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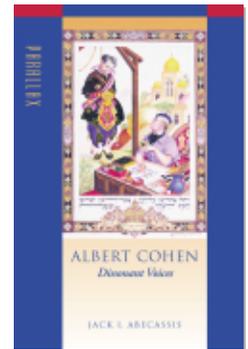
Albert Cohen

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Ariane-Solal

Ariane, she is just as much Albert Cohen as Solal.

Jean-Pierre Winter, Les Errants de la chair

Before *Belle du Seigneur*, Cohen did not particularly distinguish himself in endowing female heroines with a rich interiority. From Adrienne and Aude in *Solal* to Ariane's first sketch in *Mangeclous*, these women function as foils to Solal's epic. While they are not cartoon characters à la Voltaire, and their subjectivity does seep through at times, they never occupy the foreground of the narrative. But for her to succeed in *Belle du Seigneur*, Cohen had to endow Ariane with a strong inner voice and a singular inner lucidity. Hence the necessity to front-load Ariane and back-load Solal in the order of narrative exposition. Ariane's notes for an autobiographical novel, her first autonomous streams of consciousness, and various other inner monologues dominate the first half of the novel, whereas Solal's interiority becomes more prominent as the novel nears its end. Thus the whole novel hinges on Cohen's ability to fashion a feminine complement to Solal. Cohen needed to balance the *Belle* with the *Seigneur* so that their genitive grammatical relationship would convey all the power of Solal's inner dissonance.

Solal falls in love with Ariane at first sight. He knows nothing about her, except that she is just like him—his feminine other. Following the night on which he chooses her, Solal spies on the Deumes' villa and finally gathers the courage to break in and make his famous moral experiment in the guise of seduction. Once in the villa, as he nears Ariane, he comes upon a school notebook where, with the view of becoming a "romancière de talent," Ariane has outlined her life. Solal reads these notes, quoted in full in the novel. From a narrational perspective, the Who, What, When, How, and Why of the main

Genevan characters are quickly and efficiently disposed of—and, more important, the reader gains an insight into Ariane's state of mind. Our sole interest here concerns Ariane's self-understanding and, correlatively, Solal's apparent inability to grasp that self-understanding.¹

Our heroine was born "Ariane Cassandre Corisande d'Auble" to a noble Protestant family that traces its Genevan roots back to the middle of the sixteenth century. Her immediate family history is as tragic as her extended family history is noble: her mother died while giving birth to her sister Eliane; her father, a professor of theology, died five years later; and her brother Jacques and Eliane were killed in a car accident shortly thereafter. The lone orphan was brought up by her Aunt Tantlérie, a very devout Calvinist, rich but pious beyond measure. Puritanism is de rigueur: almost never a tender word uttered, and kisses on the forehead are rare. So palpable is the omnipresence of original sin that the bathroom towels are arranged according to body parts, lest those destined for the middle of the body sinfully soil the others.

At eighteen, Ariane begins her studies in literature at the university, where she meets a young Russian immigrant named Varvara Ivanovna: "Soon we became friends. I found her very beautiful. I loved to kiss her hands, her pinkish palms, her heavy braids. I thought about her all the time. In sum, it was love."* Tantlérie is not thrilled, especially when she discovers that Varvara is a socialist revolutionary. Ariane rebels against the Calvinist aunt and moves out into a small student apartment with Varvara, where she spends the happiest moments of her life. "Happy, she and I. . . a life of coeds. The little restaurants. I started powdering myself a little. . . I started learning Russian, to be able to speak it with her, to be more intimate. We slept together. Yes, it was love, but pure, well almost."† And later in the novel, in her second stream of consciousness, striking a distinctly more sensual note: "I never loved kissing except with Varvara I liked touching her breasts and I believed that it was affection oh! what a lay [*quelle couche*]."‡ This is clearly an enduring lesbian love affair, not a passing sorority infatuation.² But paradise comes to an end when Varvara admits to being severely ill with tuberculosis. She has a year to live. Ariane drops out of school and nurses her lover until she dies. Yet at times

*"Bientôt nous devînmes amies. Je la trouvais très belle. J'aimais baiser ses mains, ses paumes rosées, ses tresses lourdes. Je pensais à elle tout le temps. En somme, c'était de l'amour." (*BdS*, 18)

†"Heureuses, elle et moi. . . Une vie d'étudiantes. Les petits restaurants. Je commençai à me poudrer un peu. . . Je commençai à apprendre le russe, pour pouvoir le parler avec elle, pour être plus intimes. Nous dormions ensemble. Oui, c'était de l'amour, mais pur, enfin presque." (*BdS*, 19)

‡[J]e n'ai jamais aimé les baisers qu'avec Varvara j'aimais toucher sa poitrine je croyais que c'était de l'affection quelle couche oh (*BdS*, 184)

she cannot resist the temptation of a guilt-ridden evening out, from which the dying Varvara is necessarily excluded. In a scene eerily reminiscent of *Le Livre de ma mère*, Ariane reflects on her cruelty to the dying Varvara: “One night, however, returning from a ball at two in the morning, as I was telling her I don’t know what to justify myself, she calmly responded: ‘Right, as for myself, I am going to die.’ I shall never forget that look fixed on me.”* This is the answer that Louise Cohen never gave her son when he came back at four o’clock in the morning from a party from which the mother was excluded, but it looms, self-evident, in the air. Varvara voices what Louise kept silent. In Cohen, transpositions and projections are more revealing than direct personal recollections.

Varvara dies; Ariane moves into a small hotel. Desperate and depressed, she swallows a large quantity of sleeping pills, but by chance another hotel guest, the young international civil servant Adrien Deume, finds her unconscious and patiently nurses her back to life. When Adrien asks her to marry him, Ariane—who is utterly alone in Geneva, her aunt being in Scotland and her uncle in Africa—consents. She soon realizes that it was a colossal blunder, for besides being of the wrong gender, Adrien is a mediocre and pretentious upstart in all respects; and he suffers from the worst sin in the Gallic world—that of being ridiculous. Ariane has nothing but contempt for him; his only redeeming quality is servile patience. “[He was] the only being in the world who paid me any heed,” she explains defensively. “I was numb. The poison had damaged my head.”† Adrien is compassionate when Ariane tells him of her fear of male intimacy. She promptly becomes “neurosthénique” and one evening sends him away in a rage because Varvara is not there, that is, because he is not Varvara.

Disregarding the obvious meaning of these personal notes, Solal, who carefully reads them before confronting Ariane, quixotically clings to his idées fixes that Ariane desires men and adores patriarchal domination, something he asserts repeatedly throughout the novel. Although something in Ariane touches Solal’s inner core, he fails to appreciate her visceral hatred of the phallic order, her phobia about the phallus itself, her homosexuality, and above all, her desire for death.³ Solal must be partly blind to the obvious, since the whole novel

*Un soir pourtant, rentrée d’un bal à deux heures du matin, comme je lui disais je ne sais quoi pour me justifier, elle me répondit calmement: “Oui, mais moi je vais mourir.” Je n’oublierai jamais ce regard fixé sur moi. (*BdS*, 20)

†[Il était le] seul être au monde qui s’occupait de moi. J’étais engourdie. L’empoisonnement avait abîmé ma tête. (*BdS*, 21)

would not be narratable, would implode, did Solal not cling to these misconceptions. Likewise, my own critical reading of Cohen's novel would lose its own narratability if I were to disregard Cohen's fictional antagonism with respect to Solal and Ariane. The identity between the two would merely become tautological and therefore unnarratable; to exist novelistically, their identities must be in a dynamic relationship of differences through gender, time, geography, social class, religious and historical consciousness, and personal stories.

The most obvious plot structure of *Belle du Seigneur* revolves around suicides. The first suicide is botched (Ariane) or deferred (Solal), but suicidal themes continue to hover over virtually every page and culminate in the final double suicide. Ariane tries to commit suicide; she is subject to suicidal depressions and assures herself that "one could at a pinch always commit suicide."^{*} Solal mirrors this existential option in almost the exactly the same terms when he wonders whether it would not be better to "put an end right away to this drudgery [of life]."[†] These two fleeting thoughts could serve as the thematic coefficients to every page of the novel, a direct continuation of the morbid themes of *Solal* and *Le Livre de ma mère*. "He knows that in a year, or later, or earlier, it will be suicide, and yet he eats his croissants with tranquility, with a lot of butter and marmalade."[‡] Solal desires death because he cannot be an effective palace Jew. That is the overarching Josephic-Estheric dimension of his suicide; but folded within this failure are more interior and intimate states, these suicidal leitmotifs so well articulated by his Genevan feminine double. Without the Josephic-Estheric historical dimension, Solal's love story loses its epic dimension; and the epic would lose its proper novelistic depth without Solal's interior struggle as a descendent of Aaron (founder of the priestly tribe, the Cohens) in love with his own feminine projection.

The following paragraph, as macabre as they come, represents Solal's thoughts as he breaks in and enters Ariane's second-floor bedroom just prior to reading Ariane's autobiographical notes:

He stopped to consider this small, squat companion, always ready to be of service. The bullet was already there that later, yes, later. No, not the temple, risk of staying alive and blind. The heart, yes, but must not shoot too low. The right place was at the angle formed by the edge of the sternum and the third space between the ribs. With a pen left on a pedestal table, close to a

^{*}on pourra toujours se suicider à la rigueur (*BdS*, 188)

[†][s]e débarrasser dès à présent de cette corvée? (*BdS*, 9)

[‡]Il sait que dans un an, ou plus tard, ou plus tôt, ce sera le suicide, et pourtant il mange tranquillement ses croissants, avec beaucoup de beurre et de marmelade. (*BdS*, 848)

flask of cologne, he marked the proper place and smiled. There would be the small starry hole, surrounded by black grains, within a few centimeters of the nipple that so many nymphs had kissed. Put an end right away to this drudgery? Finish with the human gang, always ready to hate, to slander. Just bathed and shaved, he would make a presentable cadaver, commanding even. No, first try this unheard-of enterprise.*

Solal's choice seems clear—suicide or redemption. But he does not really believe in redemption in and through Ariane's virtue; it is, then, only a question of relative postponement. The dramatic resolution, "No, first try this unheard-of enterprise," is balanced by the initial certitude voiced just above: "The bullet was already there that later, yes, later." All means have been deployed toward a successful suicide: the gun, the targeted organ, the entry angle of the bullet, even the shape of the wound, and the aesthetic and social appropriateness of the cadaver. Ariane has the same desire for death and the same fear of botching her suicide: "I feel ill at ease in my skin it is too tight . . . try my trick from the wall no rather the jumping trick so I am thus high above on the seventh I jump out of the window I have jumped, that's it, fallen on the hard hard cement thump I didn't break anything but it hurts all over."† So for both Solal and Ariane—from the very beginning of the novel—it is simply a story of aestheticized despair, postponement of and stalling the suicide that both know to be inevitable and necessary.

