

**CENDRARS'S VARIEGATED POETIC PERSONA:
SEDUCTION AND AUTHENTICITY IN
PROSE OF THE TRANSSIBERIAN AND
*NINETEEN ELASTIC POEMS***

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Language is something that's seduced me.
Language is something that's perverted me.
Language is something that's formed me.
Language is something that's deformed me.

Blaise Cendrars Speaks¹

For Cendrars, language is seduction, perversion, formation, deformation. Though a poet of the Cubist period, he nevertheless rejects Cubism for an Orphist artistic credo of depth, time, movement, color and sensuality.⁽²⁾ And true to this credo, Cendrars's literary persona is like the «variegated plaid» in his *Prose of the Transsiberian* and *Nineteen Elastic Poems*, the seduction, perversion, formation, and deformation in which Cendrars's poetic persona is involved.

With Cendrars already pointing the way, seduction offers a useful structural metaphor for the relationship between reader and persona. That the very word «persona» offers unsettling ambiguities fits my metaphor. The Jungian meaning of «persona» informs us: it is the social façade an individual projects to communicate his role in the world. Consequently, «literary persona» conjures up more than «narrator»; no disembodied voice this, it admits to a fullness of presence which causes us to seek the «real» writer inside. It need hardly be mentioned how Cendrars's writings, combined with what is known of the man, have encouraged biographical interpretations. Let us admit our knowledge of the man as an enriching context for reading the text; then bracket him. My purpose here lies in seeing the persona as a literary strategy.

Seduction, then, is a guiding metaphor for this strategy. In all first-person literary discourse, the persona's implicit task is to attach the reader to himself; in a word, to seduce him. This attach-

ment may involve total identification, total or mixed admiration, sympathy, pity, scorn, hate, or curiosity. As Jacques Lacan formulates it, «Man's desire is the desire of the Other.»(3) American psychology, growing out of a behavioristic context, expresses a similar concept in «stimulus hunger» and its corollary, «recognition hunger.»(4) Stimulation in the form of attention by others is postulated as a basic need. Without such attention, be it good or bad, people tend to «shrivel up» and die. Seduction is a particular form of satisfying recognition hunger: it creates a desire in the Other directed back toward the seducer. The seducer not only satisfies his own recognition hunger; he controls the giver of this satisfaction. For our literary perspective it is the persona who controls the role of the reader. But let us not be ensnared by the apparent reality of what is myth. In Freud's particular development of seduction and the seduction fantasy, it happens that the real event—if there is one—has little immediate psychic effect, but rather develops that psychic effect (and affect) in the form of a fantasy.(5) Eventually, Freud comes to see seduction not as a real event fixed in time, but rather as a structural pattern for the male-female relationship. Likewise, if the reader's role, at one stage in his relationship to the persona and to the text, is, as it were, staged on the level of a person-to-person interaction, at another level his role vis-a-vis the persona is to use the persona as a structuring device for his reading of the text and, eventually, to read the persona not as person but rather as pattern among the various patterns of the text.

Initially, let us not be readers of patterns; let us not be literary analysts. Surely, our first meeting with the text is innocent. We accept the persona as an individual who addresses us, and we allow ourselves to be seduced by the self-image which he bares.

With what charms, then, does the persona of *Prose of the Transsiberian* seek to woo us?

Most ingenious, he plays a two-sided game of innocence and mastery: innocence to lower the reader's defenses, mastery the better to ensnare him (or at least to elicit his admiration). The persona, of course, exists in various incarnations, Blaise the hero of the Transsiberian chronicle, Blaise the respondent of Jeanne, and—the one who addresses the reader—Blaise the poet-raconteur-chronicler-historiographer-autobiographer. As readers, we cannot help but admire and identify with the ubiquitous traveler of the chronicle and the sexually adept partner of Jeanne.

But it is Blaise in his third incarnation who directly addresses us and ensnares us in a warp and woof of innocence and mastery. The poet-persona greets us with his ingenuousness from the start. Not only does he present his past self at the time of adolescence and the first bloom of passion, but he says, in all modesty, «For I was already such a bad poet/That I couldn't go all the way (20/27).(6) This value judgment directed towards himself—he was already a bad poet because he could not arrive at completion, perfect his verbal production—indeed seems to communicate his modesty. Furthermore, it is a leitmotif which appears, in different variants, throughout the text:

Still, I was such a bad poet
That I couldn't go all the way (21/28)

Me, the bad poet who couldn't get anywhere—
I was able to go everywhere (21/29)

