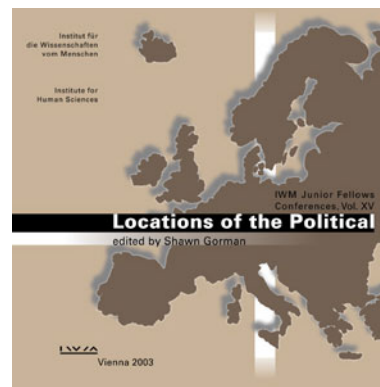


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Sartre: Retrospective Illusions and the Losers of History

Shawn Gorman

Introduction

In 1947, Sartre's *Qu'est-ce que la littérature?* made political engagement the essence of literary writing. Sartre's own engagement as a "compagnon de route" of Marxism began a few years later. By the end of Sartre's career as a writer, he had entirely abandoned literature in favor of philosophy and biography, but his political commitment persisted until his death in 1980. The marriage of literature and politics proved to be a difficult one. The declining political fortunes of Marxism in Europe in the years since Sartre's death has, furthermore, placed the politically engaged period of his career in a strange light. The posthumous reception of Sartre's works has been complicated by the posthumous defeat of Sartre's politics. How should we understand the relation between Sartre's political stances and the value his works have for contemporary readers?

We can look for answers to this question by examining what Sartre (following Bergson¹) terms retrospective illusion, and by showing how this concept inflects Sartre's discourse about the losers of history. The concept of retrospective illusion articulates a theory of how anticipating posthumous reception can affect a writer. Sartre's references to the losers of history, on the contrary, constitute a meditation on how posthumous reception becomes impossible. The former addresses a problem produced by successful literary writing. The latter deals with politics rather than literature, and with failed politics in particular. In this essay we will endeavor to show the precise relation between these two terms in order to reach an understanding of how the posthumous reception of the literary may, in Sartre's case, emerge from the hermeneutics of history's failure.

Furthermore, examining the relation between retrospective illusion and the losers of history in Sartre's work provides a certain explanation of Sartre's shift from Husserlian phenomenology toward Marxist historical dialectic. The suggestion that Sartre's rejection of dialectical materialism can be read as the mature form of his injunction against retrospective illusions may seem anachronous, since the latter is primarily to be found in *Les Mots*, published in 1964, while the former is the starting-point of the *Critique de la Raison dialectique*, published in 1960.² But the concept of retrospective illusion first emerges in 1938's *La Nausée* around the nagging problem of what an historian should do with a loser of history. *La Nausée*'s solution to the problem is to give up on history, but the *Critique* takes the opposite approach. The difference between these two solutions suggests that the need to deal with the loser of history corresponds to the shift (never complete, to be sure) from Husserlian phenomenology to Marxism and from literature to historicism. The treatment of retrospective illusions and history's losers also traverses genres, placing writing at the center of the Sartrean palinode. *La Nausée* is a rejection of history and biography (as illusions) in favor of fiction, while *Les Mots* is a rejection of fiction (as an illusion) that marks a turn toward history and biography. That the term retrospective illusion finds its fullest articulation in an autobiography, a retrospective genre by nature, therefore seems appropriate.

¹ "A toute affirmation vraie nous attribuons... un effet rétroactif; ou plutôt nous lui imprimons un mouvement rétrograde... Les conséquences de cette illusion sont innombrables. Notre appréciation des hommes et des événements est tout entière imprégnée de la croyance à la valeur rétrospective du jugement vrai, à un mouvement rétrograde qu'exécuterait automatiquement dans le temps la vérité une fois posée." Henri Bergson, *Oeuvres* (Paris: Presses universitaires de France, 1959): 1263-1264.

² The fact that Sartre began writing *Les Mots* five years before the *Critique* notwithstanding.

The success of writing depends on overcoming retrospective illusions, which means writing demands retrospective illusions it can overcome. The authentic loser of history, effaced by the progress of history's winner, seems destined to create illusions. The question is what kind of writing will overcome this illusion. By the time he wrote *Les Mots* and the *Critique*, in which eliminating retrospective illusions and recuperating history's losers take on the status of methodological imperatives, Sartre had virtually terminated his career as a literary writer. If the retrospective illusion is necessary to literature, literature requires its own failure, and the elimination of this failure spells the end of literary writing.

Success and failure; or, the difference between history and fiction

We will begin by examining retrospective illusion, situating it between history and fiction, while keeping an eye on the difference between winners and losers. Among other things, *La Nausée* is a story about failing to write.³ Antoine Roquentin never finishes his historical biography of the Marquis de Rollebon for the same reason he finds it hard to write a journal: the meta-criticisms of journal-writing in *La Nausée* parallel Roquentin's reflections about writing history. On Tuesday, January 26, 1932 (or the 30th of January in the original edition, later adjusted by Contat and Rybalka), Roquentin criticizes what he wrote – or rather, failed to write – in his journal (i.e., the text of the novel itself) on the previous day: "Je n'ai pas l'habitude de me raconter ce qui m'arrive, alors je ne retrouve pas bien la succession des événements, je ne distingue pas ce qui est important... j'ai relu ce que j'écrivais au café Mably et j'ai eu honte..."⁴ On the following Thursday, Roquentin rejects his hypotheses about Rollebon: "Lents, paresseux, maussades, les faits s'accommodent à la rigueur de l'ordre que je veux leur donner; mais il leur reste extérieur. J'ai l'impression de faire un travail de pure imagination."⁵ That is, journals and historical biographies do not merely embody a natural chronological directionality whose recon-

³ In Serge Doubrovsky's incisively Freudian reading of *La Nausée*, "*l'irruption fantasmée du féminin au cœur du logos masculin*" disrupts the classic Sartrean scheme in which "le langage se dépasse vers la référence, comme la conscience se transcende vers le monde." The failure of Roquentin's attempts to write are therefore inscribed in the logic of their genesis. Serge Doubrovsky, "Phallotexte et gynotexte dans *La Nausée*: 'Feuillet sans date'," *Sartre et la mise en signe*, eds. Michael Issacharoff and Jean-Claude Vilquin (Paris: Klincksieck, 1982): 48-49 and 44.

⁴ Jean-Paul Sartre, *Œuvres romanesques* (Paris: Gallimard, 1981): 15.

