HÉLÈNE CIXOUS Philippines

TRANSLATED BY LAURENT MILESI

PHILIPPINES

HÉLÈNE CIXOUS



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PHILIPPINES

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AUTHOR'S NOTE

Let's return to the starting point.

Every one of us has a secret book. It is a cherished book. It is not beautiful. Not great. Not so well written. We don't care. For it is goodness itself for us. The absolute friend. It promises and lives up to what it promises. We forget it but it never forgets us. It knows everything about us but it does not know it knows. If Freud had been asked to name his secret(ive) book, he would not have hesitated: it would have been *The Jungle Book*. The one book Proust loved above all others was *Le Capitaine Fracasse*. Proust might have read the book which makes me weep. I myself never read it: I dream it. I live it again. This book about which you see me thinking, as if I could see its two characters, sitting in the corner of the hall, gently holding hands, this book with almost supernatural powers, no doubt its title will seem as foreign to you as the character of the Capitaine Fracasse is to me, its loud-sounding name: *Peter Ibbetson*. I hold it as dear as the apple of my eye, just as I hold dear the condition, the law, the grace, of my whole life: *the gift of dreaming true*, *through the prison bars*. Isn't this book some sort of fortune-telling book for me? I never think about it.

This Peter has a twin sister. She is Gradiva. The two books were born at a distance and at the same time, each in a different language. Perhaps from an undiagnosed telepathy?

They tell the same story. It is about death and resurrection. The author? now he is called George du Maurier, now he is called Wilhelm Jensen. The author has a similar stroke of genius. This stroke of genius is so strong that it can take place only once. Genius is stronger than the author. Same for the Apocalypse. The illumination takes place only once. So that it can be said that there is no author any longer. The Book of Revelation is dictated by a telepathic act. 'The author' will have been the medium for a manifestation of supernatural forces. The two authors in question are true conductors of these thunderstriking phenomena. The whole irradiating truth is gathered in the destiny of one single soul with two bodies: Peter and his Tower, the Duchess of Towers. Look. From one second to the next, our heroes are hurled forever into the same psychical space. What takes place? During the initial collision, there is a transference of the seat of life to the place of the other. This can be compared to a postnatal twinship. Each makes the life of the other. The first who dies kills the other by telepathy.

Peter Ibbetson says something to me

Is it a book? What is a book? What am I doing when I

lock myself with it in a feverish tête-à-tête from which I cannot wrench myself? I get up ten times. I return to the book, I am summoned, bewitched, held back by the mysterious forces of Reading. I can hear its siren's murmur: *Let's return to the starting point*, come on, come with me. And that's what I want above all: I want a book to make itself dream [*fasse rêve*] and bring me back to childhoods. To read is nothing but that, is it not? To return to one-self in prehistory, in those legendary times when we were toddling and telepathing round the world on all fours and eight paws to see where its opening was. As always for those expeditions, the traveller must be able to have at his disposal in the book these magic primitive objects which will enable him to establish radio links with legendary times. Starting for me with: *a Gate*.

And also: *a Garden*. One keeping (watch over) the other. There is a child. We are in his timeless gaze.

When one day I find out, when I recognize my garden, I will ask myself how Peter Ibbetson's garden at Auteuil could have been, from a distance in time and in space, the dazzling prefigure of the Garden of the Cercle Militaire in Oran.

Peter Ibbetson, you say. Which one? The book? The film? Or else the prisoner or the escapee? For there are two Peter Ibbetsons which make philippine from a distance, one being the one who dreams, the other the one who is dreamt, one returning from the other, to the other. It so happens that Peter Ibbetson the first, the one who brought me to tears, with which I first found myself behind bars, will have been the film Peter Ibbetson.

It was the most beautiful film in the world.

This film by Henry Hathaway was not a film, I want

to make it clear. It's a Revelation. The true authors of this Dream filmed in a state of dream are the adorable Inventors of the Dreaming True, the Great Dreamed Ones whose names are sometimes Peter and Mary, but not always. Like all those invited in dreams, they have transfigureal names and figures: sometimes Gogo, Mimsey, Gary Cooper, they are themselves mistaken, fail to know themselves, tremble with emotion, which allows them to taste the painful happiness of double love. Of dual love. Under the borrowed names, under the new bodies which lead them astray, under the foliage whose French look conceals the fabulous forest of A Midsummer Night's Dream, they are subjected to the laws of a strange attraction. The everlasting childhood which plays within them on the ruins of names thwarts the Prisons and Towers of lost time ...

It is time I returned to my subject, which is *Philippine*. Or Philippines.