So many association-images that I can't develop in my
verse
Because I'm still a really bad poet
Because the universe overwhelms me
Because I've neglected to ensure myself against train
accidents
Because I can't go all the way.(30/40-41)(7)

And yet these instances of modesty about his poetic ability appear, most often, at strategic junctures, following some very extraordinary image-making. For example, the first instance follows a metaphor comparing his heart to the Temple of Artemis (Diana) at Ephesus and to Red Square in Moscow; the second instance follows a comparison of his hands flying off like the pigeons of the Holy Ghost; the fourth follows the extraordinary image sequence set off by the compass rose. Thus the poet-persona, while displaying his modesty to the reader, controverts his self-evaluation even as he says it. Indeed, at the end of the poem he states that he has written a poem—this one.

At the same time, the poet-persona tells of his varied personal avatars, incarnations which belie any reason for modesty. The poet-persona's self, both in the recounted past and the shown actuality, is a magical seer, mythologized by his supernatural

accomplishments. At the beginning of the chronicle, the persona in his adolescence is presented in the trancelike state of a medium, whose past had been forgotten(20/27), whose eyes had lit up ancient byways and deciphered cuneiform letters. He was a being who had had premonitions of the Russian Revolution(21/28), and who later, as universal chronicler of Russia, seemed to have seen all («I saw/I saw/.../I saw/.../And I saw» (31/42). In the end it is the mythological adolescent seer who is the model for the poet-persona, a receptacle and interpreter for the signs of the universe. Thus the poet-persona cannot develop the «association-images» because «the universe overwhelms me» (30/40). Thus the poet-persona-historiographer relinquishes his intellectual hold: «What's the use of documenting it all/I abandon myself/To the bumps and jolts of memory»(30/41). Thus the poet-persona makes the corrective to the kind of old poetry which would declare him a bad poet—the poetry of completion and perfection—through a poetry of the universe of which he is not only the possessor but of which he is also the possessed («I've deciphered all the mixed-up texts of wheels and I've collected the scattered elements of a violent beauty/that I possess/and that forces me along») (32/43-44). Ultimately, and originally, the universe is the poem; the poem is the universe (which overflows the poet), or, starting from the seed from which most of the poem disseminates, the poet himself, with his variegated life, is the poem.

Too, the «bad poet» is redeemed by the company he keeps among the persons and productions of the arts. He recalls his infancy, listening in the cradle to Beethoven, played by his mother who was like Madame Bovary (24/33). He recalls the nights spent with the daughter of Monsieur Iankélewitch listening to Moussorgsky and Hugo Wolf (31/43). He compares the landscapes of Mexico to the art of the Douanier Rousseau (28/38), and the sound of the train wheels to Maeterlinck's prose (32/43). Like Chagall, he claims, he could do a series of demented paintings (30/41). And he compares his own poetic ignorance with that of the Apollinaire who no longer recognizes the old rules of poetry. Finally, as a clever capstone to the testimony of his culture, he describes Jeanne in a pastiche of Verlaine's «My Familiar Dream» (*Mon Rêve familier*):

She is sweet and silent, without reproach
With a long tremor at your approach;

But when I come to her—gaily, here, there,
 She takes a step, then closes her eyes—and takes a step.
 For she is my love, and other women
 Have only golden garments on great bodies of flame,
 My poor love is so alone,
 She is quite bare, has no body—she is too poor.
 (24/32)(8)

Confronted with this clear evidence, who can accept for anything but false modesty the persona's self-appellation as «bad poet?»

Up to this point, my focus has been the image which the poet-persona projects to the reader, an image which is appealing in both its self-modesty and its mastery, force, and culture. In other words, the persona fabricates an image, inherently attractive, which he expects the reader to believe. The other task of the persona is the maintenance and manipulation of this relationship, or, to put it another way, the degree of intimacy and interchange between the reader and the persona. Where does the persona situate the reader in relation to himself and to what he says?

It is clear that the persona offers and manipulates a discourse of a high degree of intimacy. The most extreme instance of this is the unmediated expression of emotion offered directly to the reader: «My poor life» (23/31), «I'm afraid» (30/41), «And I've lost all my bets/Only Patagonia...can match my immense sadness» (24-25/33), «I wish I'd never made my voyages» (33/45), «I'm sad» (33/45). Similar, unmediated emotion is communicated by the repetition of an utterance: «I remember, I remember» (22/30), «and yet, and yet» (23/31), «And here's my cradle, my cradle» (24/33), «I saw/I saw» (31/42), «I wish, I wish» (33/45), «I'm sad, I'm sad» (33/45). Low in information, the repeated utterance is high in affect.