⁵ Sartre, *Œuvres romanesques*: 19.

struction is synonymous with understanding the meaning of the events in an individual's life. Rather, the writer imposes this temporal order and its corresponding meaning from the "exterior." In the *Critique de la Raison dialectique*, the "internal" co-relation between (temporal) directionality and meaning is expressed through the dual valence of the term *sens*.⁶ However, in *La Nausée*, this problem offers itself only negatively, through Roquentin's loss of belief in what Sartre discusses elsewhere under the rubric of retrospective illusion.⁷

The case of Roquentin's failed historical biography prefigures (and serves as a propaedeutic to) the theoretical concerns reflected in Sartre's concept of retrospective illusion. Overwhelmed by a nauseating awareness of the ontological primacy of the present, Roquentin finds himself unable to articulate temporal succession out of historical traces. "Je jetai un regard anxieux autour de moi: du présent, rien d'autre que du présent... La vraie nature du présent se dévoilait: il était ce qui existe, et tout ce qui n'était pas présent n'existait pas. Le passé n'existait pas. Pas du tout. Ni dans les choses ni même dans ma pensée... M. de Rollebon était retourné à son néant."⁸ In an inversion of the Proustian miracle of involuntary memory, the present is an insuperable obstacle to the recuperation of the past. History and biography are at odds within Roquentin's enterprise; linear temporal progress and the narrative it engenders cannot overcome the contradiction involved in writing about the life of a dead person.⁹ Because it appears to be independent of any temporal causality or historical necessity – in short, of any meaningful relation to history – the present obliterates the past. For Sartre, ontology (and more specifically, lived experience) takes precedence over epistemology. In this light, historiography poses a particularly thorny problem. The historian is involved in an impossible attempt to wrest knowledge from ontological oblivion. Since the epistemic value of the historical documents Roquentin possesses lies within a dissolved ontological sector (Rolle-

⁶ That is, "the meaning / direction (*sens*) of history." Thomas R. Flynn, *Sartre, Foucault, and Historical Reason* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997): 120.

⁷ According to Vincent de Coorebyter, the source of Roquentin's loss of historiographical faith lies in the "instantanéisme" of the theory of pure reflection as it is articulated in the *Transcendance de l'Ego*, which undermines a synthetic conception of duration. See Vincent de Coorebyter, *Sartre face à la phénoménologie* (Bruxelles: Ousia, 2000): 420, 454-455.

⁸ Sartre, *Œuvres romanesques*: 114-115.

⁹ Juliette Simont reads this moment – the failure of (historical) writing – as a version of "la négation totalitaire," the "terrible puissance d'indétermination où se diluent les déterminations ustensiles." "Le néant et l'être. Sartre / Heidegger: deux stratégies." *La Naissance du phénomène Sartre* (Paris: Seuil, 2001): 163, 179.

bon's life), we have arrived at the terminus of the possibility for the sign to find its referent (or in Sartrean terms, for signification to transcend itself towards *sens*, meaning), and the written historical document – whether Rollebon's letters or Roquentin's book – collapses into the purely material traces of ink on paper.

Roquentin's book is therefore a failed attempt to summon the dead back to life. Rollebon functions as a substitute for Roquentin ("Je ne m'apercevais plus que j'existais, je n'existais plus en moi, mais en lui"¹⁰) that allows the determinate character of the past and of the dead to take the place of the contingency of living. Disillusionment with the irrational premise that Rollebon can be resuscitated provokes sardonic disphoria: "je ferais mieux de m'adresser tout de suite aux tables tournantes."¹¹ So – and this is a preliminary characterization – the retrospective illusion at issue in *La Nausée* is the artificially reified perspective the living have on the dead and the deforming effect this perspective has on other regions of experience.

¹⁰ Sartre, *Œuvres romanesques*: 117.

¹¹ Sartre, *Œuvres romanesques*: 116. In *Les Mots* (Paris: Gallimard, 1995): 123, psychic seances signal the "asphyxia" of the European bourgeoisie "En ce temps, la France mourait d'asphyxie: c'est ce qu'on appela 'douceur de vivre.' Faute d'ennemis visibles, la bourgeoisie prenait plaisir à s'effrayer de son ombre; elle troquait son ennui contre une inquiétude dirigée. On parlait de spiritisme, d'ectoplasmes; rue Le Goff, au numéro 2, face à notre immeuble, on faisait tourner les tables." In one case, the reference to communicating with the dead signals Roquentin's failure to write history, and in the other, the bourgeoisie's failure to rationally understand its role in history. As we shall see, the failure of the individual and of the bourgeoisie as a whole are linked because the history of the individual-as-consciousness and the history of supra-personal social groups are often structurally interchangeable in Sartre's work. In *Brouillons de soi* (Paris: Seuil, 1998): 207, Philippe Lejeune reproduces an early variant of the passage cited above: "En ce temps, la France mourait d'asphyxie: j'étais l'enfant sage d'un siècle bien pensant. Heureusement le siècle avait des fissures; il allait bientôt craquer. Et l'enfant était lézardé." According to Lejeune, the reference to the "enfant lézardé" disappeared when Sartre imposed a narrative order on the biography that rendered it unnecessary; the conflation of "l'enfant" and "le siècle" was displaced. For Roquentin, resuscitation implies a retrospective illusion, but according to Lejeune, so do the formal exigencies of biographical narrative: "La recherche de la constante est une des constantes de la recherche autobiographique. L'illusion rétrospective n'est pas un poison instillé aux enfants par de mauvais livres, comme Sartre le dit dans *Les Mots*, ni une forme imposée de l'extérieur à la vie par le récit, comme il le dit dans *La Nausée*, mais une nécessité vitale de ce que Ricoeur appelle 'l'identité narrative.'" (Lejeune: 183.) The retrospective illusion functions both as a diagnosis of failed writing and as the sine qua non of successful writing.

Retrospective illusion as biographical illusion

Meanwhile, in *Les Mots*, the retrospective illusion comes from the anticipatory perspective of a living person on his / her own death. The young Sartre – Poulou – feels he is living what will later become the biography of a great (dead) writer.¹² Every moment of Poulou's life is endowed with a still-abstract significance that will only be fully understood by future generations. So Poulou's perspective on his own death is actually the (imagined) perspective of others living in the future, which makes a retrospective illusion out of what would otherwise remain a prospective illusion. The intertwining of prospection and retrospection is the idiosyncratic product of Poulou's initiation to bourgeois culture. He imagines himself preserved for posterity, alongside Rousseau and Bach, as one of the subjects of a volume in his grandfather's library called *L'Enfance des hommes illustres*.

[J]e me retrouvais de l'autre côté de la page, *dans le livre*: l'enfance de Jean-Paul ressemblait à celles de Jean-Jacques et de Jean-Sébastien et rien ne lui arrivait qui ne fût largement prémonitoire... Moi, j'étais vu, de la mort à la naissance, par ces enfants futurs que je n'imaginai pas et je n'arrêtais pas de leur envoyer des messages indéchiffrables pour moi. Je frissonais, transi par ma mort, sens véritable de tous mes gestes, dépossédé de moi-même, j'essayais de retraverser la page en sens inverse et de me retrouver du côté des lecteurs, je levais la tête, je demandais secours à la lumière; or *cela aussi*, c'était un message; cette inquiétude soudaine, ce doute, ce mouvement des yeux et du cou, comment les interpréterait-on, en 2013, quand on aurait les deux clés qui devaient m'ouvrir, l'œuvre et le trépas? Je ne pus sortir du livre: j'en avais depuis longtemps terminé la lecture mais j'en restais un personnage.¹³

Reading about the childhood of long-dead geniuses inspires the retrospective illusion that their future accomplishments are already inscribed in their earliest ex-

¹² Alan Buisine argues that this arrangement is typical of Sartre's association of literature with death: "...[S]'il est vrai qu'une bibliothèque est un cimetière, il faut en conclure que les écrivains possèdent cette terrible particularité d'être morts de leur vivant... il n'est de littérature sartrienne qu'essentiellement testamentaire." In adopting the perspective of death to write his biographies, including his own, Sartre conflates "scriptural" with "sépulcral." Alain Buisine, "Les Mots et les morts," *Lectures de Sartre*, ed. Claude Burgelin (Lyon: Presses Universitaires de Lyon, 1986): 19, 24.

