



Yours Faithfully, the Author

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Yours Faithfully, the Author¹

Maurice Couturier

I have a colleague at the university who finds himself in a strange predicament. He is a comparatively well-known specialist of a famous writer, and his small but fervent coterie of aficionados (should I say “aficionadas?”) among his students often address him by that more famous name, no doubt as a tribute to his supreme act of impersonation. The same colleague, who, I hope, will never read these pages, is also cursed with a striking resemblance to a handsome and amiable political leader who is much better known in France than the aforementioned “famous writer.” My colleague had never had to complain about this resemblance until a mentally disturbed girl of twenty-six accidentally crossed his path; she came up to him at the end of a cocktail party and warmly spoke a few endearing words, which my baffled colleague, who had never seen her before, failed to understand. It turned out that the girl had taken him for the amiable politician. After this first and (so far) only meeting, she even sent him a letter, addressed to something like “Ronald Smith” (a combination of the politician’s first name and of my colleague’s last name), and in the envelope there was only a visiting card with the girl’s printed address and phone number.

I leave it to the imaginative reader to think up a psychologically, or poetically, relevant dénouement to the blossoming plot. In the meantime, I would like to investigate some of the maddening tricks that the postal system can play on you if you are not careful.

Here is a middle-aged woman, called Jane, who is terribly afraid of losing her good looks. Every morning, after rouging her cheeks, lining her lips and applying mascara to her eyes, she walks up to her mirror on the wall to check the value of her shares on the stock market. The rest of the day, she writes anonymous letters to people whose names she picked up from the telephone directory. Here is a sample:

Dear Mr. Quistgaard:

Although you do not know me, my name is Jane. I have seized your name from the telephone book in an attempt to enmesh you in my concerns.²

It goes on like this for two pages; the whole letter is quoted by Donald Barthelme in his weird book *Snow White*. Jane has apparently become terribly bored with her dumb mirror; she lacks “connection,” as she lamely confesses. She is aware that in our modern, media-maniac world, people may feel that they are “overconnected”; what is actually lacking is genuine exchange between people who live “in the same universe of discourse” (p. 44). Television, the radio, and the telephone actually make it possible for people to live entirely on their own; they turn out isolates at the same rate as the Koreans and the Japanese turn out electronic components.

Now, you may ask, what is an isolate? In a 1971 article, Paul Watzlawick mentions an extraordinary experiment once undertaken by Frederic II: he took a few children and entrusted them to the care of well-meaning nurses who were supposed to look meticulously after their bodily cares without ever saying a word to them or exchanging with them in any way. The purpose of the experiment was to find out if the children would spontaneously speak Hebrew, Greek, or Latin. Needless to say, the experiment lamentably failed; the children died.³ What did they die of? Obviously not of malnutrition. Not, either, of not learning to speak. More likely of not being allowed (or encouraged) to establish interpersonal relationships with the other children and the nurses; they were involved in a process of telegraphic communication, the ultimate source or sender being the unseen, inaccessible emperor, but they could not respond nor establish any other form of exchange.

This anecdote may help to understand what happened to little Miles in *The Turn of the Screw*.⁴ His well-meaning but neurotic governess, acting upon the authority of his careless uncle, gradually isolates him and submits him to something like a double-bind, making him utterly incapable of

¹. In *Critical Angles : European Views of Contemporary American Literature*, ed. by Marc Chénétier (Carbondale : Southern Illinois University Press, 1986), pp. 29-44.

². Donald Barthelme, *Snow White* (New York : Atheneum, 1967), p. 44. Subsequent references to this edition are given in parentheses in the text.

³. Paul Watzlawick, “Patterns of Psychotic Communication” in *Problems of Psychosis*, ed. by Pierre Doucet and Camille Laurin (Amsterdam: Excerpta Medica, 1971), pp. 44—53.

⁴. Henry James, *The Turn of the Screw* (New York : Macmillan, 1898).

interacting with her or the others. She is the representative of the inaccessible power and does her utmost to prevent Miles from communicating with the outside world. The trauma is the more tragic for the little boy as Miles is (or confesses to be) a purloiner of letters; he intercepts messages that are not addressed to him. For him, communication is not easy; it is a painful necessity and a tragic impossibility. The theft of the governess's "empty" letter precipitates a crisis; he is now a complete isolate, since he has no way of seeing himself and the world through somebody else's writing nor of acting (however perversely) upon other people. He dies of being an isolate, of not being allowed to, or capable of, exchanging or interacting.