A counterpart to the immediacy of emotion communicated in the utterances of the present tense exists as well in the recollected sequences told in the past tenses. The persona invests the events he is recalling with an emotional charge. The clearest examples of this occur in the iterative passages, (told in the imperfect tense of repetition) where repeated actions and states told in but one telling make the narrator's affective investment seem quite natural. Thus, in the opening verses of the poem, the poet-persona says «I was barely sixteen and already I could no longer remember my childhood/.../And I hadn't had enough of the seven railroad

stations and the thousand and three towers/For my adolescence was so ardent and so crazy/That my heart, by turns, would burn like the temple of Ephesus or Red Square in Moscow/When the sun sets» (20/27). What the poet-persona does here is to invest his past with values from his actuality. The «already» of the first verse cited could very well be written with an exclamation mark next to it, an exclamation point of excitement and admiration which anticipates the poet-persona, revealed later in the poem as one who gives up documenting himself and abandons himself to the leaps and bounds of his memory. By the same token, the adjectives «ardent» and «crazy» and the metaphor of the burning temple and Red Square are not the words of the youth but rather those of that poet-persona who collects the «scattered elements of a violent beauty.» As are those that say that as a youth:

...every day and every woman in the cafés and all the glasses
I would've liked to drink them and break them
And all the store windows and all the streets
And all the houses and all the lives
And all the hackney wheels that used to turn like whirlwinds on the broken paving stones
I would've like to crush all the bones
And tear out all the tongues
And liquefy all those strange bodies naked under their clothes that drive me crazy... (21/28)(9)

In fact, slipping into the present tense at the end, it is the poet-persona who would have liked to pulverize the bones, pull out the tongues, and liquefy the bodies. In addition to confirming our image of the poet-persona, this investment of the past with affect from the present has a number of interesting results. First, the exuberance and the exaggeration of the emotion contribute to the mythological code and effect for which the events themselves provide the story. In addition, the affect of the persona works like a mold for the involvement of the reader with the story, predetermining the reader's affective reaction to the story and drawing him closer to it. At the same time, the distance inherent in the past tense and the act of telling soften the effect of the persona's exuberant and violent emotions: the emotions are controlled within a diachronic structure of events, a story, much as in Freudian

theory dreams and other fantasies provide harmless enactments of desire.

Unmediated affect as documented above, however, presents a problem. For the post-Romantic reader, pure affect is likely to bore, offend, embarrass; the intellect cannot process it. What does a reader do with a statement like, «I'm sad»? Let us examine one of these instances more closely:

So many association-images that I can't develop in my
verse
Because I'm still a really bad poet
Because the universe overflows me
Because I've neglected to ensure myself against railroad
accident
Because I can't go all the way
And I'm afraid. (30/40/41) (10)

Two statements, one the self-judgement as a bad poet and the other an expression of fear, seem to bare the poet-persona's soul to the reader and ensure a relation of intimacy. Yet they also risk offending or boring. What happens to alter this danger is that these statements are integrated into a structure of relations to be read by the intellect. As in the scene from the past just studied, these renderings of affect are fixed in a story, that of the production of the image clusters growing out of the compass rose; they are explained as well: the universe overflows (and overwhelms) the poet-persona. Further, one other important element appeals to the intellect and detaches the poet-persona and the reader from the pure affect: in the midst of a development on the poet-persona's emotions, place in the universe, and poetic failure, erupts the statement, of pertinence on the face of it only in a much more practical sphere, about the lack of insurance against train accidents. Finally, one such other device emerges from the «bad poet» statement in this passage. As part of the series of «bad poet» statements running through the poem, it vaults between the context of this particular event and that of the «bad poet» leitmotif, with all the double meaning attached to that leitmotif, thus voiding the statement of much of its emotional charge. Elsewhere, the affect of «I'm sad, I'm sad» (33/45) in the closing verses of the poem, in the verse which precedes it, «It's in an evening of sadness that I have written this poem in her honor», is counter-

balanced by an effect of summary and generalization. The irony, the structure of story, and other distancing devices throughout the poem thus provide the necessary balance to the moments of strong affect.

