The Book That You Will Not Write: An Interview with Hélène Cixous

Frédéric-Yves Jeannet

Wellington, April 20, 2005

Frédéric-Yves Jeannet: One of the supporting pillars—the paradox that it is a void, one absent, which holds up, but that’s the way it is—of your most recently published fiction, Tours promises [Promised Towers], is referred to as “the book that I do not write.” Is this book a Œphantasm, a metaphor, a signified that errs without settling into any signifier? Or, in other words: is it a promised land, an equivalent to that Book to Come invoked by Maurice Blanchot?

Arcachon, April 21, 2005

Hélène Cixous: It ended up by growing to the size of a character in Tours promises, in which it became a third turn or a third tower, or fourth turn/tower, or the turn or the tower of towers (the other tower metaphors or realities are the Twin Towers and the tower of Montaigne, my founding towers—unless there were a prehistoric or archi-originary tower, but there I have no idea.

So, about this book-tower/turn-pillar-phantom, I should only speak secretly or cautiously, since it/it moves, is more and more present, more and more insistent. For—it’s always been-there. I believe I have caught glimpses of it, traces, promises, warnings (perhaps in Jour de l’an? Or Délugé?). It has always been-not-there.

I should speak about it in the negative theology mode: this is an “it-is-not,” a “not to be” written. Its power [puissance] is immense, like the impossible. It persecutes me, in all its spectrality. Is it a metaphor? One must be able to think that. Is a phantom a metaphor? A phantom is also a metaphor. A phantom is an other presence. And there are two kinds of that: the phantom of a “past” and the phantom of a “not-yet.” Except that I think that it is pledged to a never.

It is not to come, in any case not in my lifetime.

Less and less do I know how I’ll bear this desirable but incommunica-ble company, how I will be able to spend years resisting without resistance. There is a lot of death inside there, even if I have “learned” to think that not-to-do (not to write, to say, and so on) can be converted,

through displacement, just as a “not to dream,” a “do not dream” produces symptoms. Yet the interdiction is very strong. It is well worth that of paradise.

Wellington, 23.iv.05

Would this “book that you are not writing” be, could it be, an image that guides you, helps you to write, a negative? Is it the un-said, the secret to keep, the angel—or the god—in secret confinement? Is it “this emanation of the Book of books” that you evoked in Tombe in 1973?

[Arcachon, April 24, 2005] such a beautiful tempest I send it to you. What “Arcachon” gives me, this hamlet, among other things, is the wind, its voices, its splendors (its visible incommensurable manifestations, its lover’s brutality with the giant oak, die Eiche in German, which, all in gold, has quakes and quivers in front of me) and for me that is writing itself—which I do not write—the breath of air. However, everyone is sleeping, my mother, the cats, because this particular wind does not wage war.

(as for me, I wage one on myself: lack of time, worries about what I venture to write, and so on.)

I feel profoundly content, picking up the threads again with you: interruption, I have noticed, does not suit with me. You’ll forgive for responding too briefly? (the cause: not enough time here—I would like to work on these themes. I will do so.)

—No, that is not an image that guides me (were you thinking of Beatrice?) or perhaps, if there were (one), this image is a kind of fabulous book, in which a unique vast, complex, passionate life would be gathered up, without example, yet barely have I said these words and that seems empty to me. It would be closest to . . . ?—in secret confinement (not angel nor god, but a beyond, a beyond that would traverse the laws, a beyond the principles which one could in no case traverse), it would therefore be a tragedy boiling over with joys, I do not see at all how to speak about it, I saw—it’s my life—that I cannot begin to write about it and that curiously I feel accompanied by an immense presence, to which I have not begun to pay homage.

I sometimes read the Recherche [In Search of] (where Proust immerses himself in reflections upon art) grateful for the work done inside the book on the book. That is what interests me.

This book is not already written, nor is it not-yet-written. It is of a kind that is not reducible—and I fear that it will never be “written,” neither by me, nor in my lifetime.