Jane is somewhat like the governess. She singles out her victim, breaks into his "universe of discourse" (a phrase probably meant as a gentle thrust at structuralist orthodoxy), and pierces a hole in his "plenum": "Even a plenum, *cher maître*, can be penetrated" (p. 45). Her words do not have a constative but a performative effect; they do not describe a state of things (Mr. Quistgaard losing his sanity), they produce it. Jane (who is also Tarzan's mate, as the book makes clear [p. 32]), is a violent person in the story, like her model, the stepmother, because she is too narcissistic to exchange and interact; she takes pleasure in mailing nasty messages that the receivers will be in no position to answer, breaking their peace of mind and sending them upon a frustrating quest to discover her identity so as to put an end to the harassment. Like Humbert Humbert, in Nabokov's *Lolita* (1955), trying to track down his rival by leafing through the pages of hotel registers, Jane's victims will desperately struggle to identify her and to stop her from diluting their "theirmess."

Jane's arrogance is somewhat belied, however, by the end of her letter: "You are, essentially, in my power. I suggest an unlisted number" (p. 46). The last sentence can be interpreted as a supreme insolence, a refined torture. If Mr. Quistgaard takes an unlisted number without moving homes he will (or may) continue to receive Jane's letters. If he does either of these things, then he will show that Jane was basically right about him and has completely taken control over him.

Jane may not be joking after all. By suggesting this solution to Mr. Quistgaard, she obliquely implies, perhaps, that she herself considers it a little shocking that any person can penetrate any other person's plenum provided the latter be listed in the telephone book. Being narcissistic, she can't help acutely sensing what it must feel like to receive such a letter. There is a teasing suggestion that she has actually been writing a letter to herself; she has a wonderful understanding of her addressee's feelings because she puts herself in his shoes. It is clear, therefore, that the plenum that is in danger of springing a leak is her own, not that of a problematical Mr. Quistgaard or Kierkegaard.

This anonymous letter is not of course like most anonymous letters we hear about (or receive). It is signed ("Jane"), but since the addressee is not known to the addressor, there is practically no danger that the addressor's last name will ever be identified. It is a mirror letter; Jane is not trying to work her revenge on somebody she knows or has reasons to

complain about. She has no way of knowing what Mr. Quistgaard looks like; she only knows that since he is listed in the directory he is neither a bum nor an industrial mogul, and he must therefore be a middle-class citizen, with a wife, children, a comfortable house, and a car. As a result, she can only project her own feelings when she wants to imagine the addressee's reactions to her letter. That is how she paints up a kind of male version of herself — a mirror-image of herself, the vain and bossy stepmother of Snow White. This letter does not fit the definition of a letter offered by William Gass: "Since a letter is written in the absence of its recipient — indeed, because of that absence — it is like a soliloquy intended to be overheard."⁵ Jane's letter is a soliloquy not intended to be overheard, not even by the dumb beasts that surround her in the jungle. She loves herself too much to be able to communicate and therefore will remain a fraud and a failure in comparison to Snow White, who inspires love with her beautiful body and esthetic pleasure with her poems.

The protagonist of Thomas Pynchon's *Crying of Lot 49*,⁶ Oedipa (a male mirror-image of Oedipus, we presume) is also a very narcissistic person who is very much concerned with the problem of communication. It is not her fault, naturally, that she must go to San Narciso to execute the estate of her one-time lover Pierce Inverarity, but she could have selected another motel than "Echo Courts." The whole story begins with a letter from Metzger, her coexecutor from the law firm in charge of the

⁵. William Gass, "Tropes of the Text," in *Representation and Performance in Postmodern Fiction*, ed. by Maurice Couturier (Montpellier : France: Delta, 1983), p. 39.

⁶. Thomas Pynchon, *The Crying of Lot 49* (1967; reprint : Harmondsworth : Penguin Books, 1974). Subsequent references to this edition are given in parentheses in the text.

estate, informing her of her good luck. The true source of this letter is Inverarity himself who put her into his will; the time gap between the writing of the original letter (the will) and its reception by Oedipa is due to the fact that Inverarity died months after the writing of it and that the will was found months after his death. Here we have a situation that approximates the one described by John Barth in *LETTERS*: “But every letter has two times, that of its writing and that of its reading, which may be so separated, even when the post office does its job, that very little of what obtained when the writer wrote will still when the reader reads.”⁷ The will is nothing but a letter from the dead. Little attention is paid to the wording, only the “signified” matters, as it were.