This play of intimacy and detachment, which seems to be one of the organizing principles of the poem, functions, too, within the important scene which gradually unfolds between the poet-persona, appropriately identified as «Blaise,» and Jeanne. This scene stands apart within the poem because, unlike the many events which are *told*, this scene becomes in fact a *scene* in which the voice of the narrator, normally addressing the reader, disappears. Instead, the poet-persona is dramatized and the object of his address is Jeanne. Jeanne, as it were, pulls the poet-persona away from the seduction of the reader which is his primary task, in order to ply her own seduction—passive though it may seem—upon the poet-persona. The leitmotif, «Say, Blaise, are we very far from Montmartre», erupts with its quotation marks into the narration. And it is clear that the poet-persona, risking a detachment from the reader to the point of completely ignoring him, at first resists the incursion. But the sequence of his replies reveals his gradual capitulation:

We're far, Jeanne, you've been on the road for seven
days/.../
The worries/Forget the worries/.../
Of course we are, you get on my nerves, you know it,
we're really far/.../
Yes, we are far, far away/.../
No, I mean...cut it out...leave me alone/.../
All right, all right come over here let me tell you a story/
Come in my bed. (27/37)(11)

The eruption of Jeanne's words has a deflating effect upon the panoramas which the poet-persona is painting, making the persona and the reader momentary accomplices as they try to suppress and deny this breaking of context in order that they might return to the unrolling panoramas. But reader and persona gradually lose hold and the leitmotif becomes «Oh come!»—the call to sexual climax. Now the image clusters, no longer growing out of the Transsiberian, develop from the themes and images of love instead: «In the Fidjis reigns the eternal spring/Indolence/

Love prostrates couples in the high grass and hot syphilis roams under the banana trees» (27/37). The persona, finally abandoning all narration, abandons the reader; rather than the past tense of narration, he speaks the future tense of dreams: «And we'll love each other like good bourgeois near the pole» (28/38). The poet-persona virtually disappears into Blaise the lover until the scene reaches a climax—a sexual climax. This completed, the poet-persona re-establishes his relationship with the reader.

Intimacy and detachment—these mutual poles which define the shifting relationship of the poet-persona and the reader are seconded by the complementary poles of fiction and reality. Despite the mythologizing of self, despite the image-making of an exuberant imagination, the persona pushes the reader to believe in his discourse as *real*. Never is this more evident than when the poet-persona speaks of «my friend Chagall» and quotes Apollinaire. The reference to these two individuals, real-life contemporaries of the poet, pulls the context of the poet-person's discourse toward actuality and reality. This has an obvious advantage in the seduction of the reader, for as Robert Scholes says, there is a «passion for actuality which motivates the reader of any document that purports to contain the 'real' ...Simple, matter-of-fact things seem more exciting if we are convinced that they have had actual experience, and more meaningful as well.»(12) The reader's resulting excitement and belief of course influence his attachment to the rest of the discourse, too. And it becomes clear that the persona's efforts to provide intimacy between himself and the reader are part of this project. Seen in the context of the pull towards reality, even the formal apparatus of the poem—free verse, the inconsistent use of punctuation, the parataxis and low level of syntactical articulation, the associative flow and disjunctive temporal organization—all these characteristics contribute to the feeling of reality and actuality. For if it is true that when the reader «believes he is reading the life of a real person he is prepared to be interested by a narrative of less symmetry and significance than he would otherwise, consciously or not, expect,»(13) then it is evident that the reader, in his «passion for actuality,» may very well *expect* less symmetry than he would otherwise. In the final analysis, then, all manifestations of the persona—the formal characteristics of his discourse, the image which he projects, the baring of his intimate self, the direct reference to actuality—serve to bind the reader to the persona and

complete the seduction into which the reader, most willingly, enters.

Prose is like a workshop for the persona in the works that follow. Cendrars extends the strategies from *Prose* in *Nineteen Elastic Poems* (written mainly in 1912-14) with surprising results. Not only do the strategies change; so does the reader's relation to the poem.