In this state of mind, Solal reads Ariane's suicidal autobiographical notes. He should recognize the state of deferred suicide as Ariane's permanent existential state, her loathing of the phallic order, and her lucid and articulate sense of imprisonment and violation in marriage, but he is too absorbed in his own fantasies to recognize the specific attributes of Ariane's persona. This distortion leads us, however, to an important general point about Albert Cohen as a novelist and about the standard interpretation of the novel. By having So-

*Il s'arrêta pour considérer le petit compagnon trapu, toujours prêt à rendre service. La balle s'y trouvait déjà qui plus tard, oui, plus tard. Non, pas la tempe, risque de rester vivant et aveugle. Le cœur, oui, mais ne pas tirer trop bas. La bonne place était à l'angle formé par le bord du sternum et le troisième espace intercostal. Avec le stylo qui traînait sur un guéridon, près d'un flacon d'eau de Cologne, il marqua l'endroit propice, sourit. Là serait le petit trou étoilé, entouré de grains noirs, à quelques centimètres du mamelon que tant de nymphes avaient baisé. Se débarrasser dès à présent de cette corvée? En finir avec le gang humain, toujours prêt à haïr, à médire? Fraîchement baigné et rasé, il ferait un cadavre présentable, et commandeur de surcroît. Non, tenter d'abord l'entreprise inouïe. (*BdS*, 9)

†Je suis mal dans ma peau elle est trop étroite. . . . essayer mon truc du mur non plutôt le truc de sauter je suis donc tout en haut au septième je saute par la fenêtre voilà j'ai sauté ça y est tombée sur le ciment dur dur plouf je me suis rien cassé mais mal partout. (*BdS*, 183)

l) be the first misreader of Ariane, and therefore of *Belle du Seigneur*, one senses that Cohen willfully programmed this misreading. The reader, after all, identifies with the protagonist and therefore perceives Ariane through Solal regardless of what Ariane explicitly says about herself. Solal recognizes their mutual singularity, but resists articulating the reasons for it, except for their shared disdain for others and their correlative loneliness in crowds. Yet, despite misdirecting our reading of Ariane, Cohen's multiple streams of consciousness allow Ariane to articulate all these themes in detail in her unmistakable voice.

The Stream of Truth

Ariane's first extended autonomous monologue, which takes up all fourteen pages (616 lines) of chapter 18, with neither paragraphs nor punctuation, occurs at a crucial moment in the narrative.⁴ Adrien has finally gathered the courage to invite Solal over to dinner. The whole family is consumed by the preparations, except for Ariane who feigns indifference yet is the only one who knows why the undersecretary-general would even consider such an undistinguished invitation. Solal has fallen in love with her, has been spying on her, has broken into her bedroom, has disguised himself as an old and particularly repulsive Hassidic Jew in a gambit to see whether she, by letting herself be seduced by a grotesque old man, will redeem the "sinfulness of women" and become the first "[female] human" (*la première humaine*) (*BS*, 41). She does not live up to this hope. Instead, she throws a glass at Solal, wounding him just above the eye. Mistaking her for a common romantic dupe, Solal spitefully promises to seduce her with the usual fare of alpha male aggression mixed with just enough saccharine sentimentality. Repelled by Solal's aggressive tactics and perhaps also by his disguise, Ariane nevertheless begins to visit the Palace of the League of Nations and seems to encourage her husband to respond to Solal's sudden interest in this heretofore undistinguished and lazy class B bureaucrat. Now the great moment is at hand: the undersecretary-general is about to knock on the door (Solal actually never shows up that night) and the class B bureaucrat's wife remains locked in her steamy bathroom, gazing into a mirror, indifferent to repeated appeals to come down and prepare for his eminence's arrival.

Solal accepts the Deumes' dinner invitation for the sole purpose of seducing Ariane. Male-female sexual tension should therefore be flowing. But Ariane's stream of "gratuitous verbal agitation without communicative aim"⁵ could not be more hostile to heterosexual romantic myth, men, their hairy

bodies and intrusive penises—at least at first, as the stream of consciousness, after a long detour, does end up all the same in a sustained Joycian orgasmic “yes.” Ariane holds male sexuality in contempt; she abhors her submission to her husband’s assaults: “he is going to do his gymnastics on me and at the same time I want to laugh.”* Ariane suffers her husband’s ridiculous campaigns on and in her body: “oh, dreadful his canine haha on me how can that captivate him so much and at the same time want to laugh when he moves on top of me so red busy so occupied concerned the wrinkled eyebrows then this canine haha so self-serving is it so palpitating this to and fro it is it is comic and then this lack of dignity oh he injures me this imbecile.”† Adrien’s orgasms would be purely comical were it not for the physical and psychological pain they cause Ariane: “he pushes cannibalistic cries on me because it is the end and how much he seems to love it and then he falls close to me very winded and it is finished just until the next time.”‡

Ariane’s visceral free-associative stream of consciousness articulates a cogent opposition to the specific cultural contexts of heterosexual romantic ideology: “beautiful now isn’t it the pleasures of the novelists are there really women idiotic enough to like this crap,”§ thusly mirroring Cohen’s obsessive indictment of the romance and his repeated equation of Ariane, the Western woman, and romantic heroines, these “idiotes” led astray by romantic mystification. Ten pages later, Ariane becomes much more specific in her indictment of “the typists with polished nails and three millimeters of filth underneath and then their conversations about how they all love *Madame Bovary* because it’s a beautiful film and also *Anna Karenina* also because it was with Greta Garbo.”|| Far from being a foolish consumer of romantic ideology, Ariane articulates the connection between high and popular culture with her somatic phobia about the masculine. In fact, the masculine and the crass are intertwined by their very nature. Her lucidity is exemplary. It is in her deepest, most “transparent”

*il va faire sa gymnastique sur moi et en même temps j’ai envie de rire (*BdS*, 176)

‡oh affreux son haha canin sur moi comment est-ce que ça peut le captiver tellement et en même temps envie de rire quand il bouge sur moi tellement rouge affairé si occupé soucieux les sourcils froncés puis ce haha canin si intéressé est-ce que c’est si palpitant ce va-et-vient c’est c’est comique et puis ça manque de dignité oh il me fait mal cet imbécile. (*BdS*, 176)

‡il pousse des cris de cannibale sur moi parce que c’est la fin et que ça a l’air de lui plaire beaucoup et puis il tombe près de moi tout essoufflé c’est fini jusqu’à la prochaine fois (*BdS*, 177)

§C’est du joli les voluptés des romanciers est-ce qu’il y a vraiment des idiots qui aiment cette horreur (*BdS*, 176)

||les dactylos avec ongles vernis et trois millimètres de crasse dessous et puis leurs conversations qu’elles aiment bien *Madame Bovary* parce que c’est un joli film et puis *Anna Karénine* aussi parce que c’était avec Greta Garbo (*BdS*, 186)

moments, that she is the closest to the Aaronite Solal, her ideological nemesis according to the manifest plot of the novel. Here, Solal, at the end of the novel, contemplates Ariane eating leftovers off the floor like a beaten but grateful dog after a violent scene of jealousy: “Some beauty, the passion called love. If not jealousy, ennui. If jealousy, bestial hell. She a slave and he a brute. Wretched novelists, band of liars who embellish passion, making male and female idiots desire it. Wretched novelists, suppliers and sycophants of the ruling class. And the idiots loved these dirty lies, these swindles, they fed on them.”* At their deepest, the protagonist and antagonist mirror each other’s thoughts, down to the very nuance. All else is plot and alibi—a foil masking identity and repetition.

Ariane views any phallic-based sexuality as bestial due to the asymmetry between the penetrating male and the violated female: “he will climb on top of me *an animal above an animal below*” (*une bête dessus une bête dessous*).† Bestialness and repulsiveness also define male anatomy: “that women should be attracted by men *in general* that is beyond me these hairs on the arms and then each monsieur knows better than the other men have these little teats that serve no purpose at all.”‡ Although she hates the bestial male rapist, the bourgeois spouse resigns herself to periodical violation. Adrien Deume may force himself upon his wife from time to time, but the lesbian aristocrat keeps her subjectivity intact, her own stream of thoughts, her irony and laughter just as he inflates and deflates into his repulsive epilepsy. The very concept of penetration, by custom or by violence, sears her mind as much as her vagina: “what right has this stranger what right has he to hurt me hurts me especially at the beginning like a red iron oh I don’t like men and then what a funny idea what imbecility wanting to introduce this this this this [*ce cette ce cette*] thing in someone else in another’s place who does not want it and whom it hurts.”§ In a particularly apt metaphorical juxtaposition, Ariane shows the similarities be-

*Du joli, la passion dite amour. Si pas de jalousie, ennui. Si jalousie, enfer bestial. Elle une esclave, et lui une brute. Ignobles romanciers, bande de menteurs qui embellissaient la passion, en donnaient l’envie aux idiots et aux idiots. Ignobles romanciers, fournisseurs et flagorneurs de la classe possédante. Et les idiots aimaient ces sales mensonges, ces escroqueries, s’en nourrissaient. (*BdS*, 962)

†il va monter sur moi *une bête dessus une bête dessous* (*BdS*, 176; emphasis added)

‡que les femmes soient attirées par les hommes *en général* ça me dépasse ces poils sur les bras et puis chaque monsieur sait mieux que l’autre les hommes ont des mamelles petites qui ne servent à rien (*BdS*, 188; emphasis added)

§de quel droit cet étranger de quel droit il me fait mal me fait-il mal surtout au début comme un fer rouge oh j’aime pas les hommes ne ne et puis quelle drôle d’idée quelle imbécillité de vouloir introduire ce cette ce cette chose chez quelqu’un d’autre chez quelqu’un qui n’en veut pas à qui ça fait mal. (*BdS*, 176)

tween her situation and that of colonial subjects: “The funny epilepsy of monsieur who deals with territories under [colonial] mandate.”* This metaphor plays on the fluid boundaries between the political hypocrisy of the League of Nations with respect to colonial subjects (it actually only represents the interests of England, France, and the international bureaucracy and not those of the indigenous populations) and the sexual hypocrisy of marriage with respect to women—institutionalized rape under the guise of propriety (in Ariane’s deep interiority). Ariane describes her civic, political, and physical states as subject to a mandate beneath which she squirms. The same patina of hypocrisy that facilitates the domination of the Deumes of this world over their foreign subjects also covers their conjugal relationships.