Now I am going to tell you the secret of *Philippine*: it's an *amande* with an a. It's an almond with two almonds. One of the two almonds has to make amends. It follows that the other also has to amend. It's a play of almonds. A double play. What is there in *Amande*? There is the double charm of an *âme* (soul) which sum*monds* two people not to forget each other, to call each other by the same name, to precede each other, to echo, dissociate and reflect each other. As if they were mutually almonding and amending each other.

From almond to almond the almond enshrines itself, promises itself, steals away, receives, an emblematic fruit of hospitality, *Mandorla* for the Virgin with child, host and hostess, passive and active, chaste and destined to be peeled, as I am doing now by opening the envelope of its names. Philippine is the androgynous almond. It always thinks about love.

Let's return to the gate of the first garden: we are always on the other side of bars. Look on the other side. You see?

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Let's return – revenons.

Days of a neat, pure and ruling sun, moments when one truly sees all the realities, starting with the muddled hearts of men and the burning arena of the first wars and the extraordinary beauty of trees that watch human carnage, a novelty, and the voiceless pain of the skinned calf. These days have an unforgettable address (rue Philippe).

'*Revenons*' will be my first word. As long as I shall live, and even more perhaps.

Let's return to our starting point [Revenons à notre point de départ].

As soon as I hear this word, this sentence, *revenons*, I feel uplifted by a melancholy enthusiasm. Warm winds hailing from the word – rather than the trains which whistle for Proust – and I have already yielded to the temptation to

I shall sing of the infinite mighty power of such a sentence, for me, over me, in me. Of the quasi-omnipotence – for instance, of this one: *Revenons à notre point de départ*. You're disappointed? Maybe it seems ordinary to you, dull as a lead casket? And yet. I've got another one for you, which is apparently more seductive, culled in the dawn of this spring morning.

Hold your crown tight [tiens ferme ta couronne]. I feel I have in my mind like the Lake of Geneva invisible at night. I have the faces of four young girls, two bell towers, a noble lineage, a 'let's go further' in the Normandy hydrangea, which I don't know what I will do with <sometimes become fetishes whose meaning I no longer know $[...]^1$

'Hold your crown tight. I feel I have in my mind like the Lake of Geneva invisible at night.' I read this and I weep. Tears, tears of joy. Tears at being reunited. Reunited with my lost paradise. I weep over learning, as I find it again, that I had lost it, I weep over finding it again in order to lose it. I weep with the joy of weeping. As long as I weep, it is still here, enduringly, sparkling under the fine shower of tears I hold my crown with a passionate shudder. Its circle contains as many treasures as a magic cup of tea. I have here the first fragrant essences of the earth, a red earth where worms of a live-red glass squirm, Mamma's forceful absence, my tiny little brother squatting in a corner, a vast military storm over my heads, soon there will be jeeps, tanks, helicopters and a handful of overblonde children, oh yes and a big stone too, a temple for an anthill which is the whole of humankind. The perimeter is made up of tall stalks of a golden metal. Gate [grille]. And sentences burning like red pimiento spat out by a viper's tongue on that face of mine with its forever lost smile. At age three this child already knows everything that is in store for her. The times are near. Death enters. Already! And a 'let's return to our starting point' which startles me with a violent prophetic happiness, which becomes that very instant a fetish whose meaning I do not know, which picks me up and saves me. Which brings me back home, with tears which necessity changes into an intense reflexion. Hold, shut your crown tight [*tiens*, *ferme ta couronne*], I say to myself keeping for later all those pieces that shine true.

That was on 21 March. In 2008.

I had just found. Cobblestones trodden with joy. A sentence of gold and silver which glistens on the cobblestones of rue du Cercle Militaire. It is mine since I found it. I apply the literary principle here. Just as Proust finds his magic crown in a wood of Nerval's. He takes it. And becomes a daughter of fire. Another time, not far from a track beaten by Chateaubriand, there he becomes a 'realized sylph'. I apply the alchemy of literary telepathy here, whose formula, well known to the fanatics, is: 'Senancour c'est moi' (Senancour: that's me). In a single word, just as 'ces âmes' (these souls) sounds like 'sésame' (sesame): Senancourcémoi. Among dreamers of the true there is communication. A banal and marvellous phenomenon. One walks in the forests of books and suddenly this is my crown, it is the very sensation. Here's a sentence wholly my own: 'Which proves a mysterious relation between -(truth and natural beauty, X's brain and H's heart).'