In many of these «poems of circumstance» (and thus «elastic» in their capacities for accommodation) as Cendrars calls them, the persona, through the intra-textual dedications to Apollinaire, Delaunay, Chagall, Canudo, Archipenko, and Léger, again draws the reader into the intimacy of his friendship with the artists. At the same time, such intra-textual dedication lend an air of authenticity and actuality to the poems. The image which Cendrars's persona projects is similar to that of the persona in *Prose*. He is again, the humble observer, overwhelmed by his world and his self («I am the Other/Too sensitive» (53/70); «I am troubled» (67/90); «I don't know anything anymore/I don't understand anymore» (69/93); «I who am dazzled» (72/96). Now, however, the poet-persona is much less timid about his project than in *Prose*. In part because of the shortness of the medium, in part because the poems often quite explicitly serve as offerings to Cendrars's friends, the persona is intentionally an iconoclast, taking his distance on the poetic and artistic establishment («I never liked Mascagni/Or art or Artists/.../ Art criticism is as dumb as Esperanto» (69/93); «You've got to escape from the tyranny of the periodicals/Literature/Impoverished life/Misplaced pride» (61/81). Concurrently, he represents modernism's exuberant reporter, its spokesman, its flagbearer, and its animus. Like the mythologized seer of *Prose*, he is now a modern seer, plunged in the present, whose illuminating touch creates poems from newspaper articles («Latest Bulletin,» *Dernière Heure*), headlines («Titles,» *titres*), and detective novels («Fantômas»). The great consumer of the magic vibrations of Orphism and the Machine Age, a focuser of their vitalistic energy («Dare to make noise/Everything is color movement explosion light/Life flowers in the window of the sun/Which melts in my mouth» (73/97); «The windows of my poetry are wide open on the boulevards,» (56/74) Cendrars's persona also finds himself modernism's exhibitionist («All of a sudden/Fireworks/Booms/ Reverberations/Spark of simultaneous horizons/My Sex/O Eiffel

Tower» 54/71). As spectator par excellence and universal reporter, Cendrars's persona in fact stages his own feelings, emotions, and fantasies and, in so doing, assimilates the phenomena of modernity to his proper self. If language is seduction, then the ultimate seduction may turn out to be the seduction of self.

Exhibitionism, seduction of self, turns out to be a useful conceptual model not only for part of the image which the poet-persona projects in *Nineteen Elastic Poems* but also for the structure of relations in which the persona operates vis-a-vis his self and the reader. Exhibitionism takes a step beyond narcissism. Narcissism involves the subject turning his look of passion upon his own person. Exhibitionism exposes the self's body to the narcissistic gaze and shares it with others. My point is that exhibitionism goes beyond loving the self-image to proffering it, projecting it outside the self.⁽¹⁴⁾ We can scarcely be unaware of the risk to the narcissistic passion coming from this centripetal movement, for distance invites reflection, and reflection judgment.

In *Nineteen Elastic Poems* Cendrars's persona seems to be performing the exhibitionist's feat by projecting his image into the various entities of his modern landscape and capturing it in his affectionate gaze. Thus in one avatar, he becomes the Orphic moving wheel-life-machine («Painting becomes that enormous thing that moves/The/wheel/Life/The machine/The human soul/A 75 mm bore/My portrait») (80/104-105). In another, he becomes the modulating, rhythmical dance perceived in the flow of his traveler's landscape («I'm no longer interested in the landscape/but the landscape's dance/The landscape's dance/Landscape-dance/Paritatitata/I tur-turn») (61-62/82). In another, he becomes the fictional character of detective novels) «We still have many traits in common/I have been in prison/I have spent illegally acquired fortunes/I know more than 120,000 stamps—all different and more joyful than the N.N.'s of the Louvre/And/Like you/Industrial heraldist/I have studied the trademarks registered at the International Office of International Patents» (76/100). In yet another, he imagines becoming a woman («This is the first time that I envy a woman/That I would like to be a woman/Be a woman/In the universe/In life/Be/And open up to infantile futures») (71-72/96). This decentering—this dissemination of the self, was a phenomenon which we observed, though to a less radical degree, of course, in *Prose*. In any case, the advantage to the narcissistic passion of the persona is the same: wherever his

gaze falls, it encounters an image of self.

Exhibitionism or seduction of self: if it suggests a model for the relation of the persona to his self, it necessarily implies a model for the relation of the persona to the reader. The reaction of one excellent critic of Cendrars sheds light on this relation: «Does not this constant reference to the act of writing, to the novel character of one's own poems, or to their intrinsically mobile nature, spotlight that act, arresting the attention of the spectator and even that of the actor himself?» (15) Though Caws' point here is that this self-consciousness impedes the feeling of continuous mobility that pervades Cendrars's poetry, she underlines the frustration and withdrawal of the reader who tries to become involved in the poems as poetic artifacts or as fictions. Quite naturally, it would seem, an exhibitionist is interested primarily in himself; while calling for the gaze of others, he effectively excludes them from the scene of desire because the desire is directed not towards the other but towards the self. Thus the reader surely has reason to feel abandoned. To the extent that the persona is an exhibitionist, the reader, whose role is either to identify with the persona and enter into the fiction, or to organize the perceptions presented in the poem, finds himself excluded by the persona's self-conscious leer.