¹³ Sartre, *Les Mots*: 166-167.

periences; this, in turn, invites the moment of identification in which Poulou sees himself as the (future) subject of such illusory retrospection.

According to *Les Mots*, the retrospective illusion is a supra-personal phenomenon that has its roots in bourgeois culture rather than in the personal idiosyncracies of Poulou (or of any given Roquentin) as an individual. The feedback loop of reciprocity exemplified by Poulou's identification with history's dead geniuses is not only ingrained in the constitution of individual consciousness as it is presented in *L'Être et le néant*,¹⁴ it is also characteristic of how the bourgeoisie conceptualizes the historical past. Poulou looks back on the characters who populate history and imagines himself becoming an historical figure seen by future generations; similarly, the bourgeoisie interprets historical actors as characters whose lives were merely premonitions of the exemplary status accorded them postmortem. The bourgeoisie then construes its own historical role as the progressive embodiment of the same type of (ideal) exemplarity.

The retrospective illusion involves an oscillation between the prospection of the individual and the retrospection of the group. Roquentin's abandonment of historical biography in favor of journal-writing (and / or fiction) corresponds to the shift from one polar end of the retrospective illusion to the other. The oscillation between the collective (history) and the individual (the personal journal and its twin, the novel) is accompanied by a symmetrical shift in Roquentin's illusion: retrospection becomes prospection. That is, Roquentin's decision to abandon history-writing in favor of fiction is motivated by a prospective illusion similar to Poulou's: "Un livre. Un roman. Et il y aurait des gens qui liraient ce roman et qui diraient: 'C'est Antoine Roquentin qui l'a écrit, c'était un type roux qui traînait dans les cafés,' et ils penseraient à ma vie... comme à quelque chose de précieux et d'à moitié légendaire."¹⁵ In *Les Mots*, the retrospective illusion originates within the collective (bourgeois) institution of posthumous fame and leads (through identification with

¹⁴ "Les consciences sont directement portées les unes sur les autres dans une imbrication réciproque de leur être." Jean-Paul Sartre, *L'Être et le néant* (Paris: Gallimard, 1999): 275. The discussion of the body in *L'Être et le néant*, particularly the section of "La troisième dimension ontologique du corps" on the integral role of the other in the constitution of the self ("J'existe pour moi comme connu pour autrui à titre de corps") defuses the monism of Husserlian phenomenology and is a point of affinity between Sartre and Lacan; according to Coorebyter, "la dissociation lacanienne entre le moi spéculaire et le je symbolique, qui libère le sujet psychanalytique de toute identité préconstituée, constituante ou même accessible, fait à ce point écho à *La transcendance de l'Ego* et *L'être et le néant* qu'elle n'aurait pas été possible ou reçue avec la même faveur sans la percée sartrienne" (458).

¹⁵ Sartre, *Œuvres romanesques*: 210.

history's winners) to prospective illusion (fiction writing). In *La Nausée* the same structure prevails, with one notable exception: the retrospective illusion originates in the collective (bourgeois) practice of historical writing and leads (through *failed* identification with Rollebon) to prospective illusion (fiction-writing).

Les Mots portrays Poulou's experiences, on a sardonic mode, as exemplary of the bourgeois culture of the Third Republic.¹⁶ One of the problems at stake in the oscillating structure of retrospective illusion is how, or whether, a given individual relates to history. The retrospective illusion is partially successful at mediating the interface between individual and history because it lends a premise to such a relation: Poulou identifies with Rousseau and Bach. However, the retrospective illusion provides an impoverished concept of how the individual is remembered in history. That is, the subjectivity of the historical actor is masked beneath the retroactive ascription of value. To the extent that *Les Mots* represents Sartre's farewell to literature, the polemical force of the book is aimed at the prospective illusion involved in fiction-writing. But Sartre's discussion of his own (prospective) retrospective illusion is accompanied by a wider critique of the deforming effects of retrospective illusion on historical memory.

[J]e choisis pour avenir un passé de grand mort et j'essayai de vivre à l'envers... Ce n'est pas entièrement ma faute: mon grand-père m'avait élevé dans l'illusion rétrospective... ce mirage-là naît spontanément de la culture. Quand les témoins ont disparu, le décès d'un grand homme cesse à jamais d'être un coup de foudre, le temps en fait un trait de caractère. Un vieux défunt est mort par constitution, il l'est au baptême ni plus ni moins qu'à l'extrême-onction, sa vie nous appartient, nous y entrons par un bout, par l'autre, par le milieu, nous en descendons, nous en remontons le cours à volonté; c'est que l'ordre chronologique a sauté; impossible de le restituer: ce personnage ne court plus aucun risque et n'attend même plus que les chatouillements de sa narine aboutissent à la sternutation. Son existence offre les apparences d'un

¹⁶ In 1972, Sartre diagnosed his retrospective illusion as a bourgeois neurosis. It was this realization that led him to begin writing *Les Mots* in 1953: "...j'ai constaté que j'avais vécu dans une véritable névrose... La névrose était au fond que... je considérais que rien n'était plus beau ni supérieur au fait d'écrire, qu'écrire c'était créer des œuvres qui devaient rester et que la vie d'un écrivain devait se comprendre à partir de son écriture. A ce moment-là, en 53, j'ai compris que c'était une vue absolument bourgeoise..." *Sartre*, texte intégral du film d'A. Astruc et M. Contat (Paris: Gallimard, 1977): 111; partially reprinted in Claude Burgelin, *Les Mots de Jean-Paul Sartre* (Paris: Gallimard, 1994): 179.

déroulement mais, dès qu'on veut lui rendre un peu de vie, elle retombe dans la simultanéité. Vous aurez beau vous mettre à la place du disparu, feindre de partager ses passions, ses ignorances, ses préjugés, ressusciter des résistances abolies, un soupçon d'impatience ou d'appréhension, vous ne pourrez vous défendre d'apprécier sa conduite à la lumière de résultats qui n'étaient pas prévisibles et de renseignements qu'il ne possédait pas, ni de donner une solennité particulière à des événements dont les effets plus tard l'ont marqué mais qu'il a vécus négligemment. Voilà le mirage: l'avenir plus réel que le présent.¹⁷

The retrospective illusion privileges a future unknown to the historical actor, although it is (now) part of the historical past. In this sense, retrospection is a form of retroactivity. The explanatory power of causal relationships is stretched backwards from the "future" – actually a point in history – to cover the all the events and experiences of an individual's life, and "son histoire devient une manière d'essence circulaire qui se résume en chacun de ses moments."¹⁸ We have in a sense returned to the structure of Roquentin's retrospective illusion – the reified perspective the living have on the dead. However, the transposition of past and past-future along retroactive lines of causal force in *Les Mots* offers a more nuanced idea of the (subjective as well as objective) structure of the retrospective illusion than the failure of Roquentin's historical-biographical project initially suggested.