Ariane’s intrinsic loathing of masculine power and dominance, both sexual and political, calls into question from the very beginning Solal’s perception of her as a passive worshipper of masculine power. Thus the manifest mythological opposition between the descendant of Aaron and the descendant of Europa immediately becomes doubtful. Philippe Zard has demonstrated that for Cohen, Europa as a general concept is consistently represented by a woman—Adrienne, Aude, Ariane—the woman Europa, in short, whom Solal desires as much as he despises her. Ariane, however, abhors precisely what the mythological Europa secretly desired—the phallic order and the phallus. Solal himself openly suggests this equation between Ariane and Europa. Following an evening at the circus, where Ariane is moved by the power of the tigers, Solal imputes a generalized pagan disposition to her: “Excited, unsettled by the tiger, yes, like the good woman Europa by the bull! Not stupid, Jupiter, he knew women! The long-locked virgin Europa surely most certainly said to the bull, eyes chastely lowered, ‘you are a strong one, my darling.’”† The irony here is double: first Ariane may obviously get a frisson from this or that act but is not fundamentally beholden to masculine ethos and aesthetics; secondly, this is a reprise of an identical scene in Cohen’s first novel *Solal* where the protagonist Solal single-handedly rescues a circus trainer from a tiger’s claws, impressing Aude, and thus definitively winning her heart in the most pagan fashion imaginable.⁶

But in her transparent interiority, Ariane is anything but a *tauroparthenos* (“virgin dedicated to the bull”).⁷ Cohen’s specific charge against the pagan Eu-

*la drôle d'épilepsie du monsieur qui s'occupe des territoires sous mandat (*BdS*, 177)

†“Excitée, troublée par le tigre, oui, comme la bonne femme Europe par le taureau! Pas bête, Jupiter, il connaissait les femmes! La vierge Europe aux longues tresses a sûrement dû dire au taureau, les yeux chastement baissés: ‘vous êtes un fort, vous, mon chou.’” (*BdS*, 779; cited in Zard, *Fiction de l'Occident*, 263)

ropa is not that she was abducted and raped by Zeus—for that could happen to even the most chaste daughter of Zion—but rather that, being in love with the bull's beauty, and above all his horns, she secretly desires her own abduction and rape. Roberto Calasso sums up this pagan psychological topos with poetic precision:

All of a sudden [Europa and her friends] find themselves surrounded by a herd of bulls. And one of those bulls is dazzling white, his small horns flashing like jewels. There's nothing in the least threatening about him. So much so that, though shy at first, Europa now brings her flowers to his white muzzle. The bull whines with pleasure, like a puppy, slumps down on the grass, and offers his little horns to the garlands. The princess makes so bold [a move] as to climb, like an Amazon, on his back.⁸

This description captures the pagan metaphor of the bull as a sign of strength and beauty, of the powers of cunning and domination, which constitute the ultimate currency in the state of pure nature in Cohen's worldview. Philippe Zard, however, suggests a less metaphorical and more disturbing reading of the myth:

For Solal, there is no doubt that beauty is the decorous expression of force and that the playful game with the animal leaves the suggestion of temptation by bestiality. "Jupiter . . . knew women!": before being raped by the god, Europa might have desired the beast, like Pasiphaë—Aria[d]ne's mother—[who] was attracted by the bull of Poseidon. What could have passed as the trickery of a god corresponds in fact to a secret wish of the young girl: *the ladykiller's guile fulfills the unavowed desires of the victim.*⁹

Cohen repeats this litany against the pagan in all his fiction and essays—except that Solal, his protagonist, despite his assertion of the contrary, is also a pagan bull. Zeus and Theseus follow essentially the same pattern of seduction: they covet, abduct, rape, and abandon, leading their victims to shame, despair, and ultimately suicide. And this is precisely the narrative sequence of Solal, protagonist of "La Geste des Juifs" (Cohen's early title for *Belle du Seigneur*). Cohen's first novel, *Solal*, offers a particularly protean version of this narrative. Solal covets the French consul's wife (Adrienne); he abducts her in the middle of the night (she consents); after a period of sexual frenzy, they part ways; Solal makes her jealous by seducing her niece (Aude); she despairs and commits suicide, which has no effect on Solal whatsoever. Except for Aude, all of Solal's lovers commit suicide, just as most abducted maidens in Greek mythology are eventually forsaken to their own chagrin and lonely deaths on rocky islands. Furthermore, that Cohen absolutely insists on the explicit identification with

the animalistic and predatory male is evident in Solal's Russian head-to-toe fur outfit, which gives him the appearance of a bear, and a particularly frightful one when he is seen galloping on horseback.

But Ariane does not belong to this category of passive maidens of pagan antiquity, these Europas, flower-collecting virgins who bathe innocently in a pond while secretly desiring wild bulls who spy upon them. "[At] heart," she says in her second important stream of consciousness, "until now I was just a kind of virgin raped from time to time by the iram [an anagram for *mari*, husband]."* Ariane belongs, at least in the level of desire and fantasy, to the category of skilled huntresses of inviolable virginity: Diana, Aura, Nikaia: "me oh me me me," she affirms to her sister Eliane in a stream of consciousness, "a fierce independent virgin my costume the day of the costume ball you know as Diana the huntress I kept it Eliane my Dear."† Diana is the militant virgin: she does not yield to a singular bull who will have her virginity as a prize for his cunning and force; she abhors the phallic order and thus remains alone in the forest, committed to the slaughtering of beasts. Her greatest nightmare is being penetrated by one of them. Calasso spins it in a neutral manner: "All [Diana] wanted was virginity and strength, nothing else"—namely, all she wanted was to avoid males (to keep her virginity intact) and never be their subject.¹⁰ All she wanted then was to avoid the nightmare that haunts Ariane: "an animal above an animal below," subject to the beast's "canine haha" as he falls into his "epilepsy." Ariane's surest Diana-like instinct is the one she displays first with Solal by hurling a glass at him, drawing first blood. Her initial reaction to the intrusive Zeus, disguised as an errant Hassidic Jew wearing the tie of the diplomatic commander, is a confident and bloody NO!

When viewed through the prism of this mythological syncretism, the conflict between Solal and Ariane is patently absurd. On the one hand, a descendent of the first Hebrew priest, Aaron, Solal possesses and displays many of the characteristics of Zeus ("Poor Solal man or beast?"),‡ all the while berating Ariane for her supposed pagan adoration of phallic bestiality. But the accused pagan woman in fact identifies with inviolable forest-dwelling virgins who would rather be killed by beasts than copulate with them, would rather dwell alone in the forest than live under the sign of the phallus in the city. And in his turn the supposed priest of the Law is closer in conduct and temperament to Zeus

*[A]u fond jusqu'à présent j'ai été une sorte de vierge violée de temps en temps par l'iram. (*BdS*, 612)

†moi oh moi moi moi indépendante vierge farouche mon costume le du bal masqué tu sais en Diane chasseuse je l'ai gardé Éliane chérie (*BdS*, 179)

‡pauvre Solal homme ou bête (*BdS*, 903)

than to Aaron. This is a singular mismatch. Yet when these absurd juxtapositions are viewed as components of a single dissonant persona, Solal-Ariane, surprising parallels come to the fore.

For example, while contemplating herself in the mirror from her steamy bath, absorbed in her shape, peering beneath the hue of her narcissistic image, the now-married woman cannot—still!—acknowledge her own conception in and by coitus, cannot accept that her parents were capable of *ça* and that her own origin is soiled by the bestial and chthonic “above below.” Notwithstanding imperatives and disbelieving exclamations, Ariane reiterates what she most desires to elide: “no more thinking about Papa Mama doing that oh that hurts that disgusts me how is it possible that Papa and yet it is certain because of Eliane and me in the night Papa on top of Mama it’s terrible parents should never.”*

But she then ponders the relationship between “that” [*ça*] and her own love for her exotic Russian girlfriend: “Varvara maybe that is why I loved her so much.”† The causal link (*pour ça*) puzzles at first. But Varvara’s silky embraces contradict the repellent aspects of her parents’ sexuality, namely, the penetration of the pious mother by the goatish, bestial father. Varvara dispels all traces of the animal that Ariane so abhors. Is it an accident that her name contains two V’s, as if to reiterate its non-phallic nature, just as Chauchat in *The Magic Mountain* embodies in her very name a feline wildness absent in proper German women? For Ariane, Varvara can never be transitive with any male-female experience. Never could the names Ariane and Varvara be substituted for Papa and Mama in the next fragment: “Papa whom I respect so much dreadful Papa on top of Mama and handling her like an animal Papa also pushing the dog’s cries haha haha how is this possible.”‡ And then comes the satire of the supposedly elected Protestants of Geneva, promised to eternal bliss in heaven, violating their angelic wives and then shamelessly advertising the result, as if the infants were the fruit of an ethereal meditation: “obviously all people since there are always births Monsieur and Madame Turlupin have the joy of announcing the birth announcing the birth [repetition in original] of their little Turlupette what nerve to acknowledge it publicly in this way and everyone finds natural suitable this birth announcement yes everyone partakes in these

*ne plus jamais penser à Papa Maman faisant ça oh ça fait trop mal ça me dégoûte comment est-ce possible que Papa et pourtant c’est sûr puisque Éliane puisque moi dans la nuit Papa sur Maman c’est épouvantable les parents ne devraient jamais (*BdS*, 186)

†Varvara c’est peut-être pour ça que je l’ai tant aimée (*BdS*, 186)

‡Papa que je respecte tant Papa affreux sur Maman la maniant aussi comme une bête Papa poussant aussi des cris de chien haha haha comment est-ce possible. (*BdS*, 177–78)

horrors and nine months later they are not ashamed to announce it all of them even respectable people dressed during the day and all these ministers who give speeches.”*

Solal shares Ariane’s phallus phobias in identical terms. Traces of this dread abound everywhere in the novel, but they flare up at the very end when the two lovers are living in their isolated oceanfront Mediterranean villa named “La Belle de Mai.” Love loses the support lent to it by the entire social web of recognition: political power, cocktail parties, dinners, clubs, without which the ennui of carnal desire in a (hostile) vacuum slowly, but very cruelly, appears. Unmediated by the high-octane mix of the Social, carnal desire must now be teased out by the invention of senseless cruelties, scenes of jealousy and reconciliation, capped by passionate love-making. Thus a painful scenario precedes every instance of passion, without which there remains only the boredom of eating and looking at the vast Mediterranean. Pain keeps interest alive. These situations bring about Cohen’s most explicitly Proustian moments, as jealousy piques Solal’s imagination, just as it did for Swann with Odette or Marcel with Albertine. Solal obsesses over the careful gathering of details concerning past affairs, possible infidelities, torment and delight mingle as he imagines these past deeds. But soon enough Ariane commits a grave mistake by confessing to an extramarital love affair with a German orchestra conductor during Solal’s courtship. Worse, she admits to having copulated with the conductor the very same day that Solal seduced her at the Ritz, where she pretended to be an innocent virgin, spiritually playing religious chorals by Bach on the piano before the rarified copulation and then assuring Solal that she would stay awake for the rest of the night to savor the singular and miraculous experience. And this after a day during which she copulated with her lover, lied to her husband, and was seduced by yet a second lover. Ariane thus becomes for Solal the ultimate hypocritical female who, despite all outer appearance of propriety, secretly adores the bull: “Oh, the face of a child and a saint, but of a saint who was getting bonked! No, no, enough.”† Paradoxically, Ariane becomes for Solal the paragon of what she herself most explicitly abhors. Even more interestingly, the clearly zoological terms used by Ariane in her first stream of consciousness

*évidemment tous les gens puisqu’il y a tout le temps des naissances monsieur et madame Turlupin ont la joie de vous part de la naissance faire part de la naissance de leur petite Turlupette quel toupet d’avouer ainsi publiquement et tout le monde trouve naturel convenable cet avis de naissance oui tous font ces horreurs et neuf mois après ils n’ont pas honte de l’annoncer tous même des gens respectables le jour habillés et aussi ces ministres qui font des discours. (*BdS*, 178)

†Oh, ce visage d’enfant et de sainte, mais d’une sainte qui recevait des chocs! Non, non, assez. (*BdS*, 961)

to describe copulation are here taken up by Solal. The same discourse, slightly altered by voice and circumstances, circulates from character to character across all Cohen's novels and essays (from Louise Cohen to Saltiel to Mangeclous to Ariane to Solal). Solal imagines Ariane copulating with Serge (whom Solal keeps misnaming Dietrich): "And now the baby of the orchestra loosened his incisors and passed his hairy tongue, his ox's tongue on the nipple more pointed than a German helmet! And while the bull licked, she smiled, the choral-playing pianist! Oh, the hairy hand that now lifted the skirt!"* These words fully reiterate the disgust that Ariane herself felt toward copulation in her first stream of consciousness, although she articulates it more convincingly and more lucidly, free as she is from Solal's infantile resentment.