Exhibitionism, however, does at the same time suggest a redeeming, alternate role for persona and reader. For the detachment of the consciousness from the self image, though its goal is passion and intimacy directed toward the self, also puts a distance between the subject doing the gazing and the subject gazed upon. Such detachment inevitably involves a critical gaze, and the possibility of irony. It is precisely this irony, like that which accompanies the «bad poet» leitmotif in *Prose*, which balances the self-love in *Nineteen Elastic Poems*. In fact, one could observe that irony is a justification for the persona's self-love. At the same time, it defines a relationship of collusion between reader and poet-persona as they together deflate the content of the poems. While instances of irony do not occur in every poem, enough do so that the reader of the collection can expect the same play between intimacy and detachment, this delectable ambiguity, which he experienced in *Prose*. At the outset, one can hardly deny the serious manner of «Newspaper» (*Journal*), the first poem of the collection, but by the time one is half-way through «Tower» (*Tour*), which directly follows, the cure to this high seriousness is quite

apparent:

1910

Castellamare

I was dining on an orange in the shade of an orange tree

When, all of a sudden...

It wasn't the eruption of Vesuvius

It wasn't the cloud of locusts, one of the ten scourges of
Egypt

Nor Pompeii

It wasn't the resuscitated cries of giant mastodons

It wasn't the heavenly Trumpet

Nor the frog of Pierre Brisset

When, all of a sudden

Fireworks

Booms

Reverberations

Spark of simultaneous horizons

My sex

O Eiffel Tower

(54/71)(16)

From the beginning, we can almost picture a Peter Sellers or a Woody Allen dining on his *orange* in the shade of an *orange* tree, and from that moment on, we know that the persona is hardly taking himself seriously. The «All of a sudden,» by the time we reach the end of the long parenthesis, turns out to be not very «all of a sudden» after all. And after the big build-up of explosion, shocks, repercussions, and glow of simultaneous horizons, the presentation of the persona's phallus is deflating, to say the least. Nor can one deny the ironic effect of the appearance, now very much belated (a delay accented by the spatial gap of the page), of the Eiffel Tower. Other examples of irony abound elsewhere. In speaking of Chagall, the persona says, «He paints with his buttocks/He has his eyes in his ass/And suddenly it's your portrait/It's you reader/It's me/It's him» and later in the poem, «He strangles himself with his tie/Chagall is astonished to be still living» (58, 59/77,78). In «On the Dress She Has a Body» (*Sur la robe elle a un corps*), whose very title plays games with normal expectations, the persona, in a tone of self-mockery, begins, «Woman's body is as full of protuberances as my cranium»

(63/83). In «To the 5 Corners» (*Aux 5 coins*), after a spectacular beginning of color, movement, explosion, light, the sun which melts in the mouth of the poet, and the poet who falls translucent—as if in a trance—in the street, a voice from off-stage says, «So you say, old boy» (73/97), and deflates the epic pretensions of the beginning.

Irony, it could be said, is inevitable in image sequences growing out of an Orphic philosophy of «simultaneous contrasts,» for the goal of the Orphic esthetics is precisely to bring together disparate things. So, too, is irony the inevitable counterpart of the persona's exhibitionism. Placed in *Nineteen Elastic Poems*, the self-mythologizing and detachment strategies seen in *Prose* are like two inflatable dolls. As the self-mythologizing is blown up to become exhibitionism, so must detachment expand into irony. To be the successful literary strategies that they are in *Nineteen Elastic Poems*, they both must grow in proportion. And so, too, does the reader's participation, which grows from one of passive belief to active collusion.

Conclusion

In driving and walking the individual conducts himself—or rather his vehicular shell—so that the direction, rate, and resoluteness of his proposed course will be readable. In ethological terms, he provides an «intention display.» By providing his gestural prefigurement and committing himself to what it foretells, the individual makes himself into something that others can read and predict from; ...He becomes something to which they can adapt without loss of self-respect... We must expect that...he will also be able to intentionally induce misreadings...In football, offensive ends are expected to acquire skill in providing false intention displays,...classification of these moves is attempted and...an offensive end who acquires skill at this sort of misdirection is said to have «good moves.»