Oedipa is immediately transformed by Pierce’s will. She leaves her muddled husband, Mucho, and her hometown, Kinneret (her kitchen, as it were), and travels south to an unknown city. The first and only letter she receives there is from her husband: “The letter itself had nothing much to say” (p. 31), but this very fact inspires her to have a good look at the envelope on which she reads a blurb put on by the government: “Report all obscene mail to your potmaster [*sic*]” (p. 32). She doesn’t realize the meaning of this blurb, which, considering the fact that she has just been unfaithful to her husband with an obscene male, Metzger, turns out to be quite appropriate. This inscription, plus the message from Kirby on the latrine wall at the Scope (p. 37), marks the beginning of her paranoid investigation of the Tristero system, which is going to expand dramatically until the “crying of lot 49” in the last page of the novel.

Her plenum has been penetrated by Pierce Inverarity’s will (as translated or reported by Metzger’s letter). She is now forced to consider the world around her as if it were suddenly a new world, a new plot. The muted horn, “a symbol she’d never seen before” (p. 37), now crops up everywhere, even in places that were familiar to her (San Francisco, for example). Pierce’s will empties her world of all the things she had taken for granted, making her suddenly blind to them, and fills it with her paranoia.

The story, here again, is reminiscent of *The Turn of the Screw*: once the governess has seen (or thinks she has seen) the ghost of Quint (a pale, hatless replica of her employer in London), Bly becomes a different place altogether. The governess’s paranoia, which gradually contaminates Mrs. Grose and the children, metamorphoses the place and makes it unrecognizable. The trigger is here again a letter, the letter within a letter from Miles’s school announcing that the little boy has been dismissed for good. The letter was addressed to the governess’s boss, but the latter forwarded it to her without even opening it, thereby confirming that she was fully in charge.

Jealousy (Jane), a dead love (Oedipa), and frustrated love (the governess) stir up an incredible energy that ignites letters, firing them up with intense metaphoricity. Love or the absence of love is a madness, like delirium tremens; it makes you metaphorize, an act that can be interpreted in two ways, depending where you stand, as Oedipa realizes: “The act of metaphor then was a thrust at truth and a lie, depending where you were: inside, safe, or outside, lost (p. 97). There are two ways to be safe, enjoying one’s plenum, like Mr. Quistgaard before he received Jane’s letter, or being a psychotic. Jane, Oedipa, and the governess are “simply” neurotics; they have their doubts all along. They wonder whether they are not making things up, mapping out a new world, or inventing a new reality of their own (little Flora’s stylized boat, for example).

Oedipa, after her momentous discovery, suffers from the same delusion as Luzhin, in Nabokov’s *Defense* (1964), who was so engrossed in chess that he finally came to view the world around him as a gigantic chess game threatening to destroy him. Once Oedipa has heard the voice from the Shadow, she becomes acutely aware of the world’s obstinate intention to communicate: “The ordered swirl of houses and streets, from this high angle, sprang at her now with the same unexpected, astonishing clarity as the circuit card had. Though she knew even less about radios than about Southern Californians, there were to both outward patterns a hieroglyphic sense of concealed meaning, of an intent to communicate” (pp. 15-16). The forged stamps, the W. A. S. T. E. inscriptions, and the post horn signs that bombard her are the palpable evidence of the world’s intention to communicate. The roar of the world gradually rises to a thunder and overwhelms her. She naïvely thought, like all the disciples of Frege or Wittgenstein, that only man could communicate, here and now, and she suddenly discovers that a god-like figure, Tristero, has disseminated a tremendous amount of information around the world that will eternally circulate and even expand.