Serge becomes the focal point of these scenes of jealousy and violence and is the pretext for a spiral of violence. Solal focuses his ire on the black moustache of Ariane's lover, using it as a condensation of male body hair, the most disturbing feature of the masculine body, which most likens it, as in the passage quoted just above, to the body of a bull (*taureau*). Serge passes his hairy tongue (*langue poilue*) over Ariane's breasts while his hairy hand (*main poilue*) lifts her skirt. But beyond his body hair lies that black moustache, a trait that contrasts with the conductor's white hair, a pure sign of the orchestra conductor's imperious virility: "Oh, the white hair, oh this black moustache that she loved! . . . But then why had she authorized the hairy hand?"† And again: "Oh, the black moustache on the golden breast! Oh, she lovy-doving under the mouth of the moustached baby with the white mane that suckled."‡ Serge obviously serves a synergetic function: he is German and his phallus is compared to the spiked *Pickelhaube* helmet worn by German troops in World War I (*plus pointu qu'un casque allemand!*), which is just another permutation on Cohen's perennial loathing of the horned, forest-dwelling Teutonic man who covers his longing for the pagan (romantic naturalism, for example) with a thin patina of Christian piety, symbolized by the (spiritual) white hair that crowns the black moustache. Ariane sees Serge for the first time when he conducts Beethoven's Pastoral Symphony. In short, Solal sees the German conductor as a composite of all he abhors: a bull, a warrior whose phallus points

*Et maintenant le bébé d'orchestre desserrait ses incisives et passait sa langue poilue, sa langue de bœuf sur le mamelon plus pointu qu'un casque allemand! Et pendant que le taureau léchait, elle souriait, la pianoteuse de chorals! Oh, la main poilue qui soulevait la jupe maintenant! (*BdS*, 955)

†Oh, ces cheveux blancs, oh cette moustache noire qu'elle aimait! . . . Mais alors pourquoi avait-elle autorisé la main poilue? (*BdS*, 954)

‡Oh, la moustache noire sur le sein doré! Oh, elle tourterellante sous la bouche du bébé moustachu à crinière blanche qui tétait (*BdS*, 955)

up from the center of his black moustache to the pointed end of his savage German helmet; Zeus, masquerading as a Christian, who seduces a married woman. The German is, in sum, not unlike Solal.

But this is not our first encounter with the moustache. We recall yet again that Cohen contemptuously qualifies his father as the “male and tamer with the strong moustache.” This black moustache stands for the animal-male regime of the father. And this same moustache now defiles Ariane, just as it defiled that other “elected” woman, the mother. We have again come full circle: from the autobiography to the stream of consciousness, the same motif resurfaces. What appears at first as an absolute contrast, the adultery of a Swiss aristocrat with a German symphonic conductor, reenacts in exact detail, through the metonymy of the moustache, the most private and humiliating of domestic scenes that took place in the Coens’ modest apartment in Marseille. Difference and otherness are merely narrative lures here. The moustache always refers to the tyranny of the father and the incessant repetition of the trauma that it causes. Solal desires to be with Ariane, just as he would have liked to be with his mother, outside of the regime of nature, outside the grip of masculine power. But at every turn, his fantasy is defiled by the hairy male(s).

This is no interpretive leap that hinges on a fanciful interpretation of the moustache metonymy, for Cohen himself offers this precise analysis in the crystal lucidity of Solal’s own crucial stream of consciousness. As the lovers slide into boredom and thus into mutual cruelty as a panacea against this boredom, and just before their erotic life is recharged by the omnipresence of the German conductor and his black moustache, Solal’s stream of consciousness leaves no doubt as to the true nature of his overt longing, regret, desire:

no longer need to act as the bastard of expensive maliciousness to please her to relieve her from boredom yes as early as tomorrow son and mother forever and enough of this mucous business and get out of here man the dreadful the bestial *the father with whom she deceived me deceived her son* I’ll ask her if she loves me more if she loves her son or the man who slammed she will tell me yes . . . what do I care I’ll live as a madman until my dying day if I can finally love her in truth oh my love I’ll be able to love you with a love that does not perish.*

*“plus besoin de faire le salaud de cher méchant pour lui plaire pour la désennuyer oui dès demain fils et mère à jamais et assez d’entreprises muqueuses et hors d’ici l’homme le bestial l’affreux *le père avec qui elle m’a trompé a trompé son fils* je lui demanderai si elle m’aime davantage si elle aime davantage son fils que l’homme qui a claqué elle me dira que oui . . . que m’importe de vivre en fou jusqu’à ma mort si je peux enfin l’aimer dans la vérité ô mon amour je vais pouvoir t’aimer de l’amour qui ne périt point” (*BdS*, 916–17; emphasis added)

The dread of repetition hovers over this paragraph. Solal is interchangeable with his father, Ariane with his mother, and the dread resides in repeating their bestial acts that the little Albert so resented. This is perhaps the most convincing and explicit thematic hybridization of *Le Livre de ma mère* and *Belle du Seigneur*. Looking at Ariane, Solal sees his mother. Thinking of himself, he sees his father. Acknowledging the cruelty of their relationship, he recalls his father's wrath, his mother's submission, his own resentment—and his enduring fantasy of being at last—be it a few moments before death—liberated from the regime of the black moustache. The paradigmatic shifts of man, beast, father and of Ariane and the mother are clear. Solal is then at once the moustached tyrant, the betrayed son, and the future androgynous, feminine, sororial companion, and Ariane is the harlot who pretends to adore the moustache, the mother and that lover, sister, mother with whom no sticky (mucus) bodily fluids need be exchanged. Solal and Ariane mimic that which they abhor. And to cap it all, this montage can only be more generally understood in terms of the overreaching moral experiment that is at play here: were Ariane capable of loving Solal in the guise of an old Hassidic Jew, the pair would have been liberated from “the mucous business,” liberated from the necessity of playing stupid roles not of their making and (real) desire, and capable, finally, of “lov[ing] in truth . . . able to love . . . with a love that does not perish.” (Needless to add that, as we saw in the previous chapter, the inverse of this moral experiment is also true: were Solal able to love a woman, were Solal capable of seeing beyond bestiality and power, were he not seduced himself by Solal the powerful seducer, were he able in short to love Rachel rather than Ariane—he would altogether have avoided “the mucous business” and the comic but humiliating necessity of playing “a bastard of expensive maliciousness” (*BS*, 916). But that is not an option for a narcissistic masochist who secretly delights in his own dismemberment, itself inscribed in the grand history of a martyred people on the eve of yet another holocaust.)

But, going further in the game of substitutions in this stream of consciousness, Cohen also imports the dwarf Rachel from the Berlin underground into this synthetic montage: “my little slightly crooked cardboard [Purim] crown to make a crazy king but kind [*sympathique*].”^{*} Solal yearns for a crooked baton, a crazy baton, yearns for the kingdom without a phallus, a “sympathetic” phallus in sum. He is an infant king; Ariane, a mother queen, the two living in *douceur* and complicity, a paradise free from the moustached king(s): “a son

^{*}ma couronne de carton un peu penchée de côté pour faire roi toqué mais gentil (*BdS*, 916)

does not have to lie [with a woman] a son has only to cherish.”* Now circling back to Ariane’s first stream of consciousness, we also see that Solal and Ariane not only share the same phallic phobias but also an identical vision of paradise.

Ariane’s interlocutor in paradise is a postmenopausal woman, irrevocably operating outside the orbit of the moustache. To be available, the old woman must be isolated at the edge between life and death, at the edge of the ocean of death. This is how Ariane imagines their conversation:

it’s funny I almost never think about my brother a grandmother that’s what I need a wrinkled little pippin very good in the solitary house on the top of the dune I’ll go see her so that she consoles me with café-au-lait the wind howling outside but we’ll be happy inside in the warmth what’s going on Ariane I don’t know grandmother I am unhappy I need something need what my darling a real girlfriend that’s it a friend to whom I would tell all that I would admire for whom I would kill myself and not be raped by a stranger yes my poor little one I understand I understand you but perhaps you will find it this great friendship.†

To the grandmother, Ariane will tell the truth: males are beasts who kill and rape, and desire exists only for “une amie” such as Varvara. To the grandmother Ariane will recount the pain of submitting to a fumbling fool of a husband. Only with the grandmother could Ariane ever cease pretending, stop acting out the comedy of desire.¹¹

This fantasy of paradise also occurs, and in identical terms, in *Le Livre de ma mère*. The only escape from the phallic order—which Cohen deftly characterizes as “this continual duo between humans, this disheartening refrain of the baboon. ‘I am bigger than thou. I know I am smaller than you. I am bigger than thou. I know I am smaller than you. I am bigger than thou. I know I am smaller than you.’ And so on, always, everywhere, Baboons, all of them!”‡—lies in retreat with the isolated grandmother, where the macabre syntax and semantics of domination and submission, of the *thou* and the *you*

*un fils n’a pas à coucher un fils n’a qu’à chérir (*BdS*, 915)

†drôle je ne pense presque jamais à mon frère une grand-mère voilà ce qu’il me faudrait une petite reinette ridée très bonne dans la maison solitaire en haut de la dune j’irais la voir pour qu’elle me console avec du café au lait le vent dehors hurlant mais on serait bien au chaud qu’est-ce que tu as Ariane je sais pas grand-mère je suis malheureuse j’ai besoin de quelque chose de quoi ma chérie d’une vraie amie voilà une amie à qui je raconterais tout que j’admيرerais pour qui je me tuerais et pas être violée par un étranger oui ma pauvre petite je comprends je te comprends mais tu la rencontreras peut-être cette grande amitié (*BdS*, 186)

‡“ce duo continué parmi les humains, cet écœurant refrain babouin. ‘Je suis plus que toi. Je sais que je suis moins que vous. Je suis plus que toi. Je sais que je suis moins que vous. Je suis plus que toi. Je sais que je suis moins que vous.’ Et ainsi de suite, toujours, partout. Babouins, tous!” (*BdS*, 366)

(*tu/vous*), dueling about the *more* or *less*, no longer dominate. Cohen's version of paradise mirrors Ariane's to such an extent that it merits a second full quotation:

Wide awake, I dream and speak to myself of what it would be like if she were still alive. I would live with her, *in a little way* [*petitement*], in solitude. A *little* house, beside the sea, far from men. The two of us, she and I, a *little* house a bit crooked, and no one else. A very quiet *little* life without talent. I would make myself a new soul, a *little* old lady's soul like hers so that she should not be bothered by me and so should be completely happy. . . . Two old sisters, she and I . . . two real *little* old ladies. . . . And this is how I imagine paradise.*¹²

There is the same visceral loathing of baboonery; the same desire to step out of the shadow of the father and be with the mother alone, like two old sisters, two postmenopausal women, self-sufficient unto themselves. No longer subject to the wheel of phallic necessity of domination and submission, the two women will be like parasites of each other, but parasites in a symbiotic relationship.¹³

Yet the wheel of necessity is relentless. Isolation at the edge of the ocean with an unconditionally loving grandmother is not an option. Two alternatives exist: immediate suicide (as on the first page of the novel) or life in the shadow of the male (either by imitation, spite, or inversion). The novel resolves this tension by its use of many voices, discourses, and fluid identities, a literary shadowboxing match, where Solal-Ariane assumes both gender roles, and, as life slowly fades out, shuttle between the two identities in the most theatrical fashion. The first suicide having been botched, and lacking courage for another attempt, Ariane finally turns her attention to Solal, her elected ferryman to accompany her down the Styx into Hades. She begins with a description of a sexual-gender ideal that foreshadows Solal's true identity. Ariane is again very lucid and prescient: beneath Solal the super male, the Zeuslike Don Juan, hidden in turn beneath Solal the old rabbi, she perceives the feminine son who occupies a place somewhere between Serge and Varvara.