Interestingly, the retroactivity at work in the retrospective illusion in *Les Mots* is also present in the treatment of "adventure" in *La Nausée*. In the "Carnet Dupuis," Sartre notes: "Définition de l'aventure: sentiment d'une liaison fatale du passé au présent et à l'avenir impliquant connaissance simultanée des trois et de leur liaison... Mais j'ai comme l'idée en tête qu'il y a une impossibilité métaphysique à l'aventure d'exister."¹⁹ The evolution that occurs between *La Nausée* and *Les Mots*, then, is the following: the temporal problematics of "adventure" are brought to bear on how the dead are remembered, complicating the relationship between history and retrospective illusions. As Sartre wrote in his *War Diaries*: "j'aurais voulu que chaque événement me survînt comme dans une biographie, c'est-à-dire comme lorsqu'on connaît déjà la fin de l'histoire. C'est cette déception que j'ai exprimée à propos de l'aventure dans *La Nausée*... J'ai été jusqu'aux moelles pénétré de ce que

¹⁷ Sartre, *Les Mots*: 162-163.

¹⁸ Sartre, *Les Mots*: 163.

¹⁹ Sartre, *Œuvres romanesques*: 1681.

j'appellerai l'illusion biographique, qui consiste à croire qu'une vie vécue peut ressembler à une vie racontée."²⁰ In *La Nausée*, however, the epistemological stakes are the opposite of those in *Les Mots*; the works of Rousseau and Bach are so well-known that it is impossible to avoid interpreting their lives in function of them, while the problem with Rollebon and Roquentin is that their lives seem to have no meaning. It is to this problem – the meaning of meaninglessness – that we will now turn in order to explain what Sartre calls "ce sens obscur qui demeure quand l'être a écrasé les vaincus de l'histoire."²¹

The losers of history: an inexplicable residue

As *La Nausée*'s ersatz citation from Germain Berger's *Mirabeau-Tonneau et ses amis* explains, Rollebon's life took a turn for the worse in 1820. At the ripe old age of seventy, Rollebon was at the height of his powers and newly married to a woman fifty-two years his junior. But then he was suddenly accused of treason and thrown in prison, where he died, still imprisoned, five years later. What can be made of this apparently gratuitous outcome? If the retrospective illusion in *Les Mots* is a more nuanced version of the "biographical illusion" in *La Nausée*, then the former can be transposed to interpret the latter; the problem Roquentin confronts is making the end justify the means. Rollebon's gratuitous death cannot be retroactively stretched backwards to cover the events of his life with the aura of causal necessity without engendering a contradiction between meaning and meaninglessness in which the difference between victory and defeat becomes, to put it in properly Sartrean terms, the difference between contingency and necessity. Viewed from the perspective of his gratuitous death, meaninglessness retroactively invades Rollebon's life. So in addition to representing the historical past running aground on the shoals of an ontologically insuperable present, Roquentin's attempt to construct history from a futile overabundance of "lettres, fragments de mémoires, rapports secrets, [et] archives de police"²² is also a stillborn expression of the semiotic void of defeat. As we shall see, the void of meaninglessness created by defeat is coextensive with the missing subjective experience of the historical actor. In the case of the loser, retrospective illusion simultaneously requires and masks the emptiness of defeat.

²⁰ Jean-Paul Sartre, *Les Carnets de la drôle de guerre: novembre 1939 - mars 1940* (Paris: Gallimard, 1983): 106; reprinted in Burgelin: 166.

²¹ Jean-Paul Sartre, *Saint Genet: Comédien et martyr* (Paris: Gallimard, 2001): 308.

²² Sartre, *Œuvres romanesques*: 18.

The image of a politically-motivated imprisonment that ends in death appears in *Saint Genet*, as well: "Captif, condamné à la détention perpétuelle, à la mort, le vaincu dépend du bon plaisir de son vainqueur... le prisonnier n'est plus qu'une chose qui rêve à l'homme."²³ The prisoner condemned to death embodies the antithesis of the genial illusions of *L'Enfance des hommes illustres*. The genius is history's winner and the condemned prisoner its loser. And while in the case of history's illustrious winners (Bach, Rousseau), the retrospective illusion serves to produce historical-biographical narrative which, however bad, weaves the warp of subjective experience into the woof of history, in the case of history's losers (the political prisoner who dies in captivity), the retrospective illusion means failing to understand the subjective experience of failure. The (subjective) story of history's loser cannot be told. That is, history's exemplary catastrophes ("[n]otre panthéon social abonde en catastrophes exemplaires"²⁴) are only exemplary because the intentions and goals of the historical actor are hidden behind retroactively assigned values. Yet the retroactive assignation of value simultaneously *requires* the historical actor's intentions because they define the conditions of possibility for catastrophe.

In *Saint Genet*, the problem of intentions displaces and complicates the distinction between history's winners and losers. More specifically, the question becomes how to speak of losers who really lose as opposed to those who seem to lose in order to win (*qui-perd-gagne*). The crucial issue is the difference between the truly committed ideologue, whose activities are entirely devoted to the success of a cause, and the esthete, who consciously intends to assimilate his / her subjectivity to an ideal for the benefit of (a real or figurative) posterity. Jean Genet's esthetic will-to-lose leads him to denounce his own crimes to the police and thereby to go to jail. The fact that Genet deliberately intends to get caught distinguishes him from someone imprisoned involuntarily, particularly because Genet's success as a writer precludes the prospect of what we have called the semiotic void of defeat. For Genet, wanting to lose effectively changes defeat into victory: "Il suffit de *vouloir* l'échec pour qu'il se change en réussite."²⁵ This brings into play the familiar Sartrean circuit of *qui-perd-gagne*: "Mais supposons que, là-dessus, je passe à l'absolu. Mon échec n'était cette bien douteuse victoire que par l'obstination que j'avais mise à le vouloir. Mais si j'oubliais que ma volonté ne fut qu'une pauvre ruse? Si je faisais de ce triomphe à

²³ Sartre, *Saint Genet*: 214.

²⁴ Sartre, *Saint Genet*: 216.