That it “helps me to write,” there is no doubt, and paradoxically: by preventing me, by forbidding me, by pushing me to approach it through
detours, reveries, dreams. (Many of my dreams, which always completely surpass me, seem to me, after the fact, to give me higher lessons. For example a dream from last night, that overwhelmed me with boredom. I was bored until the end of time, the end of the world. To such a point that I almost did not note it down, just so as to wrest myself from the boredom, you see what I mean. And with an unsayable boredom I noted it. Later, I thought that I had dreamed and noted, up above all the strengths I’ve got, an incredible and very concrete state of fastidiousness. But, to drag someone up to that point, all the power of the dream is needed. At the point where one comes undone).

For The Book should exclusively be written up above all the strengths I’ve got in anything, written wildly besides oneself. But only in dreams do I reach the up above all the strengths I’ve got.

And on top of that, The Book must not be written. It does not belong to this world, but rather to the other world, the one in which Abraham is catapulted despite himself, and gagged.

Wellington, 23.IV.05

In referring to Blanchot’s Book to Come, I also meant to indicate the place of Orpheus, a character we have not yet evoked in our Rencontre terrestre [Terrestrial Encounter], although he seems always to have been present in your work. . . . The place of Orpheus, since Blanchot locates there, in him, the destined role of the writer of today, or rather of tomorrow. . . . Even though Orpheus would already have been, for example for Monteverdi, the artist of tomorrow (which is to say, for us, already of yesterday), he seems to remain for Blanchot always to come. What is your relation with Orpheus?

Arcachon, 24.IV.05

It seems to me that initially I lived “Orpheus” in a structurally ambiguous way (“Orpheus” is a man, in the myth, and therefore not me. “Orpheus” is the singer—therefore me. It’s her. It’s him.) He is ahead, she is ahead. Who is ahead of whom? Who arrives ahead? The one who is ahead is the one who is blind, for he does not see who is behind his back. It’s an infinite figure, who or which has haunted me. She exists, almost invisibly, in Le Troisième corps I believe it is. On top of that, I have a passion for Gluck’s Orpheus, in particular for the contralto Orpheus, Kathleen Ferrier. Hence: a woman. What I tell myself is that Orpheus is a being with a woman inside, but a large woman, great big life with death. Or, you know, those are the letters of my father. Orpheus is any creature who writes, and divides itself in two, dies in writing, lives in writing, dies in living in writing.7 But in Ovid the whole myth can be read minutely. Obviously, one should always think the couple as One (male)–One (female), handed down from the Platonic Androgyne.
To come . . . (taken up, re-launched, and politicized by Derrida) enounces a whole theme—for me, over-invested—which is the promise. As you know, the word is heavy and painful in the Jewish phantasmatic: one is rocked to the murmuring of the future nostalgia. Promised land and, at the same time, to come and never. For me, that’s a benediction. The to come never comes but makes you advance, walk, write. Another version is: the Messiah—those are my cats. So familiar. The given to come. There is something of the gift in what is not yet. To have is to lose, to aim at, to wait for [attendre], almost to attain [atteindre] but without finitude.

You see that I am speaking not of the book to come but of the immense book whose coming I do not even await, because in some manner it is all around next to me, but I am not writing it, for that’s not where the book alights. Mo répanon.

Windy wintry Wellington, May 3rd, 05—

. . . I must absolutely succeed in asking you by the end of the month (that is to say, between my courses, which are quite consuming, and our approaching trip to the northeast of Australia, also for work purposes) some of the questions that won’t leave me alone about the book that you are not writing. . . . However I must formulate & write these questions which will also be for me the occasion of speaking to you about L’amour mème [Love Itself] which I’ve read about one-fourth of and in which I can “find” myself, identify and relate, which pleases me, questions me, and surprises me. Very amazing, yes, so far. Is it truly “a real novel”? I’ll know that later.

May 3—Paris-Barcelona—rain

rain outside and inside . . .

About “the book”: I feel that it will have been all the more everywhere and nowhere than I could have believed, when I delivered it, denounced and renounced it in 2003. At this moment, it haunts me—or its double haunts me in an even more insistent manner.

