

ON DIALOGUE AND THE OTHER: AN INTERVIEW WITH EDMOND JABÈS

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The following interview took place in Paris on May 30, 1985, at the home of Edmond Jabès.*

Richard Stamelman: Most of the questions I would like to ask you this afternoon concern *Le Livre du dialogue*, published last year by Gallimard. I want to focus our discussion primarily on this book because it seems to me a work of great emotional and lyrical power, for here the interest in the nature of dialogue and otherness and in a poetics of allocution, which have been major concerns of your writing from the beginning, is developed in new and more explicit ways. Here you write, for example, that “Capital est le dialogue”¹ and that to live is to be in a state of perpetual dialogue. I quote: “Everything that we see, hear, draw near to, once we become aware of it, enters into dialogue with us.”²

There are several resemblances between *Le Livre du dialogue* and such other works of yours as *Le Livre des questions* (1963–73) and *Le Livre des ressemblances* (1976–80). In *Le Livre du dialogue* you continue, for example, to examine such subjects as the Book, exile, errancy, and the Jewish condition. Moreover, between your earlier works and *Le Livre du dialogue* there are also formal and structural resemblances; the same kinds of questions, quotations, and fragments are evident. But in reading *Le Livre du dialogue* I was struck by its differences. For example, you no longer refer by name to imaginary rabbis, as you have often done in other works. And although you continue to make considerable use of dialogues where questions and answers are exchanged, it appears that these now involve a different kind of exchange between a master and his disciple. Finally, you appear to refer much more often to an anonymous

subject who is designated solely by the pronoun *il*. Why, then, have these changes and modifications taken place? Was this a decision on your part to make the book different from your earlier work and, if so, does it indicate an evolution in your thinking about some of the themes that have concerned you over the years? Do you, for example, still conceive of dialogue in the same way?

Edmond Jabès: When you say that I have always referred to rabbis, this is not quite accurate, because in *Yaël* and *Elya*, there are no characters at all outside of the word [*la parole*], which is symbolized by a woman, and the writer who uses this word. These two works present the relation of a writer to his own word. In *Le Livre du dialogue* it is somewhat the same thing. For example, when someone asks you, "For whom do you write; is it for yourself or for an other?", I personally find this question unnecessary. One cannot *not* write for someone, even if this "someone" is oneself. It is a question of doubling. You cannot really talk to yourself because there is always the other who sends your word back to you, a word that has passed through this other's reflection, sensibility, and being. It is the other, therefore, who gives us the exact dimension of the word. Now, what happens when this other does not exist? Well, we then have to invent one who would be what we might call "the ideal accomplice" and who exists because of all that we have had to leave out of our speaking. When we assert something, we are never certain of it; we assert it only after having dismissed many other things.

What happens, then, in a dialogue that we have with ourselves? We give the other the possibility of taking responsibility for all that we have left out of our speaking, of all that was not said when we asserted, for example, that "this thing is white," or that "today is Thursday" or that "the sky is grey." An affirmation like "the sky is grey" seems to remove all doubt; how can one possibly doubt that the sky is grey. But these doubts do exist. It is then that the other intervenes, the other self that is me. This other part of myself intervenes and asks, "This grey, is it truly grey; is it not some other thing?" And it is at such moments as these that we can enter into the fine points, specifying certain things and explaining ourselves a little bit better. This, I believe, is very important.

Now, there is something that I had completely forgotten but which an interviewer for German radio, who visited me recently, brought to my attention. He told me that he found it odd that in

Le Livre du dialogue I say that everything is dialogue, while in another book I declare that there is no such thing as dialogue. I was for a moment taken aback. But then I realized that whenever dialogue does appear, it doesn't seem like dialogue. Rather, it is a kind of monologue with oneself. If in that earlier work I had said that there was no dialogue, it was probably because I wanted to say that every dialogue returns us to ourselves, that from our monologue a dialogue suddenly springs forth. Nevertheless, whether monologue or dialogue, it is for us simply a need to speak.