²⁵ Sartre, *Saint Genet*: 213.

la Pyrrhus un caractère *a priori* de toute défaite? Ne découvrirai-je pas alors une positivité secrète qui serait comme l'envers du négatif?"²⁶ If the only difference between victory and defeat is an operation of the will, every defeat can also be a secret victory (i.e., successful writing).

There follows the counter-example of an individual committed in a straightforward way to the success of a cause: "Par un combattant qui préférerait sa cause à tout et qui a tout fait pour vaincre, l'échec est vécu dans le désespoir."²⁷ The will-to-win encounters defeat as a suprapersonal outcome whose ontological primacy overshadows a mere operation of the will. The cause is more important than the individual who serves it, and therefore the question of motives is of minimal relevance. But despite its apparent irrelevance for the loser, the thwarted act of will is crucial to how future generations will see the experience of defeat. "Mais plus tard, pour la postérité, l'échec devient, selon le mot de Jaspers, un 'chiffre'. C'est que la cause perdue ne trouve plus de défenseurs; elle a cessé d'être actuelle; nous renvoyons dos à dos les adversaires, Barnave et Brissot, Danton et Robespierre. Et nous voyons bien, sans doute, que Barnave avait tort: il tentait vainement d'arrêter la machine qu'il avait mise en route. Mais que nous importe? Nous constatons simplement que cet homme avait de la grandeur et qu'il a su donner sa vie pour une valeur."²⁸ So history's failed project is immaterial to posterity; the objective political cause collapses into pure biography and is reduced to the character of an individual, or in other words, to another version of the retrospective illusion.

For the committed individual, the cause is an end in itself, and virtues are the means to successfully advance the cause; for posterity the cause is merely the means that allowed the expression of "les plus belles vertus."²⁹ Victory, meanwhile, produces no similar collapse of human effort into the biographical. Rather, victory inscribes itself into the facticity of being: "les faits qui nous entourent et que nous voulons changer sont de vieilles victoires pourries" and "l'ensemble des réussites humaines s'identifie à ce que Hegel nommait le cours du monde et que les marxistes appellent processus historique."³⁰ History knows the loser only as reified personal qualities, while winners are forever linked with the objective effects of their

²⁶ Sartre, *Saint Genet*: 213-214.

²⁷ Sartre, *Saint Genet*: 214.

²⁸ Sartre, *Saint Genet*: 214.

²⁹ Sartre, *Saint Genet*: 215.

³⁰ Sartre, *Saint Genet*: 215.

success. And while defeat and victory might be considered relative or subjective, the peculiar strength of their dichotomy is that defeat lies consistently on the side of subjectivity, while victory inscribes itself into the substance of the world. So if it is true that every defeat can be considered a victory, and every victory a defeat, this conceptual game of musical chairs is local to the individual winner / loser and has no effect on the course of history as such: "Pour le vainqueur aussi, la victoire rend l'homme impossible: puisqu'il a mis son essence dans son œuvre, sa vie retourne à la contingence, devient une languissante survie. La réussite comporte un échec secret."³¹ This secret defeat is subjective and intrapersonal, and is intertwined with the same problematics of historical recuperability as the case of the political prisoner who dies in captivity.

The curious relationship between defeat and historical recuperability is what brings us back to retrospective illusions and semiotic failure. In a passage that links retrospective illusions with the problematics of historical recuperability, Sartre contrasts the experience of the winner to that of the loser who dies in prison:

Tout au contraire, celui qui meurt vaincu et garde jalousement en lui son œuvre manquée se définit pour toujours par l'atroce évidence de ses derniers moments. S'il était résigné, s'il avait demandé sa grâce, s'il avait adopté les vues de son ennemi, alors il *n'y aurait plus que de l'être* et l'ordre des causes déciderait de l'ordre des idées. S'il meurt dans l'horreur, au contraire, quand tout est consommé; expliqué, quand il est démontré que l'enchaînement des causes ne comportait aucune autre issue et que rien ne pouvait se produire sinon précisément ce qui s'est produit, quelque chose demeure à nos yeux, qui empêche la synthèse de s'accomplir: la mort du vaincu. La société ne peut récupérer cette agonie subjective; elle ne peut même tenter d'y voir un petit mal nécessaire à l'avènement d'un plus grand Bien... Personne ne peut reprendre à son compte cette souffrance morte, personne ne peut persuader un disparu que, tout compte fait, il valait mieux qu'il souffrît. Ainsi cette mort qui, en un sens, n'est qu'un événement du monde, semble un regard fixe et plein de reproche qui nous contemple; par-delà l'être persiste l'affirmation du droit; par-delà tout objet apparaît une subjectivité non objectivable qui éclaire les faits de sa froide lumière. Hantée par les âmes de ses vaincus, la société triomphante ne se

³¹ Sartre, *Saint Genet*: 215.

fermera jamais: elle est trouée. La mort a sauvé les valeurs en manifestant avec éclat qu'elles sont irréductibles: cette irréductibilité demeure, à l'ordinaire, purement logique; elle ennuie. Par l'échec elle s'humanise et devient tragédie. Inversement, les valeurs sauvent la mort et la naissance même du vaincu: par l'effet bien connu de l'illusion rétrospective, la défaite terminale nous paraît être le sens et la fin suprême de cette vie perdue; on naît pour perdre, on se voue dès l'enfance à l'échec. Du coup, la mort est un achèvement: délivrée de son aspect accidentel, elle devient l'acte d'une subjectivité qui se résorbe dans la valeur qu'elle a posée.³²

Examples include a Communard executed by firing squad. But the question now becomes how, or even whether, history's losers can be recuperated: "Ainsi le vaincu s'arrache à la contingence originelle et devient *valeur-sujet*. Cette valeur-sujet, la société la récupère par un biais après quelques années de purgatoire et l'utilise à prouver qu'il y a dans l'être autre chose que l'être, un résidu inexplicable quand tout est expliqué. Mieux encore: l'échec devient l'essence de l'homme."³³ The negative valence of the terms *valeur* and *essence* in Sartre's technical lexicon indicate that this recuperation is highly problematic.

Can the losers of history see themselves through a retrospective illusion in which they become the impossible residue of an ideal for posterity? The committed ideologue is immune to such illusions because the question of what future historians will think is irrelevant to today's practical goals. On the other hand, the irrecuperable subjective experience of history's losers correlates to the subjective region where losing and winning intertwine; the loser who contemplates becoming a "residue" is attempting to mitigate defeat. As we shall see, irrecuperable intentions correspond to the limits of intentionality. In the play *Les Séquestrés d'Altona* (called *Loser Wins* in the 1960 English translation), this problem takes the form of Frantz's obsessive effort to transform his status as a loser of history into (an imaginary) posthumous vindication. As an officer in the German army during the Second World War, Frantz authorized the torture of Russian partisans. In order to justify these atrocious acts, Frantz must nurture the delusion that in years following the war, the Allies have been systematically annihilating Germany. Therefore Frantz isolates himself in a room and, with the help of his sister, records his thoughts on audio

³² Sartre, *Saint Genet*: 215-216.