I live on the hypothesis that there would have been one single huge Garden from the beginning of time whose circle-shaped enclosure would hold a set G of gardens which have whirled about since time immemorial and alight here and there in the instant of a foreign garden.

'Hold your crown tight [Tiens ferme ta couronne]' ...

Did I write this sentence? I must have written it in another life. Or else dreamt it. And returned [*revenue*]. I recognize it from the happiness which it kindles in me and which awakens me.

Let's return to our starting point. (Which starting point? where? who? what?) Don't leave. 'To-day we will proceed along a narrow, uneven path, but one which will lead us to a magnificent prospect.' Pretend it is Dr Freud who's telling you this and lend a benevolent ear to what I'm going to say. Since I have lived with this sentence (Revenons, etc.) for a month. I know its force and that under its modest appearance it is charged with desires, with promises of incredible delights, and with magic nostalgias. It does not sound like much but deliberately so. In truth it knows everything. Out of tenderness and politeness it presents itself like an effortless, slightly vague, yet pressing invitation. You remember this extravagant path which Proust took in order to initiate us into the mysteries of 'the instigatrix whose magic keys unlock at the bottom of ourselves the door of abodes into which we would not have known how to step', that is to say, La Lecture (Reading), also called 'the original psychological act'? You remember that, in order to lead us to think what Reading is, he proceeded to evoke in minute detail the places and days when he himself made the discovery of the Original Act, and how he guided us in his Reading Chamber, a real bazaar or else a supernatural and familiar theatre whose stage is surrounded by several circles of curtains cut from different fabrics, in marceline, in cambric, in guipure, all of them white naturally.

How he made us enter and exit the sanctuary in order to lead us to another sanctuary, designed like the vegetal double of the inner chamber, an arbour shrouded in pruned hazelnut trees and located at the far end of the park, where the river ceases to be *a line of water covered with signs*, I mean *swans* [une ligne d'eau couverte de cygnes], and lined with statues, and like a book wings its way across the park enclosure.

You have not forgotten how this superposition of magic spells, a true grimoire full of signs . . .

is what he calls Reading.

You remember that this Itinerary leads us through space to the beginning of times, to the origin, to the first days of the creation of the prophetic soul, to the creator's childhood, before creation, to the state of the young Siddhartha under the boughs of his baobab.

You have not forgotten that, like a dreamer unsure as to whether he is being dreamt or awake, when, lagging behind, you felt you were lingering, through the suggestive force of a bard reincarnated from the legendary bards, 'along these flowery by-ways', it sometimes occurred to you to wonder where you were, in whose house, doing what, whereas you thought you could remember you had left in order to read, 'to read' a 'book', but to read, what is it? So a book was not what you thought it was, you had set out early in the morning, intent on reading a serious book by Proust, a solemn tome by Freud - and there we are in another book, and yet another, and then in a chamber full to the brim of the soul of others, there is in the mandorla Mamma's smiling face behind which I can hear a mocking bird's short burst of laughter, it's Papa, happy as a Holy Spirit, through the multicoloured panes of the glass door. I can see us, me and my brother, hiding under the sheets the secret life and all the secrets of the life lurking behind the curtain of the improvised theatre when we began inventing counter-stories, thus it means I have returned [revenue] to 54 rue Philippe in Oran while following in young Proust's footsteps, at the dawn of creation, in the workshop of telepathies.

It's springtime. All of a sudden a need awakens, the ancient, ageless desire to drink the immortal songs of birds, birds die, songs resume, the need to hear invisible *Voices*, to watch the dead branches give way to the victorious buds, to set a limit to hibernation, and all those ancient forces which govern me, over me and in me, gather into a precise, shining, urgent idea: I want to read *Peter Ibbetson*. Read? Read the source, the torment, both together. Read? Appease the hunger of the soul which remembers the taste of illumination. Eat the light. Shed the tears. Restore the current of life cut off by winters. Set immortality in motion again. From a great distance, from the far end of the cave of secrets, Peter Ibbetson returns. I open the window. I hear his child's voices. Reading starts again! We were sick with death. The seed picks up again

[...] during which the thousand sensations emanated from the depth of our good health follow the infinite movement of our thoughts and make up around it, from the flower of all our unconscious well-beings, the honey of a soft golden pleasure which mingles with our ardent meditation like a quiet smile. This art $[...]^2$

Books, deliver us, make us delirious [*livres*, *délivrez-nous*, *délirez-nous*], lead us into the garden of Unland where the flowers grow whose adored names we had forgotten, where, under the clumps of thyme perhaps or between the tall stalks of acanthus, I find the keys to