One could say that monologue and dialogue suit each other, and in *Le Livre du dialogue* one finds them both developed, because what people often call "true dialogue" (the one we are engaged in right now, for example, or that we recommend as being the right kind of dialogue) is for me unsatisfying. This is because true, really true dialogue comes about only after we have gone back to being alone with ourselves. It is at that moment that the questions we have asked and the discussions we have had begin to appear in their necessity; what we retain of them is only what seemed to us at the time really necessary. That doesn't mean that what we retain is better or more important than the rest; no, it is perhaps less important. But for us it triggers something else. It is at this extremely profound level of dialogue that *Le Livre du dialogue* can be situated. That is, one must bring it all back to a personal word which becomes in a certain way a monologue. One passes through three stages: first, the preparation for the encounter, which is already the beginnings of dialogue; then, the dialogue itself, a taking hold [*une prise*] in which each person sizes up the other according to his personal interest; and next, the break, the separation. And if the dialogue was as important for one person as for the other, it is going to continue. And that is how true dialogue takes place, because, as far as I'm concerned, at the moment you take your leave, the dialogue that we have arranged between us—the discussion or conversation that we have had together—will produce something that is important for me, something that I am going to take note of. I'm going to think of you afterwards, and I'm going to continue the dialogue. I'll say, "Hey, I didn't tell you, but here it is, here is everything important that I didn't know how to put into words."

RS: So the function of the other is to reveal to us things about which we had never thought before the appearance of the other?

EJ: I wouldn't say things that we had never thought of. One can have thoughts about these things, but they are not formulated. The other enables one to formulate such things.

RS: You have just defined what you consider to be the three different dimensions or forms of dialogue: there is first *l'avant-dialogue*, which sets things in motion; then *l'après-dialogue*, the "after-silence" of an encounter during which one takes note of and ponders what was left unsaid; and finally, the true dialogue itself. Would you talk further about these dialogues: In what ways, for example, does *l'avant-dialogue* resemble *l'après-dialogue*? And how would you describe the relationships and interactions among the three dialogic forms you have identified?

EJ: *L'avant-dialogue* is the preparation for dialogue; it is something very important. I am speaking of an encounter which has importance for us, although what I say pertains to any encounter. For example, let's say that today I receive a letter from a friend I know quite well who tells me that we are at a moment in our lives when it would be good for us to meet. The idea of meeting with my friend will awaken in me the memory of all those years when I engaged in a dialogue with him through my books, even without directly talking to him. Yet, he was indeed present. In a certain way, this is already dialogue. I call it *l'avant-dialogue*, because while some consider that it is not dialogue at all, it is in fact for me a truly important dialogue. A writer that I know refuses to see people because, as he tells himself, "I have already had a dialogue with them." And he should say also that he has already had a dialogue with me. Since we write to each other, since his books are there before me, since he is present in my life, I am engaged in a dialogue with him. He doesn't talk to me directly, but nonetheless there is a dialogue between us.

Dialogue, as we practice it, is in a certain way deceiving, because everything that we have stored away and that we thought we could express, we don't ever say. So the dialogue sometimes turns out to be somewhat banal, because it is hard to maintain a certain tension when one is face to face with the other. Two beings who live apart are much more tense in their relationship to each other than if they were to see one another every day. If they were to meet each day, they would say, "Well, well, you have circles under your eyes... , you are tired... , you didn't eat... , why is your hair not combed... , etc." One retreats into the quotidian, into banality. But separation means that we say things

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only that we ourselves consider important, essential. And that takes place in *l'avant-dialogue*.

Now, what is most important about an intense dialogue, or what we call "dialogue" in general, is something that cannot be put into words and is, perhaps, the emotion of the encounter. I say nothing, and yet we seem to have said many things. There is something that makes the encounter complete and fulfilling but does so in few words. In one of my books I wrote that Jews recognize each other by their gazes. They don't need to begin dialogues. They don't have to say, "Here is my life, I come from such and such a country," and so on. They just know. When you see a foreign Jew in a country, you don't need to ask him "What is your story?" A glance suffices. It is a very strong encounter.

