



**PETR DYTRT**

 <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-9563-6033>

Masaryk University, Faculty of Arts, Department of Romance Languages and Literatures

Arne Nováka 1, 602 00 Brno

e-mail: pdytrt@phil.muni.cz

## The Filiation Narrative in the Contemporary French Novel: Jean Rouaud and the Quest for the Absent Master

### Abstract

In this paper two of Rouaud's texts — *L'Invention de l'auteur* and *La Désincarnation* — are mainly being discussed. Our aim is to demonstrate that the story of filiation appears very symptomatic of a new historical situation at the beginning of the twenty-first century, which seems to be written without a “Master” both on the literary and spiritual levels.

Thus, there arises the need to accommodate the “ideologies of the end” that appear at the moment when the author enters the literary scene. By trying to establish an impossible dialogue with the Absent, Rouaud voluntarily becomes the archivist of the end of a certain world. We focus on the ways of establishing the link between the search of a father and the observation of the absence of the Father and an attempt to fill in this absence by searching other literary models.

## **An introduction**

During the last three decades, several subgenres of narrative prose have emerged in the French literary context and especially within the framework of the novel production which does not cease to produce new subgenres. Among these subgenres of the novel we note the appearance of filiation literature which established itself as a productive subgenre in the auto-biographical space, ranging from the referential to the imaginary. This new narrative category stands out because of its innovative potential: by narrating and commenting on their parents' lives, children (generally the authors) create an authentic portrait of their society. Through the author's personal vision of familiar micro-history, it is possible to develop a testimony of the macro-history, which means the most important events of a country's past. In this sense Filiation narrative focuses on the passing down of family heritage, thus, this kind of narration is closely linked to literature of memory, whose textual strategies will be analyzed in the novels by Jean Rouaud who is considered one of the emblematic authors of this type of fiction in the contemporary French literary context.

In a landmark article, *Filiations littéraires* Dominique Viart described in 1999 the emergence of a genre that he proposed to call filiation narrative (Viart 1999). Even if he reminds us that these narratives are written in the memory of genealogical gestures proposed by memorialists or family frescoes from Zola to Roger Martin du Gard, the critic proposes to read these narratives as symptoms of the time and as doors of entry to grasp the aesthetic traits of contemporary literature. Indeed, the contemporary moment, after moments of rupture with the past, revives with the past times, less in the concern to draw a nostalgia from it than in the desire to question our anxieties and to find the erased trace of it. This archaeology that contemporary literature carries out, through the family prism, is thus not a mythical account of the origins, which found an identity, but the place of questioning and concern. But this upstream return is accompanied, according to the critic, by an inventive exploration of the forms and languages of the past in an intertextuality milieu that binds together genealogical investigation and literary filiation.

The questions of family and filiation have been stirring up the human sciences for a little over a decade or two. The rapid evolution of social mores and practices, the questioning of models of conjugal life initiated since May 1968, the well-known experiences of community life and free unions and their progressive legalisation, the repeal of laws against

homosexuality, not to mention the medical and biological advances that allow artificial procreation and even cloning, have largely disturbed our understanding of these notions and of what they may or may not still cover. Strangely enough, however, literature has not yet taken up such questions: it is no less obsessed with family themes and issues, but it is along other lines, less linked to lifestyles and, in the case of contemporary literature, more attached to historical configurations.

But it is especially at the turn of the years 1975–1989 that this object of narration reappears in force. Writers and works that should be quoted in this place are for example of the *Miroir qui revient* [Mirror that returns] by Alain Robbe-Grillet or *L'Enfance* [Childhood] by Nathalie Sarraute, both authors of Nouveau Roman. At first, it was a return as if by default, with Perec who searches for the absent traces of his childhood and his parents in *W ou le souvenir d'enfance* [W or the memory of childhood], with Modiano who follows the improbable and confused meanders of his kinship (notably in *Livret de famille* [Family booklet]), with Serge Doubrovsky who mixes and untangles the impulsive links in *Fils* (the title plays on the double meaning of the word and can be translated as son or threads). On the other hand, a literary form appears at the beginning of the 80s and does not cease to develop, instead it diversifies whilst remaining faithful to its implicit program. Indeed, Dominique Viart (Viart 2011: 173) proposes to return to the notion that was proposed in 1996 (Viart 1999) to allow for the emergence of this new form, and which has since received the assent of critics, including journalists, and sometimes also of the writers themselves as “récit de filiation” (‘filiation narrative’). The notion is indeed now taken up in numerous works, notably those of Laurent Demanze, whose recent work *Encres orphelines* (2008) we would like to mention, and in those of Carine Trévisan (2002), which focus on the articulation of questions of filiation and transmission.