—Erving Goffman. *Relations in Public*. (17)

Why, one may object, initiate a conclusion with Goffman's new perspective? Is not our psychoanalytical conceptual framework sufficient? By this outward conceptual movement, which extends the extra-literary thrust of my Freudian framework, I first

wish to emphasize that reading is not a privileged activity; it participates in the broader context of human communication. Second, I wish to identify the nature of my methodological tools. My psychoanalytical framework, by naming the reader-persona relationship as «seductive» or «exhibitionist,» recognizes itself as topological. Goffman suggests a still broader *process* perspective, an economy of human behavior. This perspective allows us to reflect upon our use of psychoanalytical *topoi*, for, much like Goffman's football player, we have inflected them, they have not remained static.

If, as I suggested at the outset, the goal of the persona is to seduce the reader, then he starts by projecting a certain image endowed with positive qualities and offering the reader to accept and relate to that image. Accepting the persona's seduction, the reader enters into the text in a state of belief, reading the «story» of the text through the eyes of the persona. To use Goffman's terms, the persona proffers an intention display which guides the reader through the text.

However, as we have seen, the persona may deconstruct the authenticity and the integrity of this image by his detachment from self. Rather than offering the reader an image to relate to, the persona may now offer a mobile structure of closeness and distance, and of reality and fiction, in which both the persona and reader participate. The reader, instead of accepting his seduction by the persona, now enters into the scene of seduction as a participant or player. But the play of closeness and distance, of reality and fiction, unlike the image projected, cannot be predicted. One knows that certain thrusts of the persona are coming, but the tension of their anticipation, the putting off of their completion, doubtless creates a more engaging context for the reader than the simple demand for belief. The duplicity in the persona's intention display, then, is no loss to the reader, for what he has lost in authenticity he has gained in participation with a player or partner who has «...good moves.»

NOTES

1. «Le langage est une chose qui m'a séduit. Le langage est une chose qui m'a

perversi. Le langage est une chose qui m'a formé. Le langage est une chose qui m'a déformé. Voilà pourquoi je suis poète...», *Blaise Cendrars vous parle*, in *Oeuvres complètes*, IV (Paris: Denoël, 1964), p. 547. My translation.

2. Cendrars criticized Cubism for two of its most important features, the absence of depth and color, in his article, «Pourquoi le cube s'effrite,» published in *La Rose Rouge* (May 14, 1919): «La jeunesse d'aujourd'hui met justement à l'honneur le point omis dans l'expérience cubiste: l'aptitude de la profondeur. La jeunesse d'aujourd'hui a le sens de la réalité. Elle a horreur du vide, de la destruction, elle ne raisonne pas le vertige. ...En négligeant la couleur, les peintres cubistes négligèrent le principe émotif qui veut que pour être vivante (vivante en soi, sur-réelle,) toute oeuvre comporte un élément sensuel, irraisonné, absurde, lyrique., l'élément vital qui sort l'oeuvre du domaine des limbes»; *Oeuvres complètes*, IV, 187. For a review of writing on Cendrars's connections with Delaunay and other painters, see Mary Ann Caws, *The Inner Theatre of Recent French Poetry* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1972), pp. 36-39.

3. Jacques Lacan, *Écrits* (Paris: Seuil, 1966), pp. 181, 267 et *passim*.

4. Eric Berne, *Games People Play: The Psychology of Human Relationships* (1964; New York: Grove Press, 1967), pp. 13-15.

5. For my reading of Freud, I have substantially followed Jean Laplanche and J.-B. Pontalis, *Vocabulaire de la psychanalyse* (Paris: P.U.F., 1968).

6. All poetry quotations are referenced with two numbers. The first is the page reference in *Oeuvres complètes* (Paris: Denoël, 1963), I; the second is for *Du monde entier: Poésies complètes: 1912-1924* (1947; Paris: Gallimard «Poésie,» 1967). All translations are mine. Longer original text quotations are in the notes.

7.

Pourtant, J'étais fort mauvais poète
Je ne savais pas aller jusqu'au bout

(21/28)

Moi, le mauvais poète qui ne voulais aller nulle part,
je pouvais aller partout

(21/29)

Autant d'images-associations que je ne peux pas développer dans mes vers

Car je suis encore fort mauvais poète

Car l'univers me déborde

Car j'ai négligé de m'assurer contre les accidents de chemin de fer

Car je ne sais pas aller jusqu'au bout.

(30/40-41)

8.

Elle est douce et muette, sans aucun reproche,

Avec un long tressaillement à votre approche;

Mais quand moi je lui viens, de-ci, de-là, de fête
 Elle fait un pas, puis ferme les yeux—et fait un pas.
 Car elle est mon amour, et les autres femmes
 N'ont que des robes d'or sur de grands corps de flammes,
 Ma pauvre amie est si esseulée
 Elle est toute nue, n'a pas de corps—elle est trop pauvre.