³³ Sartre, *Saint Genet*: 216.

tape for the benefit of crabs who live in the 30th century. The crabs have an intense interest in history, and their technology allows them to know every detail about the historical past, yet Frantz claims they would be unable to understand the experience of human beings in the 20th century without his taped explanations. When his sister asks why his commentary is necessary if the crabs can "see" everything that happens in history, Frantz replies, "Ha! Mais ce sont des Crabes, Leni: ils ne comprennent rien."³⁴ In other words, the crabs represent the radically foreign viewpoint of future historians. Later in the same exchange, Leni tells Frantz, "Récuse leur tribunal, je t'en prie, c'est ta seule faiblesse. Dis-leur: 'Vous n'êtes pas mes juges!' Et tu n'auras plus personne à craindre. Ni dans ce monde, ni dans l'autre."³⁵ Frantz's attempt to communicate with the crabs is opposed to Leni's suggestion that he should ignore them in the same way the esthete is opposed to the committed ideologue in *Saint Genet*. So the retrospective illusion is the binary opposite of the (authentic) loser of history.

Recuperating the loser: the difference between history and fiction

The opposition between retrospective illusion and the (authentic) loser of history is aligned with many of the binary distinctions that structure Sartre's *Critique de la Raison dialectique*. In *Questions de méthode*, the dialectical relationship between "le vécu en tant que tel" and "la réalité du monde"³⁶ reproduces the clash between subjectivity and objectivity in the esthete / ideologue opposition. The same binary relationship pertains between phenomenology and historical dialectic in the *Critique* (Sartre warns against letting "la dialectique située" slip into "un idéalisme phénoménologique"³⁷). Meanwhile, the "residue" of history's losers (the thing within being that is not being) hovers between lived experience and the real world. The residue of the losers of history marks an elusive middle ground between phenomenology and historical dialectic: it is a limit-case for the philosophy of consciousness (because subjective intentions disappear, along with the material traces they would

³⁴ Jean-Paul Sartre, *Les Séquestrés d'Altona* (Paris: Gallimard, 1960): 87.

³⁵ *Les Séquestrés d'Altona*: 89.

³⁶ Jean-Paul Sartre, *Critique de la Raison dialectique* (Paris: Gallimard, 1960): I, 80.

³⁷ *Critique de la Raison dialectique*, II: 312. This particular binarism brings up the problem of the receding origin (genesis) of dialectic that Derrida pursued, in 1954, within Husserlian phenomenology itself. See Jacques Derrida, *Le Problème de la g n se dans la philosophie de Husserl* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1990): 5-9.

leave) and it shadows the historical-dialectical project in the form of a paradox. An authentic loser can harbor no illusions, but by fulfilling this qualification, the authentic loser becomes the "residue" propagating retrospective illusions. Losers are remembered as representatives of values in the form of ideal personal qualities. But only straightforward ideologues can become such a value-subject or residue. The link between the losers of history and retrospective illusions is a missing or erased subjectivity; in *Saint Genet* this means that an historical actor who harbors illusions (like Frantz) does not qualify as a residue (i.e., as the stuff of retrospective illusions for posterity).

The twin voluntaristic and phenomenological senses of the word "intention" recapitulate much of what is at stake in this paradox within Sartre's system, suggesting that it lies on top of a faultline between phenomenological description and historical dialectic. In *Critique de la Raison dialectique*, the word "intention" is used largely in the voluntaristic (as opposed to the phenomenological) vein, as in the 'intentions' of historical actors.³⁸ Whether or not we consider history to be the result of such 'intentions' will dictate our choice of method: in the affirmative case, the appropriate method will be "compréhension" (Verstehen), and in the negative case, the method will be "intellection," or an effort to recuperate the lost intention by integrating it – as an absence – into the totalizing process of an historical dialectic. "Je nomme donc *intellection* toutes les évidences temporalisantes et dialectiques en tant qu'elles doivent pouvoir totaliser *toutes* les réalités pratiques et je réserve le nom de *compréhension* à la saisie totalisante de chaque *praxis* en tant que celle-ci est intentionnellement produite par son ou par ses auteurs."³⁹ That is, *compréhension* means understanding the intentions of historical actors.

How should we reconcile Sartre's derision of interpreting means by ends in *Les Mots* with the methodological imperatives of *Critique de la Raison dialectique*, where

³⁸ In Sartre's early phenomenological works, the word "intentional" is used in the sense of adherence of consciousness to its objects, i.e. consciousness is consciousness of... (see "Une Idée fondamentale de la phénoménologie de Husserl: l'intentionnalité," *Situations I* (Paris: Gallimard, 1947): 29-32). But by the time of *Saint Genet* the problem of "volonté de volonté" is synonymous with "l'intention de mal faire," so in other words, intention is will; in *Critique de la raison dialectique* "intention" takes on the sense of using certain means (words, tools) to obtain a certain end. See also the discussion of intention in *L'Être et le néant*: 496 and 522-523.

³⁹ Sartre, *Critique de la Raison dialectique*: I, 190.

retrospection is necessary to historical meaning?⁴⁰ This problem is reminiscent (if only partially) of the arrangement that makes the sincerity of the historical loser's intention the prerequisite for posterity's retrospective illusion. According to the *Critique de la Raison dialectique*, the historian can understand the practical limits impinging upon the actions and choices of an historical actor precisely by virtue of being situated at a later point in history, with the increased range of knowledge this affords. "Du point de vue situé de l'historien... il reste souvent manifeste que les responsables d'une action '*pouvaient*' l'entreprendre sur des bases un peu différentes."⁴¹ Whether this point of view represents understanding or retrospective illusion depends on Sartre's distinction between exterior and interior.⁴² In Sartre's terms, understanding (and therefore intention) is based on interior relations: "comprendre qu'un dirigeant prenne une certaine décision, alors que la situation objective en proposait une autre, sans doute meilleure, c'est intérioriser dans le projet compréhensif le fait que l'absence de certains instruments intellectuels... devait limiter de l'intérieur l'étendue et la richesse des options."⁴³ Meanwhile, the description of relations of causal necessity among impersonal historical forces – the explanatory model employed by what Sartre variously calls analytical Reason, historical positivism, Lamarckism, or objective idealism – is solely exterior and would, at best, result in retrospective illusion. So, to recapitulate the point, understanding is based on interior relations, and these in turn are equivalent to the intentions of historical actors *plus* the deviation they undergo through time.⁴⁴ So what the historian must under-

⁴⁰ To resolve this contradiction one might refer to the totalizing movement of the dialectical process described in the *Critique*. As Flynn notes, the "experience of dialectical necessity is ongoing and *retrospective*, that is, confers a new meaning on the action underway by referring to the results, especially those counter to the agent's intention but which the agent helped bring about by doing what he intended." Flynn: 134. But the difference between "retrospective" dialectical totalization and "retrospective illusion" eludes us when speaking of history's losers. The subjective intentions of the loser are *incomprehensible yet necessary* in either case.