Ariane's erotic ideal resembles "a beautiful naked woman who would at the same time be a man isn't that good . . . yes who would be at the same time a man."† She goes further when describing her sexual fantasy about a powerful

*Toute éveillé, je rêve et je me raconte comment ce serait si elle était en vie. Je vivrais avec elle, *petitement*, dans la solitude. Une *petite* maison, au bord de la mer, loin des hommes. Nous deux, elle et moi, une *petite* maison un peu tordue, et personne d'autre. Une *petite* vie très tranquille et sans talent. Je me ferais une âme nouvelle, une âme de *petite* vieille comme elle pour qu'elle ne soit pas gênée par moi et qu'elle soit tout à fait heureuse. . . . Deux vieilles sœurs, elle et moi. . . . deux vraies *petites* vieilles. . . . Et c'est ainsi que j'imagine le paradis. (*LM*, 751–52; emphasis added)

†une belle femme nue qui serait en même temps un homme pas bien ça . . . oui qui serait en même temps un homme (*BdS*, 175)

hermit who will handle her just the way she wishes to be handled: “I would like so very much there I am flat and my hermit folds me into halves and then quarters like a piece of cloth and stuffs me into his sack *he is a man but without hair* and when one gets close to the source of the shades he opens his sack and unfolds me it’s so good”^{*} The male/hermit overwhelms Ariane in his power to manhandle her, yet he is hairless, smooth but powerful, aggressive but not cannibalistic. The ideal sexual being thus is both female and male, possesses a phallus, may be aggressive at times but is never hairy. If a phallus there must be, then let this phallus project itself out from the smooth curves and soft skin of a feminine body. In a later stream of consciousness, Ariane’s ideal of a perfect erotic being transpires with even more detail: “it’s crazy how I feminize myself I would rather enjoy being a man for a certain thing but to keep all the rest female the hips the breasts that would be in sum the perfect being.”[†] Such is Ariane’s erotic ideal: the man-woman, the she-man whom she will soon enough recognize in Solal the oriental dandy.

The Two Belles

Ariane once again waits for Solal in her bath, where she delves into her second important stream of consciousness, another entire chapter (chapter 70), another twenty pages, 700 lines of unpunctuated free-flowing text. After weeks of waiting, he is to return from Berlin and the lovers are to be reunited. Even though the train arrives at seven, Solal is not expected at Ariane’s for another two hours, because he must prepare himself with extreme care: “that brings him here at nine o’clock all that because monsieur wishes to please bathe for an hour and perhaps a meticulous shave,” which leads Ariane to reveal the meaning of Solal’s preciousness, “it’s your feminine side my dear feminine also are your glances in the mirror you look at yourself a bit too often a weakness my dear and also comedianlike with his dressing gowns too lovely too long oh my friend this is thus how we are we others your slaves.”[‡]

^{*}j’aimerais tellement voilà je suis plate et mon ermite me plie en deux puis en quatre comme une étoffe m’enferme dans sa besace *c’est un homme mais sans poils* et quand on arrive près de la source des ombrages il ouvre sa besace et il me déplie c’est tellement bon (*BdS*, 185; emphasis added)

[†]c’est fou ce que je me féminise j’aimerais assez être un homme pour une certaine chose mais garder tout le reste féminin les hanches les seins ça serait en somme l’être parfait (*BdS*, 618)

[‡]qui s’amène ici à neuf heures tout ça parce que monsieur veut plaire bain d’une heure peut-être rasage minutieux c’est d’ailleurs votre côté féminin mon cher féminins aussi vos coups d’œil dans la glace vous vous regardez un peu trop une faiblesse ça mon ami et puis comédien avec ses robes de chambre trop belles trop longues oui mon ami c’est ainsi que nous sommes nous autres vos esclaves. (*BdS*, 604)

When seen in his transparent interiority or even just in his domestic setting, this overbearing male is feminine at heart. When Solal gazes in the mirror, he reflects Ariane's own vain and narcissistic glance—and vice versa. That shared narcissistic gaze constitutes the site of their particular truth, revealed by Solal from the very beginning of the novel, where the man who is “beautiful enough to [make you] vomit” intersects with “the most beautiful woman in the world.”¹⁴

But Ariane's last statement: “[T]his is thus how we are we others your slaves” drives the equation between the two to its limit. To wit: this is how we women are; we are your slaves, whom you, Solal des Solal, resemble. Slave and master concurrently, man in the mirror of the eyes of other men; woman in the mirror of your bedroom. Solal simultaneously plays the role of the Beauty and of the Beast, of the Belle and of the Seigneur, or of the Belle subjugated to her Seigneur, of the Seigneur torturing his Belle, that is—himself. That baboon game of domination and submission, of the *you* and *thou* and the *more* and *less* is played out within the self, within the Belle and the Seigneur. This matrix proposition could have applied to each episode so far discussed; simply substitute the notion of Hassidic Jew for that of woman and you have a convincing reading of the theme of the Jew as marginal stranger. The statement “You are like us, despite our subjugation to you” could have been addressed to Solal by the Valorous in the underground of the Château Saint-Germain, or to Solal by the dwarf Rachel and her uncles in the Berlin underground. To recognize the dynamic identity between disparate categories is to grasp Solal's epic dissonance, which is repeated in different novelistic montages throughout *Belle du Seigneur*.

But nowhere is the identity between Solal and Ariane as categorically asserted as in the observations that the old maid Mariette makes on the subject of the two in her chapter-long streams of consciousness.¹⁵ This allows Cohen to focalize on Solal-Ariane from the point of view of a maid—awkward and colloquial, but all too observant. Describing the daily routines of the two “priests of love,” the mirror imaging of the two convincingly comes to the fore. In a way, here, Mariette describes the best period of their charmed exile in the south of France, their utopian wager against the principle of the real: to exist as two lovers, two women, one fully feminine, the other phallic but hairless, in the utopia of romance from which all traces of the beast are rigorously excluded. And thus Mariette's stream of consciousness offers a minute and highly comic description of Solal and Ariane's life in the secluded villa. Mariette's narrative strongly suggests the gender symmetry between Solal and Ari-

ane, the two precious women—except that they are nevertheless condemned to play their traditional gender roles, and thus the potential feminine-feminine utopia turns into yet another nightmare.

The crucial text for us is chapter 90 (pp. 801–16), where Mariette focuses on the lovers' orchestration of a ritualized ideal existence of unending erotic romance in the Mediterranean villa. Solal and Ariane see each other only when they are impeccable—ready for love-making, a promenade, or a meal. Ideal lovers, they must never betray the slightest hint of bodily functions—burping, coughing, flatulence, urination, or defecation—and, when indisposed or ill, they simply avoid each other altogether. Their separate bathrooms and toilets are arranged in such a way that there is never the hint of their real usage. The sound of a toilet flushing is pure horror, because it might also flush away the allure of the nondefecating erotic body, always seductive or seducing, embodied, to be sure, but never outside the bounds of ideal representation, which excludes the urinary and intestinal tracts. The words “soiled underwear,” for example, are never to be mentioned by the maid, even though, she insists, neither Ariane nor Solal actually ever soil their underwear: “monsieur’s dirty underwear is never dirty either.”* Mariette repeatedly emphasizes, by means of these revealing parallels, the symmetry between the two.

To be seen, each must be at once “ready and visible” (*prêt et visible*), which means that by definition they rarely see each other in full. Circuitous ways must therefore be concocted to communicate while being partially hidden or separated. This is the stuff of a farce. Bells are installed so that an elaborate code of rings communicates their degree of readiness and visibility. Two rings signify that Ariane should come and talk to Solal from beyond the closed door; three rings signify that Ariane is asking Solal whether she can freely circulate in the house without his coming out of his room, and so on. “[I]t’s the house of electrical phantoms I was telling myself.”† When the electricity is cut off, the maid serves as intermediary between the two impeccable beauties. Notice in the following passage the symmetry between Ariane and Solal: “go ask monsieur if I can move around because you understand she does not want to be seen without being dolled up enough, *and the same goes for him*.”‡ Through the keyhole, Mariette observes even more farcical scenes: Ariane enters Solal’s room walking backward and talks to him facing the other way, because neither

*“il est jamais sale non plus le linge sale de monsieur” (*BdS*, 815)

†“[C]’est la maison des fantômes électriques je me disais” (*BdS*, 811)

‡“allez demander à monsieur si je peux circuler, parce que vous comprenez elle veut pas être vue pas assez pomponnée, *et lui même chose*” (*BdS*, 812; emphasis added)

is “ready and visible”; or she enters his room and talks to him with her eyes covered by a scarf, because the Beau Seigneur de la Belle is neither ready nor visible.¹⁶

Mariette’s lucidity is exemplary. She recognizes this purely theatrical staging for what it is, namely, the narcissism of two females, bound in a rigid priestly ritual, whose ideal, physical perfection in its optimal *mise-en-scène*, renders their existence morbid and entombs them in the house of the dead: “there they go acting as bishops of love in their tomb.”* Mariette focuses here on the essential, the protean formula of the whole novel: *the self-fashioning of death with the other who is at heart the same*. And no one articulates this identity, the farcical theater of “electrical phantoms” and the morbidity of it all as well as the old maid Mariette does, the naïve buffoon who, like Mangeclous elsewhere, tells the truth in her proletarian patois.

Dressed in their robes, prisoners of romantic rites and rigid routines that force the magical onto the banal, they are “bishops” of love, officiants at a romantic sacrifice. Their carefully choreographed encounters read like those of two women: “He would enter, and it would be a wonder to contemplate each other, demi-gods in their robes of priestly love, poetic and cleaned.”† And then the comedy of dressing, watching, adjusting; the whole coquettish montage that occupies much of Ariane’s time, just as it does that of her counterpart: part Varvara, part Serge: “a beautiful naked woman who would at the same time be a man isn’t that good?”