:24/32)

Mon Rêve familial

Je fais souvent ce rêve étrange et pénétrant
 D'une femme inconnue, et que j'aime et qui m'aime
 Et qui n'est chaque fois, ni tout à fait la même
 Ni tout à fait une autre, et m'aime et me comprend

Car elle me comprend, et mon coeur, transparent
 Pour elle seule, hélas! cesse d'être un problème
 Pour elle seule, et les moiteurs de mon front blême,
 Elle seule les sait rafraîchir, en pleurant.
 Est-elle brune, blonde ou rousse?—Je l'ignore.
 Son nom? Je me souviens qu'il est doux et sonore
 Comme ceux des aimés que la Vie exila.

Son regard est pareil au regard des statues,
 Et, pour sa voix, lointaine, et calme, et grave, elle a
 L'inflexion des voix chères qui se sont tues.

Paul Verlaine, *Oeuvres poétiques complètes*, ed. Y.-G. Le Dantec & Jacques Borel, «Pléiade» (Paris: Gallimard, 1962), pp. 62-63. Cendrars's verses quoted in my text are part of a development describing Jeanne: preceding my quote are two quatrains and following it one quatrain. The setting off of these quatrains, the near-alexandrin verse, and the rigorous punctuation are all unique in the context of the poem, thus emphasizing the reference to the traditional forms of Verlaine.

A number of thematic parallels exist between Cendrars's verses and Verlaine's poem: the quasi-tearful attitude of the poet, the quietness of the women's demeanor, in fact the insubstantial and enigmatic quality of their presence. Without making a detailed analysis, it should be noted that the pattern of repetition and syntactical articulation have many obvious similarities.

9.

Et tous les jours et toutes les femmes dans les cafés
 et tous les verres

J'aurais voulu les boire et les casser
Et toutes les vitrines et toutes les rues
Et toutes les maisons et toutes les vies
Et toutes les roues des fiacres qui tournaient en tourbillon sur les mauvais
pavés
J'aurais voulu les plonger dans une fournaise de glaives
Et j'aurais voulu broyer tous le os
Et arracher toutes les langues
Et liquéfier tous ces grands corps étranges et nus sous les vêtements qui
m'affolent....

(21/28)

10.

Autant d'images-associations que je ne peux pas développer dans mes vers
Car je suis encore fort mauvais poète
Car l'univers me déborde
Car j'ai négligé de m'assurer contre les accidents de chemin de fer
Car je ne sais pas aller jusqu'au bout
Et j'ai peur

(30/40-41)

11

Nous sommes loin, Jeanne, tu roules depuis sept jours/.../
Les inquiétudes/Oublie les inquiétudes/.../
Mais oui, tu m'énerves, tu le sais bien, nous sommes bien loin/.../
Oui, nous le sommes, nous le sommes/.../
Non mais...fiche-moi la paix...laisse-moi tranquille/.../
J'ai pitié, j'ai pitié viens vers moi je vais te conter une histoire/Viens dans
mon lit

12. Robert Scholes and Robert Kellog. *The Nature of Narrative* (1966; new York: Oxford University Press, 1968), p. 257.

13. *Ibid.*, p. 257.

14. «The turning around of an instinct upon the subject is suggested to us by the reflection that masochism is actually sadism turned round upon the subject's own ego, and that exhibitionism includes the love of gazing at the subject's own body.» Sigmund Freud, *Collected Papers*, Vol. 4 tr. J. Riviere, Leonard and Virginia Woolf and the Institute of Psychoanalysis (London: 1924-25), in Leland E. Hinsie and Robert J. Campbell, *Psychiatric Dictionary*, 3rd ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1960).

15. Caws, p. 50.

16.

1910

Castellamare

Je dînais d'une orange à l'ombre d'un oranger
Quand, tout à coup...
Ce n'était pas l'éruption du Vésuve
Ce n'était pas le nuage de sauterelles, une des dix plaies d'Egypte
Ni Pompéï
Ce n'était pas les cris ressuscités des mastodontes géants
Ce n'était pas la Trompette annoncée
Ni la grenouille de Pierre Brisset
Quand, tout à coup,
Feux
Chocs
Rebondissements
Etincelle des horizons simultanés
Mon sexe

O Tour Eiffel!

17. Erving Goffman: *Relations in Public: Microstudies of the Public Order* (New York: Harper, 1971), p. 11.