When we speak to another, what we say is interesting insofar as it teaches us things about the other and also, above all, about ourselves. We lead the dialogue and guide it, so that what we find interesting enters into it. You meet someone, for example, whose work, let's say, you like; you are going to arrange things so that he speaks to you about his work. It's planned. You then see someone else, and you don't have the same interest in him; rather, you discover another interest. We always speak in terms of our deepest interests. But the word, in the sense of the word of writing [*la parole de l'écriture*], truly expresses itself when we are going to be separated. At that particular moment the important thing is said, truly said. It had already been experienced by the dialogue at the moment of the encounter when we said little but felt the greatest emotion. And once we are by ourselves, we are going to try to say in a few written words everything that we had been able to feel and of which this dialogue made us aware, but that was not said aloud.

RS: Isn't this what you call the silent dialogue ("le dialogue silencieux"); namely, a dialogue that is hidden, invisible, inaudible, mute, interior...

EJ: And true; it is the true dialogue.

RS: Yes, the true dialogue.

EJ: This is why true dialogue comes third. First, there is *l'avant-dialogue*; then *l'après-dialogue* which comes after the encounter or the conversation and contains all the things that should have been said

during it but weren't. It thus prepares the way for the coming of a new, a true dialogue, which only begins when the two people, who have met, depart and regain their solitude. One moves thus from *l'avant-dialogue* to *l'après-dialogue-sans-dialogue* and then to *le dialogue-dans-la-séparation*. From this solitary dialogue, the circle begins anew, and we move to *l'avant-dialogue*, then to *l'après-dialogue*, and finally to the new dialogue, and so on.

RS: What you have just said about the nature of dialogue raises the following question: Does dialogue work to bring two people together or can it continue to keep them apart? Is it a meeting or a separation? Or to put my question a little differently: Is dialogue an experience of union between two individuals who meet or is it one of solitude and rupture? In your various books, do the *I* and the *you* that encounter and question each other through dialogue move closer to one other? Do they become a couple? Or do they exist as autonomous and separate beings?

EJ: There can be no dialogue if there is no separation, no rupture. If there is union there is no dialogue. But things aren't as simple as that. We live in a state of coalescence, of fusion, which can only manifest, express, and explain itself through a certain rupture. In order to be able to speak one has to make an abstraction of oneself, and not only of oneself but of the other as well, as a kind of "other oneself." For example, I have to say to myself that the person I meet is not me, that I myself do not speak through him, that I consider him a being apart, separate, different. Yet, all the same, the encounter creates a kind of communion, which is perhaps a union, something that is interior, that takes place within. In this respect, it is exactly like the question. The question is always something outside. If you tell someone "I love you," you are inside; but if you say "Do I love you?" you are outside. But this outside [*ce dehors*] is also an inside [*un dedans*], because you would never have asked "Do I love you" if you had not wanted to go further in your love in order to know more.

RS: In reading *Le Livre du dialogue* one of the many things that intrigued me was the conclusion: "You cannot be forgotten. / That is the dilemma."³ Am I correct in thinking that it is the other who cannot be forgotten and that this constitutes the dilemma for you? If the other is truly unforgettable does this mean that the dialogue can never end?

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EJ: These lines recall a passage in *Le Livre des ressemblances* where one of the characters, one of the judges, who is filled with remorse, decides to become a forgotten person, and goes off into the desert, takes on a new identity, and changes everything about himself. And another character tells him or writes him, “Don’t worry about your trace. You are the only one not able to wipe it out.”⁴ The trace is something truly other. This is because, as the trace of the other and the otherness of the trace, it cannot be created by us. We can draw the trace of the other, because we can mark it according to our relation to the other. But our own trace we are incapable of marking. Do you think, for example, that from the dialogue and conversation we are having today, something, some trace, will remain? Evidently, that will depend on you and on me. But neither you nor I, in our rapport with one another, can willingly privilege this dialogue. I cannot tell you that you must not forget this dialogue; and you cannot tell me that you will never forget it. If one of us remembers it, then it will continue.

RS: What you have just said about the trace suddenly clarifies for me the importance of the mysterious apparition of the young woman...