In the novel, the Solal-Ariane hybrid identity is suggested by Solal from the first scene, which is subsequently reiterated in so many ways (mimicking, mirrors, fantasies). But to posit this hybrid identity of the two in the one in a more explicit or categorical manner would simply disable the narrative both for the novelist and for the critic. To succeed, narratives require that identities between disparate parts be suppressed, antagonisms exaggerated, and a plot woven around supposed differences. The same identity in two would collapse the structural cohesion of a narrative. On the face of it, Ariane must come off as a Bovaryesque or Kareninaesque dupe of phallic mystification, and Solal must appear as a phallic Zeus struggling with a Jewish shadow. Cohen’s effectiveness as a novelist springs from his narrative juxtapositions of probing streams of consciousness and a strong plot, resulting in a comic interplay between the inner lucidity of the characters and their sense of obligation to act

*“ça s’en vont faire les évêques de l’amour dans leur sarcophage” (*BdS*, 816)

†Il entrait, et c’était la merveille de se contempler, demi-dieux en leurs robes d’amoureuse prêtrise, poétiques et nettoyés. (*BdS*, 710)

out plots not of their making, not of their desire, but ultimately fatal in these particular historical circumstances. If Solal-Ariane is truly a single identity montage, which is my thesis here, then they must be split apart and pitted against each other in the same way that dissonant voices may clash in psychotic discourse but nonetheless belong to a single empirical subject.

Apotheosis and Jouissance

We now turn to the second half of Ariane's first stream of consciousness, which moves outward from the modes of interior confession and recollection to a narrative of possibility, a turn toward Solal, who incarnates the possible, constitutes the other who is at first tortured then worshiped. From the very first stream of consciousness, the trajectory of this movement, its narratives and metaphors, constitute a *mise-en-abyme* of the whole novel, not just in the prediction of the unfolding of events but also for their interpretation. Ariane's stream of consciousness already anticipates a reading of *Belle du Seigneur*.

The novel begins and ends in blood. Ariane draws first blood by throwing a glass at Solal's face, thus finally drawing the blood that the dwarf Rachel craves but does not dare spill. Solal walks away from their first one-on-one encounter wearing his cherished new flesh wound like expensive jewelry, a crown of thorns bestowed by the "elected" one as a first gesture in a blood-soaked epic. The wound constitutes their first exchange of goods—his Purim Carnival against her Easter Passion. Afterward, they are even, his intrusion into her bedroom redeemed by the wound over his peeping eye. It also occasions their first moment of complicity, as the undersecretary-general conceals how he earned his fleshy jewel and Ariane withholds how and why she bestowed it. Blood is their first bond; it will also be their last.

Ariane's outburst of violence against Solal parallels her phallic phobias, and the glass hurled at the intrusive male becomes the spear with which Diana would have pierced any intruder. Finally, she can inflict the wounds that she secretly desires to deliver to her imprisoning satyr of a husband. Yet she remains intrigued all the same, as if Solal's blood is merely a foretaste of fleshy thrills to come. What a *mise-en-scène* this strange fellow has concocted! The felonious audacity of intruding through the window late at night, the carnivalesque histrionics of customs, accents, and gestures, the philosophical contempt heaped on a stranger in her bedroom. With this one extraordinary act, Solal's singularity as a conceptual montage easily overtakes Varvara in the hierarchy of desire: "oh so beautiful to have wanted to be loved as a hideous old

man.”* And when she thinks of Solal’s anti-feminine tirade at the Ritz, Ariane concludes, “it’s not Varvara who would have said that.”† However sweet, silky, soft, and unthreatening, Varvara lacked this imaginative capacity for the dramatization of being. Ariane understands Solal as a poet of existence and his theatrical maleness as a secondary feature—another mask among many. Once she has overcome her primary repulsion from the hairy bull (and from the Jew), there transpires a far deeper desire for ecstasy in pain. Solal is a “nasty man who is good and the others are good men who are nasty.”‡ No matter how contemptuous Solal seems, his venom, compared to Adrien’s saccharine affection, is the poison that heals.

Solal’s magnetism resides in the cruelty that his smile betrays: “he can be nasty that is what is chic about him damn [*zut*] at the Ritz he said a bunch of things against too bad me *his cruel smile devastates me with happiness.*”§ The “cruel smile” refers to Ariane’s masochistic joy and Solal’s sadism, but, more abstractly and self-referentially, it also alludes to the very painful joy of the writing of the novel—always an aesthetic yet masochistic enterprise where the polyphonic, dissonant, satirical, and thus fundamentally cruel redescriptions, meet their perfect expression in language. After all, Albert Cohen himself defines the novelist as someone in possession of a good heart and a mean eye.¹⁷ By definition, the great novel offers both writer and reader this “cruel smile that devastates,” because it chronicles in minute details the desire and even orgasmic joy of dying after one’s fashion, of being one’s own executioner in the most delectable manner.

The sensual aggression comes to the fore in the second half of the stream of consciousness, only to build—through surprising pivots—into a Christian Passion play ending with a sacred orgasmic crescendo worthy of Molly Bloom’s repeated orgasmic “Yes’s.” At first Ariane sees Solal only as an imposter of the worst kind: a court Jew, a libidinal male, and an impolite intruder to boot. She viscerally despises this phallic intrusion into her privacy. The depressed housewife finally pours out all her wrath as she fantasizes about cruelly torturing and humiliating the ultimate other against whom she defines herself: Germanic, she is not a Jew; lesbian, she does not desire the male; Genevan Protestant, she loathes Solal’s baroque and very oriental theatricality. But she

*oh si beau d’avoir voulu être aimé en vieil affreux (*BdS*, 610)

†c’est pas Varvara qui aurait dit ça (*BdS*, 610)

‡un méchant qui est bon les autres c’est des bons qui sont méchants (*BdS*, 610)

§il peut être méchant c’est ça qui est chic zut au Ritz il a dit un tas de choses contre tant pis moi
son sourire cruel me dévaste de bonheur (*BdS*, 613; emphasis added)

can always put this seemingly ultimate other on the wheel of torture and thereby remain close to him while torturing him: “the chic thing would be to whip him and that he should yell out of of pain yell my dear yell yes that he should yell and that he should beg me to stop it all in tears with such comic grimaces I beg you madame I beg forgiveness on my knees and me I shall laugh oh there there on his knees and without his monocle he begs me with his hands joined with a contemptible expression of horror.”*

This is more than generic sadomasochism. Solal may indeed be an audacious undersecretary-general of the League of Nations, revered by Ariane’s husband as his superior, but Ariane sees him first and foremost as a Jew, and as a lowly oriental one at that, and with this visceral contempt, the otherwise tender woman quivers with delectation as she tortures her victim:

oh the tears flowing from his eyes the to and fro [*dzin et dzan*] on the tears no pity the tears furrowed the cheeks of *Yaourt ben Solal ben Zouli Tapis* but the brave young woman whipped him without respite and on the kike’s wretched face the red lines were turning white and really stood out and he begged to the point of cleaving the soul but the beautiful young woman unperturbed whipped on without respite and *dzin* and *dzan* that will teach you my good man to have such a conk was telling him the admirable young woman with a caustic irony oh how much he bore he is at the end of his wits he can no longer go on†

Ariane taunts her victim with a name that in itself tells a complete story: “*Yaourt ben Solal ben Zouli Tapis*”—which stands in obvious opposition to her aristocratic name: “Ariane Cassandre Corisande d’Auble.” *Yaourt*, for the French invective “youpin/youtré,” which we have encountered in the street hawker trauma. *Ben*, a Hebrew word, meaning “son of”; then *Solal*, both a proper name and a surname. She mocks his unusual name of *Solal des Solal*, whose redundancy she correctly interprets as Jew of Jews—a tautology trying disparately and theatrically to create a difference. Finally, *ben Zouli* evokes the

*le chic serait de le cravacher et qu’il hurle de douleur hurle mon cher hurle oui qu’il hurle et qu’il me supplie de m’arrêter tout en larmes avec des grimaces tellement comiques je vous en supplie madame je vous demande pardon à genoux et moi je rirai oh là là à genoux et sans monocle il me supplie les mains jointes avec une expression abjecte de terreur (*BdS*, 181)

†oh les larmes coulent de ses yeux *dzin* et *dzan* sur les larmes pas de pitié les larmes sillonnaient les joues de *Yaourt ben Solal ben Zouli Tapis* mais la courageuse jeune femme le cravachait sans répit et sur l’ignoble visage de *Yaourt* les raies rouges devenaient blanches bien en relief et il suppliait à fendre l’âme mais la belle jeune femme impavide cravachait sans trêve et *dzin* et *dzan* ça vous apprendra mon bonhomme à avoir un tel pif lui disait l’admirable jeune femme avec une ironie mordante oh ce qu’il en a reçu il est à bout de forces il ne peut même plus (*BdS*, 181; emphasis added)

Orient, and *Tapis* refers to the lowly class of oriental rug peddlers, Solal's progenitors in Ariane's mind. The name *Yaourt ben Solal ben Zouli Tapis* might be translated into English as "Kike son of a Sephardic [son of an] oriental rug merchant." No name could be further from the mythological Ariane Cassandre Corisande of the noble lineage of Auble. Her name is not a tautological name; it is a string of predicates and noble genitives. Solal the feminized oriental *metèque* repels Ariane to her core: "oh really that a woman could truly be attracted by this type of seedy shadowy man with *eyes like a Turkish dancer* it's unbelievable I wouldn't want to meet him at the corner of a bazaar."*

The good whipping accomplished, Ariane releases the Jew to his native and rightful place, saying: "off you go to the synagogue go have your wounds dressed by large noses on small legs."† Solal's rightful place is certainly not in the Palace of the League of Nations. Ariane thinks: "Your place is not here with me, Europa, but with the disfigured subhumans in your recalcitrant synagogue full of grotesque Rachels and Jérémies and Mangeclous who will tend your wounds." Thus the fictional stream of consciousness of the beloved repeats the autobiographical street hawker's invectives on Cohen's tenth birthday and with the exact plot of the Berlin underground where Solal is wounded by the "blond beasts" and healed by the deformed Rachel. Ariane's language bears an uncanny resemblance to that of the street hawker: "You there, you are a Yid, aren't you? . . . you're not quite French, are you? . . . a little thoroughbred kike . . . you can slip by on, we've seen enough of you, you don't belong here, this is not your country, you have no business being here, go . . . get the hell out of here go to Jerusalem and see if I'm there."‡ Everything is a question of places and displacement, of love and repulsion. "off you go to the synagogue," "off you go to Jerusalem," "just go away": therein lies Solal's catastrophic odyssey—climb up and down the secret staircase of the Château Saint-Germain, crouch in the Berlin underground, hide behind the wall of the Palace of the League of Nations spying on your kin. Never can Solal just belong (*en être*) naturally and at ease, either as a spectator of a street hawker or even (or especially) as a participant in a sadistic fantasy. That normalcy in its