Some critics have offered a religious interpretation of the novel; they failed to realize, however, that the novel is the confine of “Silent Tristero’s Empire” (p. 128). The prime mover of the plot is

⁷ John Barth, *Letters* (New York : G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1979), p. 44.

silent Inverarity impersonating Tristero. The signs he scattered around him in his lifetime have outlasted him, and now Oedipa is painstakingly trying to collect them in order to make sense out of them and thereby to make contact with the dead lover's intent: "He might have written the testament only to harass a one-time mistress, so cynically sure of being wiped out he could throw away all hope of anything more. Bitterness could have run that deep in him. She just didn't know. He might himself have discovered The Tristero, and encrypted that in his will, buying into just enough to be sure she'd find it. Or he might have tried to survive death, as a paranoia; as a pure conspiracy against someone he loved... Had something slipped through and Inverarity by that much beaten death?" (p. 136). Tony Tanner may have been ill advised when he stated that in this novel "the problem is finally about America."⁸ Inverarity's letter from the dead has forced Oedipa to look into a financial and semiotic estate that, otherwise, she would not have known existed or could exist; it has instituted her as a privileged decipherer/reader.

The estate is apparently a metaphor for the work of art. Once it is completed (and especially when the artist has retired for good), it becomes the responsibility of the reader to produce and organize it. Among all the manipulations, "modes d'emploi," there are some that

are more appealing, more relevant, than others; those, presumably but not necessarily, are closer to the author's intent as we can guess it! But there is always the danger that we may go astray. We stand at the receiving end of the communication chain and have no way to make contact with the prime source. Your arrogant structuralist (counting the present writer at some point in his career) or jubilant deconstructionist will tell you that the question is of no interest — the author is dead, thank God!

I have a little imp at my side who reminds me that the author (let's say Nietzsche) killed God some time ago. What a paradox! Ever since the beginning of the eighteenth century, novelists have gamely been trying to slay, liquidate, rub out, and zap the author, to put him out of his misery. Samuel Richardson stumbled upon the epistolary form to execute the sacrifice; others after him developed free indirect speech, interior monologue, the narratorless text, and collage. However, writing is such a thankless and unrewarding job that nobody would take such torturing pains to write books were it not to achieve authorship. The French writer Jean Guenot, commenting upon Danton's last words to his executioner ("Sanson, you must show my head to the people, it's worth it"), remarks: "Every writer who produces a book will become the author of his head. Or of his cock. He will need to show it; before or after his death, whichever."⁹ The author has never been so frisky and robust than at the end of the nineteenth century. Balzac had to share some of his royalties with God and the good people of Paris, Angoulême, or Saumur whom he greatly depended upon to concoct his novels; Joyce owed a thinner slice to the Dubliners; Beckett and Nabokov even less to Cosmopolis.

Naturally, the writer (especially the novelist) would like to believe that once the book is out, he is out of the book, that it is now the reader's business, not his own. Still he is painfully aware that the reader will rifle the book to discover the author, and this is precisely why he develops such elaborate strategies to be out of it. Michel Butor once said, in answer to a question about the privileges of being a painter: "Writing is, for me, a kind of magic which is going to transform the entire world into a kind of web. You see, there is for me a way to go further, to do more than they [the painters]. Naturally, one must avoid getting caught." There are people who catch me from time to time, but there are times, too, when I succeed in going beyond these limits or these frames without getting much caught."¹⁰ Jane and Inverarity are strong narcissistic figures, but they don't want to get caught, just like Michel Butor; that is, they refuse to be considered as vain, haughty, and cruel persons. To achieve that, they overburden their readers with insoluble enigmas and pitiless spite, forcing them to defend themselves as best they can, in the hope that, in the process, these dazzled lip-movers will forget to investigate the author's whereabouts (a word that Lawrence Sterne reminds us, can strangely be synonymous with "cock"!). Hence the appropriateness of the anonymous letter as a metaphor for the novel.

Nabokov's last novel, *Look at the Harlequins!*, can be read as a wonderful allegory of the author-reader merciless conflict. The first letter inserted in the book provides a counterexample of what the author-narrator, let's call him McNab, is trying to achieve in his novels. One day his wife,

⁸. Tony Tanner, Thomas Pynchon (London: Methuen, 1982), p. 71.

⁹. Jean Guenot, *Ecrire* (Saint-Cloud, : Chez Jean Guenot, 1982), p. 17 ; my translation.

¹⁰. Maurice Couturier, "Interview with Michel Butor", in *Representation and Performance in Postmodern Fiction*, ed. by Maurice Couturier (Montpellier : France: Delta, 1983), p. 204; my translation.