L’amour mème. I’m glad that you ask, “is it a real novel?” I ask myself that, too. I also ask myself a thousand other things regarding the truly real [vrai]. Obviously, that, this questioning, is nourished by the part played by the letters. Everything is in the mailbox-letters box. We’ll talk about it once you’ve finished it. I cut a lot out for the publication. You have the complete text.

Wellington, May 7, 2005 already!—I am completely lost in Time, always associated for me with the seasons—but here, we are entering winter after an on and off Indian summer which refuses to end but will have to admit the obvious: it is cold, the heating is unable to get rid of the native humidity of Chesney Wold, this house in which Katherine Mansfield once
lived; by the way, what do you think of her, of her work (which, for my part, I didn’t much like, but am re-discovering here in a better light)? I am in the vertigo of L’amour même (LM—is this the final title?—it is very beautiful.) I do not want to give in to it, here, to follow other paths before having fully tracked down in Tours promises the “book that you do not write” [BTIDNW], but I am sinking into it nonetheless (in the vertigo of L’amour même): very enticing & dangerous for me, all of that, whereas I am currently teaching something totally different (Duras and, of all things, Beauvoir!!!), and so on. But every time I have a hard time closing the book (the computer, since the book is still virtual for me).

Montsouris, the other May 7, 05

I was already, early this morning, busy fussing around with my last text (Insisting is its name—Insisting—to J.D.) when your fax was well received. First, let me tell you the movement of my heart: that did me well. I say to myself: luckily, on the other end, FY is busy reading, that drops in well-timed, given the overwhelmed terrestrial state that I am in. I owe you.

LM is the final title, more precisely: LM: Dans la boîte aux lettres [In the Letterbox]. As I told you, I made cuts. I hope you will agree with them. I am truly delightfully revived that it dizzies you a bit. I fear (feared) having attenuated it somewhat. At bottom, I should—and perhaps I’ll do it one day—write a madly violent LM. It is in reserve. There are slight modifications but strong ultimately. That way, you will be witness of the displacement. Yes, really, I am glad that LM had11 quickness for you.

And also: I adore Wellington. Nothing is more marvellous to me than the cities I imagine and which are real [réelles] for having been lived by those who are dear. So, thanks to you, I live in “Wellington,” known in dream. So many cities have I travelled through in dream! (I don’t know the name of the one from last night.) K.M.? I read her, long ago, with a certain esteem. Doesn’t go much farther than that. I am not very fair, in literature, I only like the extreme, what is near to the abyss, which limits me, that’s to say, unlimits me. Thus, without having any love for V. Woolf, I consider her nonetheless as literature by right, because of the violent tension of her work. In truth [vérité], there are enough extremes, in the universe, for me never to be tempted by a little-less.

I have the idea that this “book that I do not write” would also be somehow located in the shadow of an eleventh commandment: “Thou shalt not write.” Which one can of course interpret as: thou shalt not unveil the secret, thou shalt not transgress the code (of literature, of morality & of religion, and so on). What about that? About religion?

You are following on my heels [talonnes] (what a beautiful word, no?) with the BTIDNW—that puts me into danger, but I like that.
I love this idea of the 11th Commandment (which is perhaps only the shadow of all the others or their condensed translation: thou shalt not kill, and so on . . .)

Your question is magnificent, and thus frightening: 1) you are right. There is certainly a law. But as soon as there is law, and that’s what makes me tremble, there is transgression, almost structurally: the law, showing you the forbidden, gives you the desire to flee, therefore the desire—which you flee. The “thou shalt not write” is an internal threat. Nevertheless, it’s you who translated my Book . . . , with intuition, in this form. I am not certain that I would have translated it into in-justice, into thus-justice, the way you did.12 But I recognize that a shadow of the law slides into the Iamnotwriting.

In my B . . . however, the notwriting—which is therefore a writing that does not come about—is a sign of not-to-be-able. Not to want to and not to be able to, not to want to be able to and not to be able to want to, and so on . . .

All these interpretations are acceptable: “thou shalt not unveil the secret” but that would require a long, fine, commentary on the veiling-unveiling of the secret, such as the one J.D. undertook so absolutely, undertook and performed in Voiles, for everything in this statement is to be re-thought: the thou, the unveil, the secret, and so on. Each of these words contains reserves of ambiguity and of secrecy.