In this paper mainly two of Rouaud’s texts — *La Désincarnation* (2001) and *L’Invention de l’auteur* [The Invention of the Author, 2004] — are being discussed. Our aim is to demonstrate that the filiation narrative appears very symptomatic of a new historical situation at the beginning of the twenty-first century, which seems to be written without a “Master” both on the literary and spiritual levels. Thus, there arises the need to accommodate the “ideologies of the end” that appear at the moment when the author enters the literary scene. By trying to establish an impossible dialogue with the Absent, Rouaud voluntarily becomes the archivist of the end of a certain world. Indeed, we try to focus on the ways of establishing the link between the search of a father and the observation of the absence of the Father and an attempt to fill up this absence by searching other literary models.

### **In the name of the absent father: Jean Rouaud and the absence of a master**

Jean Rouaud’s novels are from the outset situated under the sign of mourning. One can say that the literary project of this author consists in a permanent search for any attachment that links him with the father figure. It would be useless to recall that Jean Rouaud’s father tragically disappeared the day after Christmas 1963, as the narrator of the novels of the first cycle symptomatically entitled *Le livre des morts* [The Book of the Dead] containing five novels underlines. Jean Rouaud systematically returns to each of the family personalities and to each of the crucial events that have left indelible traces in the author’s life. Among these personalities, it is primarily the father figure and his unexpected death that serve as the starting point for the narrative and thus for the quest for memory on both

a personal and a collective, i.e., national, level. This quest, which functions as a way of filling the void left by Joseph Rouaud in Jean Rouaud's life, represents an effective strategy for re-examining critical moments in family history and at the same time in national history because they have marked the majority of French families, but also European ones.

Haunted by the absence of the father (Father), Rouaud's writing, which attempts to re-establish the attachment to the father figure, proceeds by re-examining the notion of filiation to the point that the author affirms in *L'Invention de l'auteur* [The Author's Invention]: "to write is to reproduce in the name of the father ad infinitum."<sup>1</sup> This extreme statement shows to what extent the question of filiation is consubstantial to his novelistic creation and without which, at least for some critics, there would perhaps be no writer: to the invectives of these critics who "feared that apart from telling the story of this progenitor who died too soon, [Jean Rouaud] would not have much to say," the author answers: "Even if to say, to tell the truth, I have never had this pretension. But to write, yes."<sup>2</sup>

In this contribution we would like to approach two texts by Jean Rouaud: one, following the cycle of the "Books of the Dead", is eloquently entitled *L'Invention de l'auteur* [The Invention of the Author] and opens the new cycle of "La Déposition du roman" [The Deposition of the Novel], while the other, *La Désincarnation* [The Disembodiment], acts as a literary manifesto along with *Misère du roman* [Misery of the Novel]. We would like to show that the narrative of filiation appears to be very symptomatic of a new historical situation at the beginning of the twenty-first century, which seems to be written without a "master" on both the literary and spiritual levels. The postmodern era, freed from ideologies and, as a result, also from the personalities that convey them, seems to be driven, particularly at the literary level, by the search for historical ties, which obviously have a profound effect on writing. In this sense, Jean Rouaud represents a particular and yet quite exemplary specimen of the new trend towards historical and subsidiary affinities. His novels are a spiral journey which bypasses the nodal points of the author's life to the same extent as the history of his country in the manner of the bird evoked in the incipit of *L'Invention de l'auteur*, for indeed,

[...] each new novel published, apparently detached from the family saga, ends up revealing that it belongs to a kind of *continuum* that is anchored in the matrix novel and takes its author ever further — and inwardly deeper — into the heart of a reflection on his life as a writer and his relationship with his own creation, on the weight of childhood and filiation influencing his choices, his convictions and his battles.<sup>3</sup>

It is worth noting here that Jean Rouaud never separates fiction and reflection on writing. The particularity of Rouaud's novel consists precisely in putting into practice this conception of literature, which is not possible without a critical history of literature, both being in-

<sup>1</sup> "Écrire, c'est reproduire au nom du père à l'infini" (Rouaud 2004: 106). We translate into English.

<sup>2</sup> "Même si à dire, à dire vrai, je n'ai jamais eu cette prétention. Mais à écrire, oui" (Rouaud 2004: 37). We translate into English.