*oh vraiment qu'une femme puisse être attirée par ce genre d'homme louche ténébreux avec *ses yeux de danseuse turque* c'est incroyable j'aimerais pas le rencontrer au coin d'un souk. (*BdS*, 187; emphasis added)

†allez hop à la synagogue allez faire panser vos blessures par des gros nez sur des petites pattes (*BdS*, 182)

‡"Toi, tu es un Youpin, hein?" . . . "tu es encore un Français à la manque, hein? . . . un petit Youtre pur sang. . . tu peux filer, on t'a assez vu, tu es pas chez toi ici, c'est pas ton pays ici, tu as rien à faire chez nous, allez . . . va un peu voir à Jérusalem si j'y suis." (*Ô vous*, 1052)

most banal or most bizarre forms remains ontologically foreign to him. His *en être* is a permanent utopia (no place); his name, permanently an index both to his tautological overdetermination as a Jew and his permanent displacement—Solal des Solal wandering misty Europe, repelled by his own people, repelling others. His lot is to be a Hebrew, a *paquebot* from identity to identity, costume to costume, slipping in through a window, kicked out through a door, and always disturbing the peace.¹⁸

But Solal is also that perverse erotic subject who takes a great deal of masochistic joy in being tortured at the hands of the blonde beast, especially when Ariane spits in his face the identical invectives that derailed his life at the age of ten and turned him into a suicidal subject that fateful evening at the Marseille public lavatories. No doubt Solal identifies at some perverse level with Ariane's description of him and of where he ultimately belongs—which is why he disguises himself as an old Jew in the first place. In that sense, in this torture scene, Ariane is simply a montage of all the anti-Semitic hatred that defines Solal's identity as the hated Jew whom he both abhors and cherishes, which he suffers from and performs. Ariane and Solal are alloyed into a single montage, of which the deepest points of contact are to be found in the seemingly meaningless recesses of this stream of consciousness chatter. Ariane in this case is just the active agent in an *autophagic organism*; she is the half that consumes the other half of the same entity. She is the internalized street hawker reincarnated in the image of Viviane, his childhood imaginary playmate.

More specifically, Ariane's sadistic fantasy resonates with two recurrent motifs in Cohen's most elemental montage: Ariane bleeds Solal, just as Rachel was tempted to bleed him but did not because Solal viewed her as an unworthy torturer. Deep down, Ariane, the "elected one," wants to bite and castrate Solal as much as the despised Rachel does: "I'd love to smoke a cigar . . . I'd like to have a chocolate candy when I eat one I would look at him before putting it in my mouth putting it in my mouth I turn it on all sides and . . . then snap I bite again bite again the presents that [Adrien] gives me."* Solal is the gift brought by Adrien, which Ariane would now like to crack in her mouth. The oral castration even surfaces in the whipping phantasm, for as she tortures Solal with a whip *dzin et dzan* in the face, forcing him to kneel and beg for mercy, she fantasizes about taking a break between strokes to contemplate her work: "I'll chain him up tightly so that he can't hurt me so I can whip him at

*j'aimerais fumer un cigare . . . j'aimerais un bonbon au chocolat quand j'en mange un je le regarde avant de le mettre dans la bouche le mettre dans la bouche je le tourne de tous les côtés et . . . puis crac je remords remords les cadeaux [his penis] qu'[Adrien] m'apporte (*BdS*, 175–76)

my leisure and eating a chocolate truffle after each snap of the whip one truffle for me”*

Likewise, she laces her *dzin* and *dzan* whipping with the street hawker’s invectives, which act as the verbal correlative to the whip’s lashing, and appear just as perversely satisfying to both torturer and victim. These practices, of course, continue Solal’s secret delectation in anti-Semitic discourse and acts. Ariane simply serves as a vehicle for Solal’s own fantasies in the most novelistically efficient manner: Let the adversary perform the vivisection.

The Aryan aristocrat torments the oriental Jew. Absolute difference, spiteful phobia is inscribed in blood. This torture phantasm marks the moment of absolute polarity and conflict between the two (who are but one). Ariane lashes the flesh of Solal, searching above all for that humiliation in his eyes. Contemptuous of her victim, despising every detail of his existence, she recoils in horror at the thought of any contact with him, except for the highly intimate exchange between torturer and victim. But as much as she resists the mere thought of Solal, this resistance, evident in the torture fantasy, only inserts him even deeper into her mind. And while she soon pivots in the stream of consciousness from apparent repulsion to desire, the sadomasochistic modality of the relationship is stamped once and for all. The torture-passion trope remains constant; only the roles of torturer and victim oscillate: Solal becomes the dominant Savior (Seigneur) and Ariane his subjugated disciple on all the sadomasochistic levels, hence its death-bound dimensions.

In truth, even before the turn, despite conscious hostility to Solal, Ariane spends her days and nights waiting for this rabbinical clown to deliver her salvation (what a scenario!). She recognizes his singularity, his suicidal insanity, as a fitting complement to her own. She slowly realizes what Solal understood at once at the Brazilian reception. Slowly the two halves converge. Although conflicted, she knows that the madman will return, and that she will then cede to him; and she awaits Solal, naked in her bathtub with the window wide open, her gaze fixed upon the open space just beyond, her expectations heightened.

To effectuate such a shift from repulsion to desire, from torturing “Yaourt ben Solal ben Zouli Tapis” to venerating the intimate yet sacred “Sol,” a bridge phantasm must operate on both sides. This would provide a perfect *fantasme embrayeur*, capable of articulating contradiction, of overcoming obstacles, of rendering the real magical. The figure of Jesus Christ acts as that *fantasme embrayeur*. Jesus allows Ariane to almost seamlessly transform the oriental Jew

*Je le ferai bien enchaîner pour qu’il ne me fasse pas mal pour le cravacher à mon aise en mangeant des truffes au chocolat après chaque coup de cravache une truffe pour moi (*BdS*, 181)

into a figure of Genevan reverence, while allowing Solal to assume this role without negating his identity as an oriental Jew. After all, Jesus was himself a Mediterranean Jew, as Solal reminds himself obsessively when celebrating Easter in the first novel.¹⁹ Both Solal and Ariane play at the edge of their identity horizons, the exchange is symmetrical and the complicity mutual.

Ariane transforms Solal himself into Christ in the last page of her stream of consciousness, as in a perfect metaphorical and sensual dénouement, overcoming all contradiction, entering the zone of post-reality utopia (this is the ontotheological dimension here), and ending in the phantasm of sexual penetration and orgasm. The sequence in these last two pages is quick and worthy of close attention, for it all ultimately culminates in the aesthetic suicide motif that drives the whole novel. Ariane thinks of her suicidal state of mind “the black ideas about my life come more often when I brush my teeth.”* She then freely admits to having performed a ritual that consists of waiting in her bathtub for another of Solal’s “break-ins,” which the phantasm of torturing Solal served to obfuscate. Only then does the crucial Christ phantasm appear; she awaits her Savior, who is now just barely perceptible over the horizon beyond the open window: “there he is I see him over there in the white robe he goes quickly on the blindingly powdery road one would say that he does not place his bare feet on the ground there he is closer me very pure all naked but not flat it’s not the moment that’s it he pushed the barrier he is holy he is royal it’s the lord hermit me on my knees a very grave disciple.”†

The roles are reversed. Solal advances in the stream of consciousness from one who is chained and whipped to one who walks on water and floats, semi-immaterial, toward his submissive disciple, who no longer cruelly dominates but readies herself on her knees. The sexual dimension is underlined by the semantic slippage of the word “hermit.” Four pages beforehand, “hermit” refers to the infantile imaginary sexual partner, who powerfully folds and unfolds Ariane, all while *not* being a hairy beast. And now, it is another “hermit,” the “lord hermit” who comes to fold and unfold his “grave disciple.” Solal will henceforth occupy this tragicomic space between Savior and sex toy, upon which is hinged the whole aestheticization of their hetero-master/slave-but-not-hairy-beast performance of a relationship—the object, as we saw above, of Mariette’s scorn.

*les idées noires sur ma vie viennent beaucoup plus quand je brosse mes dents (*BdS*, 188)

†le voilà je le vois là-bas dans sa robe blanche il va vite sur la route poussiéreuse aveuglante on dirait qu’il ne pose pas ses pieds nus par terre le voilà plus près moi très pure toute nue mais pas plate c’est pas le moment ça y est il a poussé la barrière il est saint il est royal c’est le seigneur ermite moi à genoux très grave disciple (*BdS*, 188)

For the fantasy to complete itself, the Seigneur must disdainfully discipline his Belle. Ariane finally submits, not out of necessity, as she was compelled to do with her husband, Adrien Deume, or out of boredom, as with the German conductor, Serge. Rather, she follows a willful strategy of being, in this case the mode best suited to accompany her down the Styx toward her self-fashioned death. Her Savior is in fact Chiron; he acts as the perfect ferryman for a one-way voyage. This Savior Chiron is as dominating as Zeus, as smooth as Europa, as cruel as human fate. That this vicious aspect of the Seigneur should differ from the Gospel's image of Jesus is beside the point, because all of Cohen's mythological allegories are marked by syncretism, the significance of which remains internal to Cohen's particular montage.

Notice that Ariane not only desires to submit but emphasizes the disdainful scorn that the Seigneur must perforce exhibit toward her: "he *scorns* me a bit otherwise it does not work I am *nothing* next to him just a kind glance and only once a sort of smile and afterward he doesn't *condescend* anymore it's moving this kindness and this smile only once from the *disdain* and then I am madly his *servant*."* For this Belle du Seigneur relationship to work, dominance must be established, although mediated through the Savior narrative, thus thinly disguising the sadomasochistic mode, which becomes obvious before their first kiss and later dominates the decline and dénouement of their passion in death.

In a later stream of consciousness, Ariane's phantasms become even more sexually submissive: "I am chained and he overcome with a male fury I can't escape him he makes me submit to the worst indecencies I don't see any disadvantage to the male fits of rage *it's right up my alley [ça fait tout à fait mon affaire]*."† A literal reading may suggest that Ariane has pivoted 180 degrees. Why would a Diana, allergic to the hairy male, hater of penetration, desire this humiliation in the hands of "male fury"? But this question misses the point, as the last clause clearly intimates: "it's right up my alley." That is, it corresponds perfectly to my core desires of erotic and morbid self-dramatization. That Solal takes her from time to time, that she lives a parenthetical "love affair," does not change Ariane's self-understanding as that virgin who is raped

*il me *dédaigne* un peu sinon ça marche pas je ne suis *rien* à côté de lui juste un regard de bonté une seule fois une sorte de sourire et après il ne *daigne* plus c'est émouvant cette bonté et ce sourire une seule fois du *dédaigneux* et alors je suis follement sa *servante* (*BdS*, 189; emphasis added)

†je suis enchaînée et lui il est pris d'une mâle fureur je ne peux pas lui échapper il me fait subir les derniers outrages je ne vois aucun inconvénient aux mâles fureurs *ça fait tout à fait mon affaire* (*BdS*, 622; emphasis added)

from time to time. But this violation now becomes more theatrical, aristocratic in appearance, feminine in essence, and, through its linkage to the ultimate sacrificial narrative, much more acceptable. Ariane now submits to a male but a Savior, to a male but a feminine dandy God, to a “hermit” who is both religious and phallic. Thus intimacy occurs with this simulacrum of a male, which with any other real, non-dramatized male (e.g., Adrien, Serge) would have been all but impossible. Of course, reversing all the terms here, the same could have been said of Solal: he gets his female, but one who at heart abhors phallic baboonery—an acceptable female, even if both “women” (Ariane and Solal) must play along in the hetero-phallic comedy of romance. Cruelty mediates the horror of the same loving the same, and no narrative could be as evocative as this Solal-as-Christ one with all its macabre subtexts: the Trial (banishment from the League of Nations), the Via Dolorosa (the various torture scenes), the Stabat Mater (Ariane on her knees at Solal’s feet), and the Crucifixion (the suicides).