(I should say here in parentheses that one of the threats or hypotheses or thoughts that fascinate me, that leave me speechless, is the idea that “the secret,” whatever it be, if there is any, if there is a, or One secret, is probably the most difficult thing in the world to foresee or prevent or calculate. To give you briefly an idea of my uncertainty: what I run by myself is that if there is a secret—let’s say, “someone’s”—over the course of the centuries, 1) Everyone would know it or will have known or sensed or guessed or smelled it. 2) Exactly the inverse, it will never be known, therefore it is as if it had never existed. [A fictional/fictive example: Beethoven’s immortal beloved. Everyone knows no one knows who it is. It could be absolutely anyone or anything]—this is, comparatively, nothing, for there are surely grave secrets like that of Abraham, things that one can really not say, to anyone, not even to oneself—no doubt crimes or actions that seem like madness, but also have an aspect of innocence or wisdom. Dostoyevsky is a bearer of these scenes, and for that I love him apart from all others.)

“Thou shalt not transgress the code of . . .” and so on . . . I will set, apart from all, literature: it is made to allow us to attempt transgression. That is what it promises me. Yet with experience, one starts to see that it is extremely difficult to transgress: one cannot do it on purpose. One cannot step over to the other side. But one can find oneself there. Does
Artaud transgress? No. He talks his talk. Does one want to avow? (which I’ve tried to do more than once) the movement of extracting the avowal produces on the secret a reductive or annulling effect. Those are themes I’ve written much about, which is to say, by and in fluttering around, or there above.

To a certain extent, one can only transgress in secret—hence without witness.

As for the other categories: morality—religion (I don’t know if I should distinguish between them) I really and truly am not acquainted with the codes. Apart from Thou shalt not kill. But I have my own, certainly, that I don’t succeed in obeying, obviously. We’ll have to talk about it again, or you can formulate your question again.

You were saying to me that you had detected traces, warnings or promises of TBIDNW in Jours de l’an [New Year’s Days] or Déluge [Deluge], thus in the 1990s. Already in Tombe [Tomb, or, Drop or Fall], one finds the following, which seems to prefigure it also:

If I had had other eyes to read it, I would have been able to reproduce its secret ink, the book would not have been missing from Tombe in the place of which this one here is written. But if I had known why Tombe is written and not an other, I would not have had the desire or obligation to come back to the point of delirium upon this wall. All the lures and all the prudences and all the ruses of conservation were laid down there.

That is why what is missing from this book is the book of death, of which this book is only a parody. But this book comes near to the book of death, and at moments with a hair’s breadth of it.15

This point interests me very much; as usual you read me. Whereas for me, I forgetoread myself. What I say (you say) in Tombe refers to another scene, another motif, which leads me then, thanks to you, to clarify: there are books that I do not write, that I aim at, and whose failure causes, as Proust would say, a “diversionary” book, an unexpected, an as-good-as-I-could, a lieutenant. Tombe is thus all I was able to do before Manhattan which is all I was able to do with that same book not yet written. For I could try to write out another one, more exact, rawer, more merciless, less circumspect, and always in the direction of this same book that taunts me or stands up to me, let’s say not one that is “truer” [plus “vrai”] but rather one that is more cut-away, more uncovered. This book, of which Tombe and Manhattan are two attempts or incarnations, has not finished with me, and I not with it. I have no project. It may happen that one day I launch an attack, but that is not something calculated, rather unleashed. At least I know that it is still lurking in the cave.
There are thus two kinds of B. that. . . : A. The kind like Tombe, Manhattan + X. + Y. + Z. (or Neutre [Neutral] + Le Jour ou je n’étais pas là [The Day I Wasn’t There] + X., and so on.). And B. The Book, the only one, the unique, still unattempted, which is everywhere and nowhere.