⁴¹ *Critique de la Raison dialectique*: II, 93.

⁴² Sartre's distinction between interior and exterior is inconsistent, leading (among other things) to the breakdown of the difference between "sens" and "signification," since the former is "interior" and the latter "exterior." "Unfortunately, Sartre does not scrupulously respect his own distinction between meaning (sens) and signification... But when he is speaking strictly, he will link signification with the exterior and conceptual and *sens* with the interior and notional." Flynn: I, 163.

⁴³ *Critique de la Raison dialectique*: II, 93.

⁴⁴ Understanding therefore means taking account of the "différentiel" ("l'écart séparant les exigences subjectives de la réalisation"), which Sartre also calls "la déviation de la praxis." *Critique de la Raison dialectique*: II, 236.

stand is the partial failure (or total defeat?) of a given intention, since the conditions of historical action always produce a "résultat qui sera, au pis, un échec terminal et au mieux une déviation"⁴⁵ relative to that intention.

The prisoner condemned to death in *La Nausée* and *Saint Genet* are terminal defeats *par excellence*. As such, they form a limit for the historian's attempt to understand interior relations because defeat means intentions are masked by exterior relations. In the *Critique*, Sartre compares the experience of the condemned political prisoner to that of an explorer lost in the desert.

A travers l'impitoyable nécessité de son agonie, un voyageur égaré dans le désert fait l'expérience de la non-humanité de l'Univers et, par là, la limite transcendante de l'aventure humaine se manifeste à lui dans l'horreur comme son impossibilité de vivre et comme l'impossibilité d'être homme. Mais un insurgé, arrêté par des hommes, condamné, gardé à vue par des hommes et qui sait que d'autres hommes le mettront à mort, ne saisit pas autrement, à travers l'échec de sa tentative et l'inévitable 'liquidation physique' qui la suivra, l'impossibilité de vivre et d'être homme pour lui et ceux qu'il voulait délivrer. Ce qui se vit ici et qui s'éprouve, en effet, comme l'être-en-soi de l'Histoire, ce n'est pas, bien sûr, l'ensemble de fautes et de malchance qui ont conduit la révolte au désastre: c'est que, à travers cet ensemble d'erreurs et de contre-finalités, le résultat vienne inflexiblement à l'agent comme définitive impossibilité d'agir historiquement et de dépasser sa défaite... Si la lutte continue sans lui, il peut dépasser cette expérience en *utilisant* sa mort, en en faisant un *acte* exemplaire; mais dans la mesure même où il s'en sert, où ses camarades au-dehors peuvent profiter de l'indignation populaire, c'est que le *sens profond de l'événement* est vécu par les masses elles-mêmes comme indépassable et scandaleuse cassure interne de l'Histoire, comme brusque et terrifiante apparition de l'aventure humaine comme conditionnée en extériorité. Ainsi, à travers l'échec et la mort, l'être-en-soi de l'Histoire, comme irrémédiable facticité des organismes humains, dévoile son omniprésence (*cette* mort infecte tout): c'est l'aventure humaine en tant que son statut ontologique lui vient *aussi* du monde extérieur.⁴⁶

⁴⁵ *Critique de la Raison dialectique*: II, 236.

⁴⁶ *Critique de la Raison dialectique*: II, 324-325.

Once again, the subjective experience of the loser of history is recuperable only if defeat is mitigated. If the defeat is total, the *sens* of history obliterates the loser's subjectivity. The loser's death becomes an insuperable obstacle to the epistemological project of the historian (as it was for Roquentin's effort to write Rollebon's biography) because death erases interior relations: "nous ne savons *rien* de la mort... Nous ne la *comprenons* pas, non pas parce qu'elle serait un mystère dépassant la Raison humaine mais simplement parce que des facteurs en extériorité réalisent en un certain cas la possibilité rationnelle (au sens positiviste) mais non-compréhensible que la compréhension soit pour toujours impossible."⁴⁷ For this reason the loser of history marks the limit of the *sens* of history (and therefore of knowledge). Sartre designates the limit of the *sens* of history with a term – "la totalisation d'enveloppement" (the exterior limit of history's interior and the interior limit of its exterior⁴⁸) – that constitutes the highest macros cosmic order of the dialectical system of the *Critique*. The interruption of *sens* is identical, however, whether we are talking about the macros cosmic "totalisation d'enveloppement" or the microcosmic subjectivity of history's loser: interior relations terminate. "[N]ous l'avons vu, la défaite et la mort... nous font réaliser l'expérience absolue mais vide de l'être-transcendant comme limite d'extériorité et comme annulation de toute compréhension"⁴⁹ The historical actor's violent death renders comprehension impossible, since interior relations are hidden beneath the exterior. So it seems that from the historian's perspective, retrospective illusions are all that remain of the loser of history.

However, this result is not solely attributable to irrecuperable intentions. Rather, since the dialectical movement of history in the *Critique* is driven by the transposition to social relations of the intentional model of consciousness adapted from Husserl⁵⁰ (consciousness is consciousness *of*...), the disappearance of the loser of history lies on the side of "la réalité du monde" (materiality) as well as on the side of "le vécu en tant que tel" (subjectivity). As Sartre notes in *Questions de méthode*, the "vérité objective du subjectif objectivé doit être considérée comme la seule vérité du subjectif... L'action ne peut se juger sur l'intention."⁵¹ The co-relation between consciousness and its object (in the language of the *Critique*, between praxis and the

⁴⁷ *Critique de la Raison dialectique*: II, 325.

⁴⁸ *Critique de la Raison dialectique*: II, 328.

⁴⁹ *Critique de la Raison dialectique*: II, 341.

⁵⁰ "Sartre grants society the ontological status of 'objects as meant' (*noemata*) in Husserlian phenomenology." Flynn: I, 62.

⁵¹ *Critique de la Raison dialectique*: I, 80.

practico-inert) implies that history's missing subjectivity can be restored if its objective correlate can be found. The case of "les insurgés de Cronstadt"⁵² provides such an example: according to Sartre, their defeat was the inevitable "jugement de l'Histoire," but by a "libre déchiffrement" of the revolt from the insurgents' point of view, "l'historien délivre l'histoire future."⁵³ That is, the historian can see that historical actors did not entirely understand the meaning of their own acts. The historian therefore confers this meaning *retroactively*. By producing a new (retroactive-proactive) *sens*, the historian engenders a new totalization that recuperates an intention historical actors did not even know they had.