EJ: Yes, absolutely...

RS: ... in *Le Livre du dialogue*. You write that “About this woman—of whom I know nothing except that one morning she suddenly entered my home only to vanish just as quickly, but whose incomprehensible question continues to plague my memory—no particular mention will be made in this book: not of the infinite softness of her voice, not, either, of this open wound that she wanted to contrast to my own; yet, her face and her voice are, because of this, all the more present in these pages: her face, in order to nourish my imagination; her voice, as irrefutable proof of her reality.”⁵ There is no doubt, then, that upon the surface of your text she has left a significant trace.

EJ: All the way through, right up to the end. It is the book that is completely marked by her. And if there is a tremor (I prefer to call it “a tremor”) in the book, it is provoked by this woman, by this phantom apparition which asks the essential question. Not the question, “Who am I?”, for that question is ultimately absurd. What can it possibly mean? Who can ever know the answer? We will never know it. To be able to say that I am *this* person would mean that I am dead or

somehow immobilized. But given that we are always in movement, how can we say who we are. But the woman does not ask “Who am I?” Rather, she says, “Since I can exist only by my name, give me the name—not a name, but *the* name—that I should carry in order to be who I am.” And this is somewhat similar to the appeal that the Book makes; like the woman, the Book expresses a call for help that speaks the Book. But what is a book? “Am I,” it seems to ask, as did the young woman, “this anonymous or multiple thing you call a book? Give me the name that is mine so that I may know, and all the world may know, that I am *the* Book.” But books are things; they are made; they are given titles that sometimes suit them and sometimes don’t. These are not *the* Book. So how can I speak the Book, how can I encompass it? And how can the Book or this woman appear once and for all, as each truly is, unique?

RS: I’d like to pursue further the encounter you describe with the young woman. You suggest that there transpires a meeting, a confrontation, perhaps even a dialogue, between the woman’s inconsolable pain, her *inguérissable blessure*, and the deep and incurable wound that you yourself feel. Can you say something about the resemblance of these wounds and what connection such pain has to the phenomenon of dialogue?

EJ: Yes, because it is the wound of not knowing, of speaking in the name of someone who can never be recognized as who he is, as a unique being. Don’t you see? We speak; we speak in the name of intelligence, in the name of the mind, in the name of the heart. But we also speak ourselves. That is, we assume, sign, subscribe to everything that we’ve been able to say. But who has spoken and from where does this speaking come?

RS: That comes back, then, to the idea that for you dialogue is a separation or, as you say, a breaking apart of a word that by this very fragmentation initiates dialogue. In *Le Livre du dialogue*, you write that “every break opens a dialogue.”⁶ That means, then, that through dialogue one is in touch with such experiences of rupture and loss as exile, errancy, death, and nothingness, which are so central to your work.

EJ: Absolutely.

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RS: I'd like now to pass on to another subject that resembles or corresponds to that of dialogue, namely the idea of the other and of otherness. In your opinion, can the other be named and identified or does the other remain completely anonymous?

EJ: Without going so far as to say that the other remains anonymous, I'd say it remains enigmatic. We can't foresee its reactions. The difficulty is that we cannot encircle the other and that the other can reveal itself in a way that is totally contrary to what we had expected. You go toward someone to tell him something that you had thought would delight him, but, contrary to all expectations, instead of pleasing him it makes him furious. It is an attitude you don't understand, and it is also like the ambiguity of language. Often, we believe that we are saying things that are comprehensible, and then all of a sudden we find ourselves in a difficult or embarrassing situation. In foreign cultures this can often happen. Sometimes, we are even responsible for what we have not said or written. If someone has found in your books something he can make use of, and it's not at all what you had had in mind in writing it, that's because there is an ambiguity in the language that enables it to be taken up and used. This was the case of Nietzsche being exploited by the Nazis; it wasn't anything Nietzsche had done; it was a result of his ambiguity. It's not a question of saying that it was what Nietzsche did, or for that matter what Jabès or any other writer did. Rather, it is what the text has done. To take my books as an example, you can see that because of the ambiguity they express about God, life, and other subjects, one can say anything at all about them. And the writer alone is responsible for this. Perhaps, ultimately, this is the curse of writing: namely, that one is sometimes responsible for what one has not said, for what one had not even wanted to say.