I understand the secret that you were calling upon when you replied to me, the other day: “about this book-tower/turn-pillar-phantom, I should only speak secretly or cautiously, since it moves. . .” and of course I have neither the pretension of seeking to un-veil it by devoting myself to a vast exercise of Derridean deconstruction (like you, I prefer God to his apes), nor that of translating your metaphorized language into my common language . . . The BTIDNW will therefore remain secret, but we turn around it. When you write in Tours promises: “the Book that I do not write is the only one I have never fled, attacked, or failed. It is. It is That One which being not yet is everywhere. I am well there. I am indeed at it,”¹⁴ is this not a little bit of a contradiction—it’s what I called in Rencontre terrestre the rejection of one book by the other—with what you wrote prior to this book (yet which was published after) in our interviews: “The book of books, the book towards which I am heading, and again in the one I am presently writing [Manhattan, I believe is referred to here], bolts in front of me, like the sacred animal that makes all the impure demon cavaliers race towards mortal purity.”¹⁵

You see a contradiction, I take it as between 1) “It is. . . I am well there [I am indeed at it]” and 2) “It bolts in front of me. . .”, and so on. Yet a): the number 2 here belongs to the first category. It was no doubt indeed Manhattan, for example. And b): nevertheless, I could imagine that The Book—in which I am—is the object of an unconscious pursuit: to race after what we are in, isn’t that a bit what one does for God?

All these considerations, which your vigilance / your wakefulness pushes me to state, to spotlight in my sleepy haze,—make me think that perhaps I never write except in, or I have always written in, this vital struggle with what is refused to me (and therefore negatively granted), that perhaps I have never written except in order to attenuate the exile I am held in, for, when I write (but can I extend that to you and say: when we write?) I am absorbed like ink or tears by a spiritual and a bit narcotic substance, a cloth of oblivion, a white tissue that stains the exile, that stops its flow every time that I clamp down the gaping of my being by putting in front of my body-soul a sheet of paper which I attach myself to with a pen. This sheet has the powers of a bandage or of a sail (of a raft). As long as I hold to it infinite loss is suspended like a suspended sentence. As I must fear loss (which however I desire) it is rare that I let go of the paper for very long; what is sure is that if one deprived me of this stanching, I would not hold very long before dying.

Sometimes I ask myself whether I have a hidden design similar to the one Proust speaks of (subject: art). It may be that Proust’s subject is a
fiction that serves as a tourniquet. But I rather believe that he really and truly discovered “memory,” a continent. As for me, my continent is a phantom. An immense phantom. (Not a person—a universe—but phantom, The other world of the world in which I exist).

[Interrupted]

Wintry Wellington, June 3, 2005

In order to suspend (I do not know how to conclude) this interview of today, here are some more leads. Your last response itself remained suspended, “interrupted” as you wrote. So here are my questions:

Very surprised by the protocol of the appearance-disappearance of characters in your books. Thus I was expecting to find again, now that it had appeared in TP, this BTIDNW in L’amour même. Yet it is missing from it. Like the brother suddenly missing and replaced by a “semi-brother” in PT—which may remind us of the sentence in Tombe from 1973: “Desire always rushes headlong onto the one twice born twice stolen who is i/he-brother of the semifather and his beautiful orphan.”

Paris, June 2, 2005 (you notice this lovely feat:
I respond to you one day before your question.

What do you say to that? Who follows who I am following today?)

Your questions, my very [mon très], weave, they do the work which for Proust the grand magical ceremony of the madeleine does: the madeleine, the teacup, the return, the blooming of the Japanese miniatures, prove to him that “immortality” is a reality. Your questions are not simply questions: they extend a fabric of silk above the various voids, the absences, over the gaps in memory, above death, they continue while one is not there, they are the absolute, ideal reading (the reader who never sleeps and who dreams all the time), they are the voice when silence extends itself.

Humbly attempt to respond to their admirable vigilance.

First, regarding the interruption, which you rightly kept: however accidental, it had to have a symptomatic necessity. Event, rupture. All of that makes up the text. I cannot erase it.

So I turn towards the questions—each more living than the other.

That you are surprised enchants me. a) that depicts you as a reader of the heart, like the great actor is he who believes; b) in addition, you await me, you await yourself and expect (that’s what uninterruption is)—for you hypothesize that, as regards the part of me that is author, I continue, you believe. You believe in the reality, the immortality, the truth, in fiction. I grant you that entirely.