Iris, shows him a letter she claims to have composed for the novel she is currently writing, and she wants him, a professional writer, to suggest a sequel to this letter. The letter, written in bad Frenchy English, is from a Frenchman called Jules who is shamelessly begging his one-time mistress not to let him down, otherwise he will die of grief. McNab, who is also a good linguist, senses that the letter can't have been written by a Frenchman: "It is a Russian blackmailer knowing just enough English to translate into it the stalest Russian locutions."¹¹ Iris doesn't care about his linguistic lore, she only wants to know "what should happen next... Should this situation end in slapstick or tragedy?" Cruelly, McNab answers, "In the wastepaper basket" (pp. 63–64). The letter fails to meet his own requirements as a piece of fiction. The trouble is, of course, that it is not fiction at all. Iris has just jilted a lieutenant Starov whom she had an affair with and who pesters her. McNab's refusal to answer her leads to tragedy, as Starov shoots Iris, in the next chapter, before shooting himself.

McNab's understandable mistake comes from not having recognized that his wife "had been transcribing an authentic letter" (p. 64). If he had been more thoughtful, he would have gathered that his remorseful (or disenchanting) wife, whom he had suspected before of being unfaithful to him, was begging for help and did not know whom to turn to. This is a typical communication failure. Iris, who did not know if her husband suspected anything, could not tell him the truth about this letter, so she transcribed it, erasing as it were the handwriting of Starov and appropriating the words. McNab, believing that she was the writer of this letter, advised her; judiciously to strike out this letter (remember Ada's "Destroy and forget!"¹²) because it was unworthy of her as an author. At the same time, he was unwittingly paying tribute to her shrewdness, her capacity to lie or conceal her secret while exposing it. Iris is, therefore, a clever but ill-fated imitator of the minister in Poe's "Purloined Letter" (1845) who kept the stolen letter in the most conspicuous place to make sure it would not be found by the police.

Though a professional writer, McNab will make exactly the same mistake. He concedes, almost in the middle of the book: "In this memoir my wives and my books are interlaced monogrammatically like some sort of watermark or *ex libris* design" (p. 85). The story will show that this interlacing is more like an intermeddling. Whenever he wants to propose to marry a woman, he is compulsively urged to speak about his mental disorder, that is, his incapacity mentally "to switch from one direction to the other" (p. 4), to retrace his steps in his imagination. When he describes his predicament to Iris on a beach, she immediately understands that he wants to marry her. The second time, with Annette, he writes a letter in which he explains his illness, announcing that he will officially propose to her at her next visit and begging her (if she consents in advance) to wear a certain Florentine hat (an echo, no doubt of the sail episode in *Tristan and Isolde*). Silly Annette does come the following Friday, but without the hat; her attention was sidetracked at the last minute, she claims, by her father reading something about an ancestor of McNab. The latter wonders if she has actually read the whole letter (p. 107). The third time, with Louise, he explains during a party that he has a friend, let's call him Mr. Twidower, who is affected by a strange illness. Louise gets the message, although he had not officially made his proposal yet, and says: "Oh. I'm also going to marry you. Yes, of course, you idiot" (p. 182).

Each time, the novelist invents a more elaborate (and probably a less reliable) system of communication to make his proposal. The woman he loves is supposed to understand that his confession counts as a proposal. The exchange works like a potlatch, it seems: I give you something that is dear to me (the secret of my mental illness), and I expect you to reciprocate by giving yourself to me.

The fourth time, he borrows the technique used earlier by ill-starred Iris: he asks the woman he loves (referred to only as "you") to read a passage from his latest novel, *Ardis* (McNab's version of Nabokov's *Ada*, we assume), in which the protagonist's mental illness (the same as his own) is described (pp. 231–32). While she is reading, he is out on a walk, reading mentally over her shoulder; but when he decides to turn back, physically, he has a mental breakdown. He regains consciousness at the hospital after weeks of paresis, but he has utterly forgotten his own name. The woman who was reading his novel when he collapsed discusses the protagonist in the third person, as did McNab with the addressee of Jules's letter: she has failed to understand that McNab wanted her to read that particular passage in order to tell her, obliquely (poetically?), about his illness, and therefore she doesn't say, as the novel ends, that she will marry him.

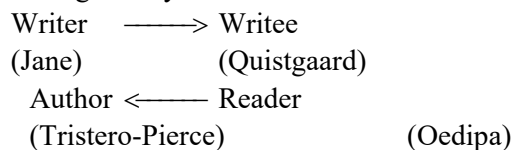
¹¹. Nabokov, *Look at the Harlequins!* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1974), p. 62. Subsequent references to this edition are given in parentheses in the text.