<sup>3</sup> "[C]haque nouveau roman publié, apparemment détaché de la saga familiale, finit par dévoiler son appartenance à une sorte de *continuum* qui s'ancre dans le roman matriciel et emporte son auteur toujours plus loin — et intérieurement plus profondément — dans le cœur d'une réflexion sur sa vie d'écrivain et ses rapports avec sa propre création, sur le poids de l'enfance et de la filiation infléchissant ses choix, ses convictions et ses batailles" (Freyermuth 2011: 8). Author's emphasis. We translate into English.

separable. It is therefore possible to find in this author's novels considerations on the notion of authorship, on the evolution of the novelistic genre, etc., but above all on his own scriptural gesture, which he submits to a critical re-examination while proposing clarifications, rectifications, or clarifications on this or that episode, character, or moment recounted in these novels. In this way, all his previous work is provided with a narrative and metanarrative commentary at the same time, because the author not only (re-)examines his past life in the company of the characters he writes about in his novels, but he also composes a history of the writing of these novels by looking for motives for this writing and re-explaining what was from the present point of view, that is to say, with the eyes of Jean Rouaud at the beginning of the 21st century.

However, let us return to this absence of the Master, which is not only limited to ideological debates of the last hour, nor to its parallel in contemporary French literature, which seems to have been orphaned by the father since the death of Sartre and Barthes in the early 1980s<sup>4</sup>. For our author, it is also intimately linked to a certain conception of language marked by the lessons of linguistics that have emerged over the past century, including that of Saussure: words do not refer to things and signs are arbitrary. By dissociating the letter from the thing, Rouaud's observation of loss is also perceptible on the linguistic level insofar as the word is never what one would like it to be and thus becomes a source of permanent dissatisfaction — not to say frustration -. In this context, our novelist does not fail to recall in *La Désincarnation* that “[t]he word has become so used to doing without what makes it exist, [that it] has served as a lure [...] that we forget to ask it for an account”<sup>5</sup>. Reflecting in this way on the absence of the link between the word and the thing, every text by Jean Rouaud becomes the bearer of a latent, but more burning, questioning of the status of writing and of the writer, as well as of the validity of the novelistic genre. Rouaud once again imposes the question of the writer's responsibility to his time, which gives him a special and relatively tense place in the contemporary literary imagination.<sup>6</sup> The writing of mourning — whether personal, familial, collective, or novelistic — is first and foremost a writing that is aware of itself and, therefore, “ready to question what underlies it” (Lantelme 2009: 22).

### **Filiation I: image and language become writing**

If there is a typical characteristic of the modern French novel, at least in the sense of one of the typically French literary rules, it is that all novels also, and perhaps above all, speak of themselves, thus inscribing themselves in a long literary tradition that they perpetuate or contest. The narrator of Jean Rouaud's novels is no exception to this custom, systematically questioning the very foundations of this writing by constantly returning to his origins and to the question of filiation without which, it seems, there would be no novel, at least

<sup>4</sup> On this subject, cf. the reflection by Jean-Pierre Salgas, “Défense et illustration de la prose française” (Salgas 1997: 81). Jean-Pierre Salgas lists the events and factors whose combination constitutes a possible delimitation from which the postmodern phenomenon becomes palpable even in the field of novels, among which the death, fortuitously, of the great “masters of thought” of the modern era — or Modern Times — among which Jean-Paul Sartre and Roland Barthes.

<sup>5</sup> “[L]e mot a tellement pris l'habitude de se passer de ce qui le fait exister, [qu'il] a tellement servi de leurre [...] qu'on oublie de lui demander des comptes.” (Rouaud 2001: 16). We translate into English.

<sup>6</sup> This fact is recalled by Michel Lantelme in his book devoted to Jean Rouaud (Lantelme 2009: 22).

not with Rouaud. Indeed, the figure of the “great Absent One”, as he calls him, serves as a central motif allowing the author to fill the void left by the death of his father in his life through the medium of writing, in the manner of the Royal typewriter given to him by the father of the author’s father, Pierre Rouaud, for his 17th birthday. This apparent paradox can be related to the story of Georges de La Tour’s painting *Saint-Joseph Charpentier* which, as the narrator of *L’Invention de l’auteur* remarks, appears as a “pretext” for writing (cf. Rouaud 2004: 33), thus explaining why the author’s father’s father, Pierre Rouaud (33), thus explains numerous scenes in the previous novels where Jean Rouaud, son and little ten years old boy, assists his father in tinkering in the house where he was born or in his carpenter’s workshop temporarily installed in the family garden: “I also remembered that I recounted in *Des hommes illustres*, the father’s book, how we used to light ourselves with paraffin lamps during the frequent power cuts in the past”.<sup>7</sup> This half-nostalgic, half-humorous evocation nevertheless allows us to orientate ourselves and interpret various scenes from Rouaud’s previous novels, where the path of the writing always leads back to the search for ties with the father.