So then what do I have to say about these no shows? This BTIDNW, that brother, who have absented themselves? First, these absences form
a *part* to the general movement, like the advent of death in life, the crater dug out by a catastrophe. It would be vain not to recognize before your friendly eyes that I am in a state of *mutilation*.

*Mutilation*, superb cruel word, bespeaks retrenchment. I am in a state of retrenchment. *Mutilus* was used in Latin for *dehorned* animals, rams for example. That agrees with my state: I am without horns and dehorned, my shofar has been wrested from me—Derrida—I am without this originary breath. Do you know that the shofar is a ram’s horn which bespeaks deprivation, a horn without a ram, ram without horn when you hear it wailing at the synagogue, you want to cry. Derrida appeals to this desolate shofar in *Rams*. There you have it. I have not begun to get to know the jagged edges of this wound, I feel them but I do not think them over, nor, for that matter, do I treat them with any gauzes.¹⁷

I have a movement inside myself that refuses denial. Last year I was asking myself how and what to write when shouting out my lungs. I found myself at the very place where the knot is strangled.

Nevertheless I still believe that the BTIDNW is in *L’amour même*. It cannot be any other way. Only not in a thematic way: phantom. If you start to reflect about this bizarre narrative, according to me it joins up again with the zones of *Manhattan*, in the destinal authority granted to literature about the stories of the characters: all are written, steered, shaken, pierced, rocked, by letters that one does not cease to receive and at the same time never really and truly to receive. And by books, a library that infiltrates souls with its threatening traces. (I’m enclosing for you the publisher’s insert, it’s a simple indication, of course). According to me the characters are (in) the pre-history of the BTIDNW. They do not know how to *read* their book.

*In our previous interviews [Rencontre terrestre], we had evoked the hypothesis of a “rejection of one book by the other,” the previous by the following, and so on. Now, doesn’t the BIDNW play a bit the role of this exemplary foil, permanently that which one cannot write as the horizon of that which one is writing?*

Concerning the “exemplary foil” and the horizon, I would rather say, horizon but blurry, indistinct and *attractive*, not foiling. One sighs for what it would be, if one could represent it to oneself, but that is the model of all legends and myths: one can—must not look god in the face, likewise for *Psyche*, *Eurydice*, and so on. He is unfigurable and improbable and nonetheless *he is*. One feels his immense impalpable presence, the Divine Comrade or the Companion Divine [*le Compagnon Divin ou la Divine Compagnie*]. One guesses, nay, divines that it will display itself, virtually, when one will be posthumous, so that one is traversed,
crisscrossed, by desires to die so as to see, infantile desires since, precisely, having gone beyond that door, one will not see: it really is the Promised book.\(^\text{18}\) I think a lot in that direction. I am tempted to write it, but I know that I would have to die from it, and I do not dare. On top of that, it is not impossible that, in my cahiers, in my notes and dreams, it secretes itself. But all of that remains dispersed, dis-assembled. Anyway, if I did not have this haunting, I would fall down like a dead tree.

*In L’amour même TBIDNW is caught up to by “the book that I have not re-read, that I will never re-read” (you say this also about Le Prénom de Dieu [The Given Name of God], your first book). So, I would like to ask you: does your life contain many of these books (which make your oeuvre), that you thus designate without naming them, or only by periphrases? I am referring in concrete terms to the following passage from Tours promises: “In the book which I am not writing, I had noted on June 12, 2001, in the notebook with sails and veils, everything is made up of soft and apocalyptic scenes. The character who I am is very different from my apparent person. The tale of these scenes exists in reality. We are capable of doing it, the one to the other... For example, Washington Square with, by it, Washington Square and the traces on the ground, the glistening of our having gone at our gait, manyscore crisscrossings of the square with the squirrels and peanut shells. Squirrels’ immortality, ours. They are always there. In the square. And all is in my books.”\(^\text{19}\) Among a thousand other occurrences of the omnipresent book, let us quote this one, for example: “Now while we walk at the same rapid pace, I wonder if we will find ourselves in a book at the next crossing or if we will spend a day among family.”\(^\text{20}\)