¹². Nabokov, *Ada* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1969).

McNab has not managed to communicate to the woman he loves that he is ill and wants to marry her. But his failure is also, poetically, a success. *Ardis*, though it teems with autobiographical details, doesn't read as an autobiographical novel; the woman reader is not aware of communicating with the writer she may be in love with (she will never say so), but with the characters in the story who act as screens and prevent her from making contact with the author, as this comment indicates: "His mistake... his morbid mistake is quite simple. He has confused direction and duration. He speaks of space but he means time" (p. 252). She is so engrossed in her discussion of this character that she forgets the whole thing is McNab's invention. This is his marvelous achievement — this, his "most private book, soaked in reality," can fool even a lover (p. 234). McNab is baffled by this feat, because he is afraid that it "might be an unconscious imitation of another's unearthly art," that other being, as we know by now, none other than the author himself, Nabokov (p. 234).

Here we have a perfect example of the conflict opposing the writer to the author. McNab knows himself as lover and writer, not a very successful man in either parts. His mental breakdown takes place at the very moment when the woman he loves makes contact with the author through the book, in the physical absence of the writer who is taking a walk. Her response to the book is experienced by McNab as a tangential response, as Jurgen Ruesch would phrase it.¹³ This kind of response can have serious psychopathic effects on children and presumably on vulnerable adults as well. The woman didn't jump from one system (fiction) to the other (reality) as McNab expected her to, and therefore she failed to answer his proffered question. They are not in the same universe of discourse, as Jane would put it, a paradoxical situation considering that he was the creator of the system he wanted her to walk out of. This episode amply proves that it is the reader, not the writer, who invents the author. The writer won't be an author unless his text can be purloined or appropriated by the reader, unless the reader projects the writer as a reversed image of himself.

In modernist and postmodernist fiction (and here I see no difference between James and Barthelme, Flaubert and Pynchon, Joyce and Nabokov), there are two systems of communication that function tangentially:



In *Look at the Harlequins!* the situation is even more complex. McNab's writee is the woman who may become his fourth wife, and since she has failed to get the message while reading *Ardis*, McNab must now spell things out for her. He writes his autobiography, hoping that this time he will get through to her. Actually, as we realize, he is desperately trying to rub out the tangent that separates the two systems, to make the writer and the author coincide in order to beat schizophrenia. The difficulty, of course, is that this feat could be achieved only if writee and reader coincide too, and there is no way he can make sure of that. See what happens when Lacan's "barre" starts to swivel on its invisible axis!

Tangentiality (though it appears as a curse to weak-minded McNab) is the goal that writers like James, Barthelme, Pynchon, and Nabokov try to achieve. It is what allows the writer to become an author, that is to say, a godlike, inaccessible figure, somewhat like Bill, the chief of the dwarfs in *Snow White*, who refused to be touched, to interact with people, and had to be put to death for this.¹⁴ It is achieved when the novel constitutes a plenum, as it were, when its meaning is undecidable, (see Kurt Godel's theorem and Roland Barthes' analyses), that is to say when the reader must himself be an "auctor," an "increaser," someone who penetrates this plenum with the wedge of his own words and of his own letters. The plenum is akin to Hawthorne's scarlet letter, the tangent that separates and interconnects the sinner, the lover, and the poet on one side, and the censors, the puritans, and the sectarians on the other. It is an emptiness, of course, but it doesn't matter so long as nobody knows it!

Before I conclude this essay, I would like to mention that my colleague who received the disturbed girl's visiting card is also a "promising" novelist. In one of his novels there is an interesting anecdote about stamps: an old Pole who lives in America and who has collected stamps all his life decides to visit his ancestors' homeland before his death. Unfortunately he has no money, except his monthly social security check. So he decides to sell his best stamp collection to dispatch himself to

^{13.} Jurgen Ruesch, *Disturbed Communication* (New York : Norton, 1957).

^{14.} Barthelme, *Snow White*, p. 4.

Poland by surface mail on the *Queen Elizabeth II*. A new life begins for him when, in Warsaw, he realizes that his social security check converted into zlotys makes him a millionaire. Paper money, too, can turn aching dreams into blissful reality, as Malcolm Bradbury has shown in his latest novel, *Rates of Exchange* (1983).

The old man in the story ended up marrying a young barmaid, by the way!