RS: So there is what might be called *l'autre de l'écrit*, an otherness that passes inadvertently and unconsciously into a text unbeknownst to the author. This reminds me of an important passage from *Le Livre du dialogue* where you write that "the other is a fiction" (p. 34). Would you say that the other is created by writing? Does the book establish otherness? And what we learn from our encounter and dialogue with the other, would you call that a fiction, too? This notion of the other as a fiction is very mysterious, isn't it?

EJ: Yes, it is very ambiguous. The other is a fiction insofar as I imagine him as he is and also as I wish him to be. It is an invention. I invent a character that I love. Someone towards whom you feel friendly, for example, is someone, whom you've invented through your friendship. Yet, this friend is more real than other people, because he comes out of something very deep. It's as if someone says "No, I don't love this woman; I am in love with love." It's not true. We invent the woman we love by means of an image that we have of love. If I open myself to you, for example, in order to tell you thousands of things, it is because I've told myself that you are a friend, and because I've invented what you can be. At the moment I begin to speak to you, let's say for example that you start thinking of something else and don't give a damn about what I'm telling you. For me that's not a problem, because you are the ideal listener that I myself have invented. Thus, the other is always somehow a fiction, but a fiction that is so necessary that it becomes for me the very reality of what I can feel and the very possibility of speaking about this thing that I seek. In a loved being, in a woman, you search for an ideal, for something. If you do not invent her in some way, if you don't bring her into the dream, you can never speak to her deeply. Thus, the other—either the being who is close to you or even the one whom you consider as an enemy—must be invented so that you can love him or her, or attack him or her, or make him or her part of that particular world that is your own universe. Obviously, I am going very quickly here, but it's a subject that deserves being talked about for a long, long time. And it explains why that woman in *Le Livre du dialogue* no longer knows who she is. She appears and says, "You have invented me, you have called to me." The writer responds, "I don't know; how did you get in?" She answers, "I found the door open." He says, "That's very strange, because I always close the door." And then he wonders, "But how did she come here and how did she disappear?" Now, all this belongs to a certain imaginary [*imaginaire*], but one that is reality itself. And to take some of my books again as examples, I would say that I am without imagination. I have no imagination. I have never imagined anything that I did not see. It is what I see that enters my world. It is writing that shows me things.⁷

RS: In hearing you talk about this young woman who appears so suddenly and inexplicably in the writer's home and then mysteriously disappears, I was wondering whether she bears a resemblance to your sister who died at the age of 22 when you were 12? Undoubtedly, that

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loss must have left you with an *inguérissable blessure* similar to the young woman's and to the writer's.

EJ: This is what psychoanalysts have told me. I feel a deep rapport with this woman. We never know about such things. The being we love, the woman we love, they spring from love of the sister, and of the mother.

RS: I'd like now to turn our discussion to the question of representation. Do you feel that writing has the power to represent anything it sets its sights on? Or do you believe that there are things about which nothing can be said, things that are beyond the power of the word? Are there, in your opinion, prohibitions against representation, interdictions like the commandment against graven images, for example?

EJ: To begin with I want to distinguish between the sacred and the profane. I have said elsewhere that the sacred book does not exist, that there are only profane books that we have made sacred. The prohibition against writing, which is lodged in writing itself, is the silence that writing first imposes on you. This is precisely what happens in the dialogue. If I speak, I impose a certain silence on you. That's my power. It can be either very weak or very strong. But it doesn't depend on me. It comes, rather, from your fascination, from your willingness to remain silent while I talk. Because you are fascinated and say nothing, I allow myself to go more deeply into my subject. He who is silent is not passive but active. He doesn't speak, he doesn't answer, because he wants to hear the word as it exists in itself in order to judge it in the best way possible.