So to restate the question: what separates the methodological imperatives of the *Critique* from retrospective illusion? The counterfactual example of an extraterrestrial life-form (a *leitmotiv* throughout the *Critique*) provides a partial answer. Martians see the course of human history from the outside, while humans can only see it from the interior: "l'être-en-soi de la praxis processus est le fondement de toute objectivité possible de notre histoire pour un témoin extérieur à l'espèce humaine. Reste que l'homme, en tout état de cause, *ne peut pas* se faire ce témoin."⁵⁴ The actions that constitute human history (*la praxis-processus*) are made in ignorance of this exterior perspective, which is itself a representation of the limits of human knowledge: "Pour le Martien des science-fictions (qu'il veuille conquérir ou pacifier la Terre), notre ignorance – soit qu'elle l'aide à asservir les hommes, soit qu'elle les empêche de le comprendre – deviendra *une détermination de chacun de nous par la culture de Mars...*"⁵⁵ So while history can only be made from the inside, with the entire universe as its unknowable exterior limit, the Martians, whose technology has surpassed ours by "trois siècles,"⁵⁶ produce a different "external limit of the interior" of human history, because they know more about the conditions of human historical action (and the *déviations* they will produce) than humans do. We might say that Martians produce *sens* where none existed before. But to be more precise, the *sens* Martians would produce within human history (by expanding the limit of its interior) remains completely virtual (illusory) until the moment when Martians, by attacking Earth (or what have you), enter into and become part of human his-

⁵² In March 1921, an insurrection at one of Russia's main naval bases, Kronstadt, was defeated by the Bolshevik government.

⁵³ *Critique de la Raison dialectique*: I, 81.

⁵⁴ *Critique de la Raison dialectique*: II, 333.

⁵⁵ *Critique de la Raison dialectique*: II, 332.

⁵⁶ *Critique de la Raison dialectique*: II, 331.

tory. And the case of the Martian is fully transposable to the case of the historian living in the future, with the exception that the historian's perspective always arises *within* human history. That is, the historian is in the same position as the Martian in all respects but one: remaining exterior to human history is impossible. The historian-as-Martian *must* attack; remaining "exterior" is an illusion.

Transposed to the Martian example, the difference between understanding history's losers and indulging in retrospective illusions is analogous to the difference between attacking Earth or quietly observing humankind from space. This analogy reposes on the distinction that ordinarily divides exterior from interior and illusion from understanding. But a Martian invasion represents an attack against this very distinction: the temporal progress of history means that *sens* moves forward by advancing the limit of what Sartre terms "la totalisation d'enveloppement," (which, as we noted above, is the exterior limit of the interior of human history), but the *sens* the Martian creates moves from the exterior into the interior, disrupting the limit of history's meaning / progress by creating a new limit. Both the Martian attack and the retrospective illusions of Poulou and Frantz engender an new (imaginary) exterior limit of history's *sens*; the Martian attack produces the same effect as a posthumous reading public or super-intelligent crabs. Meanwhile, *sens* normally progresses from the present toward the future, but the historian who recuperates the meaning of the Kronstadt insurrection injects *sens* from the present (relative to the historical event, from a point in the future) backwards *into* the past. By doing so, the historian effectively alters the boundary between exterior and interior, just as the Martian does. The directionality of meaning is reversed, arriving backwards and from the "exterior," both in the case of the loser of history (the historian-as-attacking-Martian) and in the case of retrospective illusion (concerning the "winner" of history). The sole difference is that in the case of the historian-as-Martian, *sens* is internalized through integration in the future-oriented movement of human history. In other words, the Martians who attack Earth will necessarily *win*.

In the *Critique de la Raison dialectique*, the loser is "interiorized" by the winner. For example, "Dans certains pays, le Parti communiste ou tel autre parti autoritaire et centralisé de gauche a fait disparaître les formations d'extrême-gauche (gauchistes) et les partis démocratiques (social-démocratie, etc.) qui constituaient la droite de la gauche... l'adversaire-allié incarnait leurs appréhensions devant la rapidité – par exemple – de la collectivisation dans les campagnes; quand il a disparu, cette

appréhension qui était la leur *comme autre* devient leur propre appréhension."⁵⁷ The meaning of a victory therefore depends on the intentions of the loser(s). "Tout revient à se demander si la victoire a toujours *un sens*,"⁵⁸ as Sartre puts it, but this meaning / direction depends upon incorporating or "digesting" the foreign internal enemy whose status as history's loser should, by definition, make their intentions irrecoverable.⁵⁹ That is, unless the "Martian attack" of future historians' intellection restores the meaning of the actions of history's losers by producing a new winner. For the losers of history, *compréhension* is impossible. On this point, Marxism (intellection) must supercede phenomenology (*compréhension*).

Thus, the attempt to recuperate the intentions of history's losers necessarily leads to the same fictive construction of subjectivity as retrospective illusion – for the following reasons. First, intellection is the only method to use; it excludes understanding because it is about objective moments in the historical process. Second, the intention of the ideologue (i.e., the historical actor) can be interpreted only in light of objective results (the success of cause). Yet, third, defeat means producing *no* objective results; only intentions "internalized" by the winner remain. So there is a contradiction between the injunction against retrospective illusion and the methodological imperative for interpretation in hindsight via intellection: *nothing(-ness)* distinguishes intellection from retrospective illusion in the case of history's losers. Applied to the winner, the retrospective illusion means interpreting "le vécu" in light of "la réalité," while the loser is consigned to ontological oblivion, transforming "le vécu" into (an imaginary) value or residue (in other words, nothing). This residue can subsequently become more than a mere value, however, for the politically committed historian or bellicose Martian of science-fiction novels. In which case, Roquentin's decision to abandon history in favor of fiction (retrospectively) takes on a new sense: where the *Critique* assigns the impossible task of recuperating history's losers to "intellection," Sartre's recourse to the rhetoric of (science-) fiction in his illustrations (re-)produces the emergence of literature from the *nothingness* of historical *failure*. In the structure of retrospective illusion, the historian is aligned with the Martian on one side of the retrospective / prospective dyads we have discussed: Roquentin / Rollebon; Poulou / Bach (or Rousseau); (imaginary) posterity /

⁵⁷ *Critique de la Raison dialectique*: II, 85-86.

⁵⁸ *Critique de la Raison dialectique*: II, 87.

⁵⁹ "... la liquidation du sous-groupe vaincu suit de peu sa *désincarnation*... avant les derniers assauts, il n'est déjà plus qu'un *corps étranger* au groupe..." *Critique de la Raison dialectique*: II, 91.

Poulou; posterity / the ideologue (Danton, Robespierre, Barnave, Brissot); super-intelligent crabs of the 30th century / Frantz; Martians / the totality of human history. The emergence of fiction at the point where history fails (or let us say: from the hermeneutics of failure) enacts the replacement of the human historian with a fictional counterpart (Roquentin becomes a writer, the historian becomes a Martian) at the same moment that the structural opposition between retrospective illusion and history's losers (i.e., posthumous reception and its impossibility) is erased by *the committed historian's methodological recourse to fiction*.