Thus, offering a parallel between the figures represented in the painting and the filial bond that unites the writer with his father, Georges de La Tour’s painting also functions as an interval for reflection on the relationship between writing and image, between fiction and reality. By allusively but all the more radically protesting against the excesses of the Nouveau Roman and the new Nouveau Roman that haunted French literature during the third quarter of the 20th century, Jean Rouaud refuses to push back “in a radical gesture of literary modernity [...] the text off the page, to do hors-texte in a way”<sup>8</sup> and takes advantage of his “poster of Joseph the carpenter”, “good fishing, miraculous fishing”, to renew the link between image and text, between reality and fiction. Indeed, the discovery of the “very personal reproduction of the master of nights”<sup>9</sup> serves as a rather solid link between the writer’s life and his work, for “we see that fiction is an autobiography that ignores itself.”<sup>10</sup> Therefore, by rediscovering this image that stages the relationship of filiation, which is very rich in meaning, Rouaud also rediscovers the meaning of his own creation. Indeed, by making this authorial confession in *L’Invention de l’auteur*, Jean Rouaud also finds the answer to the invective of grumpy critics who saw in his texts only the anecdotes of a vaguely regionalist and refractory author deploring a certain disappearing world. The image of the father emerges again from memory against the backdrop of the painting by Georges de La Tour:

I had seen it [i.e. the image] appear in the course of sentences, like line after line of a picture on a gelograph, in a dark glowing forge light, disguised in the old-fashioned way, with less hair and more wrinkles, but which too many clues made suspicious: the function — woodworking

<sup>7</sup> “Il me revient également que j’ai raconté dans *Des hommes illustres*, ce livre du père, comment nous nous éclairions à la lampe à pétrole lors des coupures de courant fréquentes autrefois” (Rouaud 2004: 248). We translate into English.

<sup>8</sup> “Dans un geste radical de modernité littéraire [...] le texte hors la page, de faire du hors-texte en quelque sorte” (Rouaud 2004: 112). We translate into English.

<sup>9</sup> “Reproduction très personnelle du maître des nuits” (Rouaud 2004: 174). We translate into English.

<sup>10</sup> “On voit que la fiction est une autobiographie qui s’ignore” (Rouaud 2004: 174). We translate into English.

—, the first name — Joseph —, the link — a father and his son —, there was no room for doubt. Not him, not my father, after all. Well, yes. He was. My arms fell off.<sup>11</sup>

Having emerged from the shadows, the father figure mixed with the features of Saint Joseph Charpentier preoccupies Jean Rouaud again, who already hoped to have drawn on all the words precisely to reanimate him to the point of “having made a science of it, and to stand before you, certain of having acquired an authority on the subject.”<sup>12</sup> In asking what his father still wanted from him, the author states that he had come out of this exercise in cloning by word to his advantage. One can read in this ironic and self-deprecating detachment a critical distance that is so necessary for every writer who draws material for his books from his own life: “And then from you to me, there were so many repaints that I don’t even know what the original looked like anymore.”<sup>13</sup> And the author concludes: “to write is to reproduce the name of the father ad infinitum.”<sup>14</sup>

Constantly questioning itself in such self-reflexive gestures and critically re-examining its status as a writer in metatextual passages highly charged with ambiguity, Rouaud’s writing does not, however, only go in the direction of a self-contestation through an overly ironic look at its own work. The search for the father is coupled with a search for literary fathers (and mothers), which enables the construction of a work at a time when the question of inheritance seems to be the keyword of our times. The question that arises is that of the literary masters.

## Filiation II: The Literary Fathers and Writing

The narrator of *The Author’s Invention* ends up reconstructing the father’s image, albeit in the form of a dream in which,

We can also see the author watching the narrator untangle himself from the father figure as the story of his resurrection comes to an end. A way out, in short. The first-named Joseph emerges from this story more dead than alive.<sup>15</sup>

This carnivalesque exit of the father in the guise of Saint Joseph the carpenter allows the author to push the questioning further, on the side of literary filiation, because it also serves as a starting point for a quest for the sources of his creation and for the search for his own

<sup>11</sup> “Je l’avais vue [c’est-à-dire l’image] apparaître au fil des phrases, comme ligne à ligne une image sur un bélinographe, dans une sombre lumière rougeoyante de forge, déguisée à l’ancienne, cheveux en moins et rides en plus, mais que trop d’indices rendaient suspecte : la fonction — le travail du bois —, le prénom — Joseph —, le lien — un père et son fils —, le doute n’était pas de mise. Pas lui, pas mon père, tout de même. Eh bien, si. Lui. Les bras m’en sont tombés” (Rouaud 2004: 112–113). We translate into English.