Now, what occurs in writing? How does it happen, for example, that there are days when we can write a page as if we had been carried away and other days when we can't write even a word? Sometimes you have letters to write, and you don't succeed in even sending off a word to say "I will be in Paris the day after tomorrow." It just doesn't come. And then at other times you tell yourself that you must sooner or later take care of your correspondence, and you write five letters all at one time. How does this happen? Where does it come from? It comes from an understanding not only of writing but of what one expects from writing.

Now, writing has this power to impose silence in order to speak. It is a power that is fragile, because it can be interrupted at anytime. Some say that the artist or writer is not a person who wants to speak.

When a painter wishes to paint a landscape, he ultimately lets the landscape impose itself on him, and so he makes something other than a landscape. He paints a different landscape, and by this very difference he perceives that it is the landscape that has spoken. The more you express yourself, the more you remain silent. That is, the more you digress from your word, the more you give to what is taking shape before you—a book, a painting—the possibility of speaking profoundly. You have come to such a point in your writing or your painting that it is no longer you that is speaking like that. Or, to put it another way, it is you that is speaking from inside, through the work. It's curious, isn't it, that landscape painters sit in front of a scene for hours and suddenly something else happens. It is not so much the landscape that counts, but rather what the landscape has expressed for them. Thus, they have spoken, but only by forcing themselves to let the landscape alone speak. This kind of thing also happens in dialogue.

RS: I would like to leave our discussion of dialogue for a moment and ask you to comment on the myth of exile in modern Jewish life. In an essay on contemporary American Jewish culture, the critic Harold Bloom has raised the question that, because of the political and secular condition of Jews in America, it is very possible that the idea of *Galut* may no longer have meaning as the defining myth and reality of Jewish identity. Since exile is one of the major themes of your books, I would like to ask you how the myth of *Galut* can continue to survive in an epoch when Jews no longer live in a condition of exile? For example, Bloom affirms that in the United States one is currently witnessing the end of the myth of *Galut* which, historically speaking, has been central to the Jewish experience. The risk of this loss, he states, is that Jews may cease to be a people of the Book. They may no longer exist as a “text-obsessed people,” with the result, he writes, that the difference between Jew and non-Jew may soon be abolished.⁸ Do you agree with this prediction?

EJ: I am partly in agreement. There is a Jewish history that the Jew continues to live in the history of the world. An unfortunate, serious event takes place; the Jew confronts it with two thousand years of history. The Jew speaks of the destruction of the Temple as if it had been burned yesterday. He always carries with him all this history of life. This personal history lives and continues to live, even while it tries to adapt itself to a general history. The Jew's experience is millennial, and it is an experience that is consigned to texts. There is

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historicity and, equally as important, there is commentary. It was with commentary and with Moses that Jews first became Jews. Before, they had been Hebrews, nomads, a people passing from one country to another. But that was not the Judaism of the Book. It was Moses who brought this. With him a Judaism of the Book developed. Moses gave the Jew over to the text. And as the years went by and the idea grew that it was necessary to seek the word of God, it became difficult, if not arrogant, to tell people, who were used to adoring the golden calf and things like that—the concrete things of life—that they had to pray to a God they couldn't see. “How is it that I don't see Him?” they asked. “How do I know that He is there?” And they were told, “You know He is there; here is the evidence of His word; you must listen and you must speak.” And so, what did the Jew do? He put himself in the position of understanding the word of God. And he began to examine and question the Book.

Thus, as long as this kind of questioning continues (and I don't see how it could possibly end, because for the Jew as he exists in his reality as Jew it is essential) the word of God will be present. The Jew must succeed in hearing it. The Book, according to the Cabbala, is given to us but not in right order. We have to find the order in it. The Book is written, but we have to know how to read what is behind the words. This, then, cannot be taken away from a Jew insofar as he lives the truth of his Jewishness, because it would prevent him from being in touch with God. The relationship to God passes through the Book, because it passes through the word. Since Jewish thought is kept alive by books, there is an incredible force and there is a power of questioning that can't be exceeded, unless one ignores everything or declares that one doesn't want to know anything. In that event, everybody would be identical. But he who thinks declares his difference. A person who thinks very powerfully will evidently feel isolated. The finest thoughts are the disturbing ones which have provoked so much turmoil that the person who expressed them is either killed or ostracized. Why? Because a dialogue can exist only if there is difference. One very important thing for me, and from it derives the contradiction of my books, is that we must learn to live with difference. To my way of thinking, the world contradicts itself, but it is this very contradiction that enables us to be able to think about things differently.

