out of the dance of the glow-worms emerged something pale, limp and bleeding, a forehead beaten black and blue, blue lips, over which black blood dripped. It was him.

Johnson points out in a series of notes to his translation that he has felt compelled to smooth out the text and use common modern English locutions in place of the awkward and untranslatable German phrases Hauptmann wrote. Details pile up almost randomly, as though the eye that perceived—and the pen that recorded these perceptions—were unable to see relationships, causal sequences, or meaningful patterns. In the original text, furthermore, there are also not always clear appositives to pronouns, and things happen to an indeterminate “it” or are given in passive constructions so that the actor or the object of the action remains at best ambiguous.

In Nordau's account, the translation made not to enhance the German novel but to exemplify the critic's argument, shows how the railway man experienced the occasion: “His glassy pupils moved incessantly.” Nordau objects: “This is a phenomenon which no one has yet seen.” Because Nordau wants to show how the degenerate mind works without coherence, continuity or resonance in the scientific philosophy of his time, he finds Hauptmann's description offensive to the rationalist's sense of factual truth. He assumes that the purpose of art is to represent the natural world as accurately as possible, like a photograph, to be sure, albeit within the boundaries of traditional realism, and with the social agenda of the Naturalist movement. Thus when Nordau reads, “The trunks of the fir-trees stretched like pale decayed bones between the summits” he cries out in near despair: “Bones are that part of the body which does not decay.” A better reading, perhaps based on the hindsight of more than a century of familiarity with the insights of psychoanalysis and anthropology, recognizes the nightmarish state of Thiel's mind as it tries to make sense out of the scene that only comes into focus with great difficulty before him, a scene clouded over by misunderstandings, a passionate moral need to deny what opens before it, and the sheer physical and psychological pain of recognizing the mangled and bloody corpse as his beloved son Tobias. Hauptmann's descriptions, in other words, are not verbal representations of the natural world; they are correlatives of the mental processes overlaid in the experiences of the traumatic moment. Like George Sand's *orblutes*, the innumerable yellow spots before his eyes are

distortions of blinding light producing illusions produced on his retina and incoherent figments of disassociated imagery playing in his imagination.⁴⁰

This is the point at which we leave off one approach to the study of Alfred Dreyfus and move into this third volume of books on the man, the wife, his intellectual, emotional, aesthetic and spiritual experiences. In George Sand's attempt to recreate the state of mind she had as a very young child, reflected and refracted through the mentality of a middle-aged woman and an accomplished novelist, we grasp the deep heritage of introspection and psychological (moral) analysis Alfred engages in both in

⁴⁰ According to Shoshanna [the author goes only by her first name and wishes otherwise to remain anonymous] on the *East European Jewish History* site: "Don't second-guess G-d. The RESULTS count. Actions count. Often the reasons that people think make them do things are mirages, changeable. Thoughts are not reality, they don't even identify a person" (posting on EEJH 29 March 2012), on the one hand a rather mystical and bizarre statement on the unreality of the world or at least human experiences thereof. On the other hand, this is a very Orthodox Jewish notion that puts reality firmly into actions in the world rather than thoughts about experience and memory. The argument that brought forth these remarks concerned whether or not more French men and women were making *aliyah* (migrating) to Israel because of recent acts of anti-Semitism or the apparent rise in numbers of *olim* (migrants) was part of a longer term trend: that is, whether God was creating a miracle out of the evil in the world and Jewish people's fearful decisions or whether the real *mitzvah* (religious obligation and blessing) belonged to a rational strategic choice in the process over many years. Shoshanna also adds: "Their intentions also don't count, until they actually make the action." Such a view departs radically from Platonic notions and subsequent modes of philosophical Idealism wherein there is a both a disjunction between the material universe, which is an illusion or a distorted image of the spiritual universe—the true and eternal world of pure ideas—and an incompatibility between their concepts of what is real. Rabbinical Judaism sees a meeting point between the spiritual realm of divine existence and the mortal experience of human experience in the fulfillment of the *mitzvot*, in active engagement with the created world. Hebrew forms of Kabbalah, however, are more ambiguous, some versions tending towards Gnostic and Neo-Platonic mystical concepts that conceive as the world as real insofar as it is composed of letters (*otiot*, both lexical units of a human language, each *ot* or letter embodying divine energy); and other versions that are more speculative insofar as they superadd to the performance of *mitzvot*, including the sacred texts they derive from and the method of interpretation and application thereof. In this light, when we consider Dreyfus's attempts to maintain his sanity and his strength of character, along with Lucie's efforts to guide, comfort and support him, it is not the inner emotional world of intentionality or aspiration that counts as much as the actions taken to aid one another and the resulting success in gaining his freedom and then his exoneration.