<sup>12</sup> “S’en être fait une science, et de tenir devant vous, certain d’avoir acquis sur le sujet une autorité” (Rouaud 2004: 112–113). We translate into English.

<sup>13</sup> “Et puis de vous à moi, il y eut tant de repeints que je ne sais même plus à quoi ressemblait l’original” (Rouaud 2004: 112–113). We translate into English.

<sup>14</sup> “Ecrire c’est reproduire le nom du père à l’infini” (Rouaud 2004: 115). We translate into English.

<sup>15</sup> “On peut voir aussi l’auteur regardant le narrateur se dépêtrer avec la figure paternelle au moment où le récit de sa résurrection s’achève. Une sortie par le haut, en somme. Le prénommé Joseph sortant de cette histoire plus grand mort que vivant” (Rouaud 2004: 240). We translate into English.

literary origins. Thus, a whole army of historical and literary figures parade before the eyes of the reader of *L'Invention de l'auteur*, each of whom has in one way or another influenced Jean Rouaud's writing.

The name of the patron saint of Spanish poets, Juan de la Cruz, appears first in the order of the publication in *The Invention of the Author*. It is undoubtedly the mystical side of this Carmelite priest and saint from the second half of the sixteenth century that intrigues our author the most. The enigmatic injunction 'To go where one does not want to know, one avoids going where one knows' of this poet of the Spanish Golden Age has the effect that the author, searching for his literary roots, makes it a leitmotif of his entire novelistic work. The mystic's remark has resonated so deeply in the author that he finally realizes that it is an a posteriori justification — for "discovered once the chips were down"<sup>16</sup> and that it simply allows him to verify "that it is enough to look back to see that things happened more or less that way."<sup>17</sup> In other words, it is enough to follow "the text that resembles nothing, that seeks itself, that seeks its form, its subject."<sup>18</sup> Although the disputes over illuminism led to the mystic's writings being called into question, it was thanks to the French Carmelite Thérèse de Lisieux that the importance of his doctrine was once again established as indisputable, and Juan de la Cruz was proclaimed a 'doctor of the Church' in 1926. It is important to note in this context that some philosophers — Henri Bergson, Maurice Blondel or the Christian philosopher and mystic Simone Weil (Vetö 2016: 82) — rely on his writings in the field of religious metaphysics. We could therefore add to this far too summarized of a list, Jean Rouaud, who joins the mystic on one of the essential points of his metaphysics, that of the need to strip oneself of everything, the experience of the dark night of the senses or of the mind, but also his definition of unhappiness which seems directly inspired by the three abandonments of Christ of which the saint speaks in *La Montée au Carmel* [The Ascent to Carmel].

The other religious figure invoked in *L'Invention de l'auteur* is Bernadette Soubirous, whose recommendations Rouaud follows. Indeed, this girl from Bigorre, who claimed to have witnessed eighteen Marian apparitions at the grotto of Massabielle, advises her biographers on how to report her incredible adventure: "The simplest thing you can write will be the best", adding as a matter of form: "by dint of wanting to make things flower, you distort them."<sup>19</sup> And Jean Rouaud immediately adds that, as curious as it may seem, the involvement of the little seer as an artistic and literary advisor can be explained by her credo, which could pass for realism. Indeed, it is Bernadette's natural modesty that interests him, if only because having visions comes naturally to her and therefore there is not much to write about.

In this sense, we also find symptomatic the evocation of the young Flaubert and the calamitous reading of his *Temptation of Saint Anthony* by Louis-Hyacinthe Bouilhet, future curator of the Rouen library and a Parnassian by conviction, who recommends Flaubert

<sup>16</sup> "[...] découverte une fois que les jeux étaient faits" (Rouaud 2004: 64). We translate into English.

<sup>17</sup> "[...] qu'il suffit de jeter un œil en arrière pour constater que les choses se sont passées à peu près ainsi" (Rouaud 2004: 64). We translate into English.