This is why in the first stream of consciousness, the notion of intimacy and disdain is so explicitly linked; “disdain and then I am madly his servant” followed directly by a concessive clause: “nevertheless there is a mysterious intimacy since in the end he accepts that but at this very moment without looking at me he speaks of God with this all eluding gaze he teaches me the path toward the truth and life me I listen on my knees very pure he is no longer speaking now.”* So Solal, as Jesus, is at once intimate and distant, carnal and ethereal in a way that no male ever was—not a Hebrew prophet and certainly not a Greek god. Solal incarnates wisdom from beyond, while accepting that Ariane should prostrate herself in front of him—both as a supplicant disciple and as a woman to be taken. This penetration becomes explicitly sacramental. Far from the repulsive “above below” (*dessus dessous*) and the canine “haha haha” of the other hairy males, this copulation represents the gravitas of a mass of multiple consumptions tinged with the comedy of banality, a distinctive characteristic of Cohen’s style:

he remains upright before me because he knows what will come I am very moved I bow down I genuflect great respect now I rise I shall go and fetch the ewer of perfumed water scented oil would be more sacramental but it makes the hands sticky it would be stupid to wash my hands with soap dur-

*pourtant il y a une intimité mystérieuse puisque à la fin il accepte que mais en ce moment sans me regarder il parle de Dieu avec ce regard ailleurs il m’enseigne le chemin de la vérité et la vie moi j’écoute à genoux très pure il ne parle plus maintenant. (*BdS*, 189)

ing the rite that would destroy the charm so scented water instead okay there I've returned naked with the ewer I very religious he always royal he ignores me necessary that he should ignore me then on my knees I gently pour the water on his bare feet dusty from the road very gently I let down my hair it's very long in the rite with my long hair I wipe his sacred feet I do it for a long time a long time oh it's nice he lets me do it because he deserves everything [*tout lui est dû*] I love it more more now I kiss his feet he lets me do it he does not punish me for my audacity lips pressed to the sacred feet a long time a long time now I lift my head and it's his marvelous smile his smile that accepts that I oh I tremble as I approach I am going since he allows that yes I oh it feels good more more me oh me more oh my lord more more of you more lord inside me.*²⁰

This passage is riddled with inverted religious imagery. Ariane would like to anoint Solal with perfumed oil, but she does not because the sacred oil would make her hands sticky (the novelist cannot resist laughing at Ariane's combination of gravitas and idiocy, her enduring tragicomic signature). Instead, she washes his feet with perfumed water, which places her in a pious position, prostrate at the Savior's feet. A humble servant yet fervent in her devotional duties, subjugated yet initiating copulation with the man-god—such is the sacred orgiastic rite, the erotic self-fashioning that allows Ariane as Diana, and now as Mary Magdalene, to allow the descendent of Aaron to penetrate her body, not in humiliating violation but in orgiastic joy with this demi-god, man-woman, Savior, and ferryman, all at once: “oh my lord more more of you more lord inside me.” This is Ariane echoing Molly Bloom's orgasmic “Yes,” the assertion of both love and death, of the one phantasm-montage that reconciles Solal with the idea of being a male like his father, a female like his mother, and phobic to both, while performing both roles admirably through a sacralized reiteration—erotic, messianic, and morbid. Ariane's first stream of consciousness is an interpretive cornerstone of the whole novel, the well-

*il reste debout devant moi parce qu'il sait ce qui va venir je suis très émue je m'incline je fais une révérence grand respect maintenant je me lève je vais chercher l'aiguière d'eau parfumée l'huile parfumée serait plus sacramentelle mais ça poisse les mains ça serait bête d'aller se savonner pendant le rite ça couperait le charme donc eau parfumée d'accord voilà je suis revenue nue avec l'aiguière moi très religieuse lui toujours royal il m'ignore faut qu'il m'ignore alors moi à genoux je verse doucement l'eau sur ses pieds nus poudreux de la route tout doucement je dénoue mes cheveux ils sont très longs dans le rite avec mes long cheveux j'essuie les pieds sacrés je le fais longtemps longtemps oh c'est bon il me laisse faire parce que tout lui est dû j'adore ça encore encore maintenant je baise les pieds il me laisse faire il ne me châtie pas de mon audace lèvres collées sur les pieds sacrés longtemps longtemps maintenant je lève la tête et c'est son sourire merveilleux son sourire qui accepte que je oh je tremble en approchant je vais puisqu'il permet que oui je oh c'est bon encore encore me oh me encore ô mon seigneur encore encore de vous encore seigneur en moi. (*BdS*, 189)

camouflaged mise-en-abyme that understands and states it all, from deep psychology of sexual identity to aesthetic self-fashioning of a most dramatic and morbid type.²¹

The rest of the novel is little more than the consummation of this narrative. Their love affair is akin to a walk down a gallery of late medieval and early Renaissance art dominated by sacred devotion, thorns, nails, blood, scorn, and the orgasmic beauty of evil (crucifixion) culminating in (self-)execution—not unlike the macabre promenade Solal takes with Rachel in the Berlin underground, except that here the couple do pause from time to time to consume each other. For Solal, there is never the shadow of a doubt that he will soon die, that he will soon turn his snubbed-nose companion (*compagnon trappu*), the revolver that has accompanied him since the opening pages, on himself.

In a later stream of consciousness, Solal imagines his death like this: “I am the one who nails myself to this door of a cathedral in the mountains I am the one who pierces my side with a nail of the underground one of the long nails that she gave me as souvenir.”* “I am the one who” emphasizes Solal’s deliberate agency in his dramatic suicide-crucifixion; the woman who gave him the nails is, of course, the dwarf Rachel, a metonymy for modern Jewish disfigurement, which implies suffering, repulsion, and eternal crucifixions. The nails represent Solal’s studded bad conscience, related to the fact that he does not love his mother, did not love Rachel at all except as an abstraction; the permanent guilt about his searing ambivalence—sharp nails with which he crucifies himself. But in mid-thought, Solal shifts back to his desired interlocutor, not Rachel, but Ariane: “yes my love I love you more and inside myself I cry it out to you while you gently sew”†—to which I would add: “While you weave gently the story of my death which you gently foretold to them for me in your first flowing chatter, meaningless and true as my soon to be death is meaningless but also real.”

Solal and Ariane do commit suicide in the end, and it is not a heroic one. Their suicide results from a sordid spiral of self-destruction at the Ritz after nights of drug-induced debauchery. A banal suicide by veronal sleeping pills at the Ritz is the final cruel joke on these two (really one) who so ardently wanted a death of their own heroic self-fashioning, anointed with perfumed water and hot, scented oil. Instead, they die miserably and anonymously—

*c’est moi qui me cloue à cette porte d’une cathédrale dans la montagne moi qui perce mon flanc avec un clou de la cave un des longs clous qu’elle m’a donnés en souvenir. (*BdS*, 906)

†“oui mon amour je t’aime toujours plus et en moi-même je te le crie pendant que tu couds gentiment.” (*BdS*, 906)

more like Madame Bovary than like Jesus Christ. Or, more correctly, more like a Madame Bovary, yes, but with the conscious self-understanding of a failed Joseph endowed with a lyrical and prophetic and messianic temperament, as the shift from an indicative narrative to a delirious phantasm in the last paragraph of *Belle du Seigneur* makes all too obvious.

However cagey Cohen remained till the end of this life about the political, messianic, and specific historical dimensions of *Belle du Seigneur*, the last paragraph of the novel could not be more eloquent and categorical. Cohen clearly directs us toward the real submerged Josephic and messianic plots, as if he were afraid that the real plot was buried too deep in the romance. We are in Geneva, late 1936, at the Ritz Hotel. Ariane has already taken the lethal dose of sleeping pills that will put her to rest, and Solal, who also intends to commit suicide shortly after her, carries Ariane in his arms . . . down into the Berlin cellar where Rachel is awaiting him. Here is David Coward's translation of this crucial last paragraph:

Suddenly his legs buckled and coldness came upon him, and he set her down on the bed and lay by her side and kissed her virginal face, softened now by just the shadow of a smile and as beautiful as it has been on that first of their nights, kissed her hand, which was still warm but heavy now, held her hand in his, kept her hand in his until he reached the cellar where a dwarf was weeping, weeping openly for her comely king who was dying transfixed with nails to the wart-studded door, her doomed king who was weeping too, weeping for forsaking his children on earth, his children whom he had not saved, what would they do without him, and suddenly the dwarf enjoined him in ringing tones, ordered him to offer up the last prayer in accordance with the ritual, for the hour had come.*

The whole Solal-Ariane-Rachel montage is spelled out here in detail: Solal carries Ariane's body to Rachel's Berlin cellar. That is, he deposes in the Jewish cellar, the corpse of his narcissistic female double and then proceeds to his own death with the proper form of intoning the *Shema Israel* prayer (*Hear, Israel, the Lord is our God, the Lord is One.*) just before his death, exactly as many

*Chancelant soudain, et un froid lui venant, il la remit sur le lit, et il s'étendait auprès d'elle, baisa le visage virginal, à peine souriant, beau comme au premier soir, baisa la main encore tiède mais lourde, la garda dans sa main, la garda avec lui jusque dans la cave où une naine pleurait, ne se cachait pas de pleurer son beau roi en agonie contre la porte aux verrues, son roi condamné qui pleurait aussi d'abandonner ses enfants de la terre, ses enfants qu'il n'avait pas sauvés, et que feraient-ils sans lui, et soudain la naine lui demanda d'une voix vibrante, lui ordonna de dire le dernier appel, ainsi qu'il était prescrit, car c'était l'heure. (*BdS*, 999)

Jews did in the gas chambers. But in this last hallucinatory phantasm, his death is not passive, not induced by an overdose of sleeping pills, as the preceding paragraphs imply. He is the “comely king who was dying transfixed with nails to the wart-studded door”; he is the king who has forsaken his children—children that this Joseph was supposed to save. The Savior is crucified like Jesus, but not for the purpose of expiating the sins of humanity. This Savior is crucified because of a political failure at the crucial historical juncture of 1936 to save those who were to perish soon afterward. And so Solal weeps, and his death is sanctified by the weeping dwarf: his Jewish double, his mother.²²