*In L’amour même these different metaphorical books have become: “I had just written this particular book, I wonder if it is on the side of the just right place or on the other side of the hidden inverse, I was thinking towards the mystery of the book which is neither true truly nor false truly and which had ordered me to retrace our steps looking for the letters that were the authors of this incalculable total that is our being and that tell stories on the subject of ourselves without our being masters of our subject. I am keeper of the true body, I thought, I keep everything, I write everything.”\(^\text{21}\)

“The book that I have not re-read” (how beautiful your questions are, my friend, and their beauty is made up of exactitude. You, who are deaf, you have the finest ear for these murmurings that escape from volumes.) These non-named books however having a referent, I don’t know if there are many of them. A few. Some I have spotted explicitly. For example, the “aborted” book, stopped and kept, that will/would have attested the end of Thessiah-Messiah.\(^\text{22}\) This “book” is not-born. I wrote everything, but to her. It is not imaginary. But there it’s a sacrificial “book,” sacrificed. Who is the keeper of a pain that I want in no case to lessen. I want to keep for it the muteness of the horror. You know,
sometimes one also writes in order to be “finished with it.” All these nameless, these phantoms, these withheld, are preserved from a light that would reduce them to dust. This is a double bind: here or beyond: on both sides, there is a life-less death-less.

There are those that are written and upon which, for reasons I “can” really and truly not analyze, I turn my back (which is to say that I let them look at me but I do not look at them).

All of that means, no doubt, that books have formidable powers, they know a lot about our blindesses or about our weaknesses. They are creatures that can become friends or enemies.

(My limitless animism: last night my two cats, which are she-cats whom I call the cats or the girls, astonished my circle, with their conversation. You mean, I said, you are astonished? Nonetheless there you have it, cats that speak French perfectly). Where does the book begin, where end, I don’t know. There I am. You too are there. All is book, all becomes writing. Thus I live. And above faraway infinitely, the one I lack, the BIDNW, but I have a hunch that its lack is converted into fuel.

Translated by Thomas Dutoit

Notes

1 This interview forms a sort of codicil to Hélène Cixous and Frédéric-Yves Jeannet, Rencontre terrestre (Paris: Galilée, 2005), which “covers” Cixous’s work up to Benjamin à Montaigne.
2 Cixous, Tours promises (Paris: Galilée, 2004).
3 The French is le livre que je n’écris pas and contains also the sense of an alternative translation in English, with the present continuous: “the book that I am not writing.”—Trans.
4 “It/it” refers here to le tour (turn) and la tour (tower).—Trans.
5 Puissance, power with also a sense of potential force, to be distinguished from pouvoir, power in the sense of capability, faculty, ability.—Trans.
6 “I saw—it’s my life” translates je vis, which reads as the present indicative (I live) and the simple past (I saw).—Trans.
7 An alternate translation might give, “dies to write, lives to write, dies in living to write.”—Trans.
8 In English in the original.
9 In French, “Est-ce ‘un vrai roman’?” A true novel would be “un roman vrai”; a real novel is “un vrai roman.”—Trans.
10 In English in the original.
11 The written manuscript of the fax leaves ambiguous the transcription of this word: “ait-est-soit” (had-is—would be).
12 Traduire en in-justice is here the French. In legal terminology, “to bring someone before the courts, to prosecute somebody” is traduire quelqu’un en justice.—Trans.
14 Cixous and Jeannet, Rencontre terrestre, 60.
15 Cixous and Jeannet, Rencontre terrestre, 49.
“Think them over” and “treat them with any gauzes” translates the homophonic verbs in *je ne les pense pas* and *je ne les pense pas non plus*.—Trans.

“Desires” translates the French *envies*, which has the Latin root *videre* (to see), but if separated into two words, *en vies*, would translate as “in lives.”—Trans.

Cixous, *Tours promises*, 146.

Cixous, *L’amour même: Dans la boîte aux lettres* (Paris: Galilée, 2005), quoted from manuscript.

Thessie (Thessiah) was the name of Cixous’s cat, and *Messie* (Messiah), a book she published in 1992.