<sup>18</sup> "Le texte qui ne ressemble à rien, qui se cherche, qui cherche sa forme, son sujet" (Rouaud 2004: 61). We translate into English.

<sup>19</sup> "Ce qu'on écrira de plus simple sera le meilleur [...] à force de vouloir fleurir les choses, on les dénature" (Rouaud 2004: 43–44). We translate into English.

to “give up flying and condemn himself to the earth”<sup>20</sup>, that is to say, to write a “Balzac-like novel”<sup>21</sup>. The evocation of Flaubert’s first book and its disappointing reception by his fellow students makes it possible to establish a link with *Désincarnation*, in which it is precisely the question of realism and lyricism on which the future of literature is hung. Jean Rouaud feels particularly touched by “this tension in some people between heaven and earth.”<sup>22</sup>

To finish the list of references which Jean Rouaud acknowledges to have had an impact on his writing, we must also recall the *Querelle des Anciens et des Modernes*, because it sums up the position of our author in the contemporary literary field. Jean Rouaud openly sides with the Ancients. Borrowing a metaphor from Fontenelle, the author of *L’Invention de l’auteur* represents the Moderns as children perched on the shoulders of the Ancients. The wish is clear and unambiguous, it seems: “Put me down, Dad. I don’t want to overtake anyone.”<sup>23</sup>, in other words I don’t want to be Modern, “I willingly present myself as an archaic.”<sup>24</sup>

### Conclusion

By way of conclusion, we could therefore return to several observations that have emerged in the course of this short journey through two texts by Jean Rouaud. Indeed, the narrative of filiation appears to be very symptomatic of a new historical situation at the beginning of the twenty-first century, which seems to be written without a master, both on the literary and spiritual levels. Thus, it seems to deal with the “ideologies of the end”<sup>25</sup> that arise at the time of this author’s entry on the literary scene, for in trying to establish an impossible dialogue against the clock with the Absent, Jean Rouaud willingly makes himself the archivist and archaeologist of the end of a world, an attitude that he underlines by adopting the posture of the Ancients facing the Moderns.

At the crossroads of two centuries, Jean Rouaud’s work is affected by the feeling of passing from one era to another. As Michel Lantelme points out, “writing mourning also means inventing a new aesthetic for the twenty-first century” (Lantelme 2009: 23). Thus, to the problem of disembodied language that he addresses in the eponymous essayist work, our writer gives a completely original response in his literary autobiography *L’Invention de l’auteur* by mixing the father’s work in the family garden with the future of literature: “Thus everything is in place for the next stage, the incarnation, this hybridization between body, text, father, and law. Instead of imprinting the stone, the word will become part of the flesh itself, like biological software. Engrave this in your head. The stigmata are indeed a form of writing.”<sup>26</sup> The word regains its ties to the real world through the image of the body of the one who was.

<sup>20</sup> “[...] renoncer à voler et de se condamner au terre à terre” (Rouaud 2004: 209). We translate into English.

<sup>21</sup> “Roman à la Balzac” (Rouaud 2004: 211). We translate into English.

<sup>22</sup> “[...] cette tension chez certains entre le ciel et la terre” (Rouaud 2004: 210). We translate into English.

<sup>23</sup> “Repose-moi, papa. Je ne veux dépasser personne” (Rouaud 2004: 240). We translate into English.

<sup>24</sup> “Je me présente volontiers comme un archaïque” (Rouaud 2004: 272). We translate into English.

<sup>25</sup> For example Fukuyama, Baudrillard, Muray to name only the most important theorists of the idea of the end.

<sup>26</sup> “Ainsi tout est en place pour la prochaine étape, l’incarnation, cette hybridation entre le corps, le texte, le père et la loi. Au lieu d’imprimer la pierre, la parole s’intégrera à la chair même, comme un logiciel biologique. Gravez-vous ça dans la tête. Les stigmates sont bien une forme d’écriture” (Rouaud 2004: 128). We translate into English.

Thirdly, by invoking the fathers in the literary sense of the term, Rouaud's narrative of filiation proceeds through a critical gaze that the auctorial instance projects on its own work. Through the evocation of the historical figures that make up his personal literary heritage and through metatextual commentary, the writer shows that it is impossible to separate fiction and reflection on writing itself. Literature, in the sense that Jean Rouaud understands it, is not conceivable without a critical history of literature, the two being inseparable. From then on, the narrative of filiation is not only an archaeological fiction that seeks the family ties of the writer with a loved one who has disappeared, but also a fiction that itself seeks its ties with the literary past in the mode of the essay.

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