RS: It is the Book, therefore, as the place of contradiction and difference that “[nous] apprenons à désapprendre” (p. 38), as you write in *Le Livre du dialogue*. It makes us learn how to unlearn, doesn't it?

EJ: Precisely. There are people who refuse to unlearn, who want instead to protect the homogeneity of their culture, to shield it from difference, to make a synthesis of everything. For me, what counts above all are the things that I have discovered indirectly in Western thought, things that strike me as purely intellectual, because they have always been that way. And I have seen how Jewish thought advances by means of intelligence and difference. I have to say I find that fascinating. Everything comes down to that. And intelligence is something that can't be stifled as difference is something that can't be suppressed. So, I think that Harold Bloom's prediction of assimilation is a bit premature. It's as if I thought that the day I no longer were to do such and such a thing I would become like my neighbor, that the day I eat what he eats I would resemble him. That's not true.

RS: What you are saying, then, is that difference is always present in our lives, because both writing and the Book live within the difference that exile creates, and because dialogue is fundamentally an experience of both separation and exile.

EJ: Yes, exactly.

RS: *Galut*, therefore, is not really a myth; it is an experience of separation through dialogue.

EJ: Precisely.

RS: So dialogue, then, as you write in *Le Livre du dialogue*, "exists, precisely there where, by means of the silence that has given life to the book, it is no longer anything but the desperate confrontation of two feeble words searching for their truth."

EJ: Yes, that's right.

RS: Edmond Jabès, I am very grateful to you for having given up so much of your valuable time. Thank you very much.

Translated by Richard Stamelman

NOTES

*Editor's note. Unspaced ellipses here denote pauses or interruptions in conversation.

1. *Le Livre du dialogue* (Paris: Gallimard, 1984), p. 21. [Hereafter referred to as *LD*.]

2. "Tout ce que nous voyons, entendons, approchons, une fois reconnu, entre en dialogue avec nous" (*LD*, p. 13).

3. "Tu ne peux être oublié. / Tel est le dilemme" (*LD*, p. 120).

4. "Ne te soucie pas de la trace. Tu es seul à ne pouvoir l'effacer." *Le Livre des ressemblances, III: L'Ineffaçable, l'Inaperçu* (Paris: Gallimard, 1980), p. 109.

5. "De cette femme dont je ne sais rien sinon, qu'un matin, elle fit inopinément irruption chez moi pour s'évanouir aussi vite, mais dont la demande incompréhensible continue de harceler ma mémoire, il ne sera fait, dans ce livre, aucune particulière mention; ni de la douceur infinie de sa voix, ni, non plus, de cette inguérissable blessure qu'elle était venue confronter à la mienne,

mais son visage et sa voix n'en sont que plus présents dans ces pages; son visage pour alimenter mon imagination, sa voix, preuve irréfutable de sa réalité" (*LD*, p. 36).

6. "Toute rupture est accession au dialogue" (*LD*, p. 26).

7. "I write," Edmond Jabès observes, "without imagination, through lack of imagination. Writing is the opposite of imagining [J'écris sans imagination, par manque d'imagination. Ecrire, c'est le contraire d'imaginer]." *Le Livre des marges, I: Ça suit son cours* (Montpellier: Fata Morgana, 1975), p. 28.

8. "A Speculation Upon American Jewish Culture," *Judaism*, 31, No. 3 (Summer 1982), 266–73. See also, Bloom's related essay "Free and Broken Tablets: The Cultural Prospects of American Jewry," in his *Agon. Towards a Theory of Revisionism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1982).

9. "Le dialogue se poursuit, précisément là où, à travers le silence où se fonde le livre, il n'est plus que l'affrontement désespéré de deux impuissantes paroles en quête de leur vérité" (*LD*, backcover).