

Forgetting Foucault? Anonymity, Death and the Author

Kenneth Wain
University of Malta

The title 'Forgetting Foucault?', minus the question mark (a very important omission, of course), is one I have borrowed from Baudrillard's famous paper of 1980 which tries to cut Foucault's thesis about power\knowledge down to size but fails to tell us exactly why Foucault should be forgotten'.¹ Racevskis describes the Baudrillard article as 'a fairly abstruse poetico-philosophic essay that indicts Foucault for collusion with prevailing myth-making strategies. Foucault,' Racevskis continues, 'is shown by Baudrillard to have become infatuated with the imaginary force of his own discourse, and his genealogy is depicted as a system satisfying a certain hegemonic logic of reason.'² In effect, not only has Foucault not been forgotten, the contrary is the case; a Foucault industry has grown over the ten years since his death with a Centre for Foucauldian Studies set up in Paris. What were Foucault's own views about his posterity? Why would Baudrillard want us to forget Foucault and what is this continuing presence his memory constitutes?

The second question perhaps could be the subject of a hermeneutical study of Baudrillard's paper; Racevskis reads it as 'confrontation', as 'a violent challenge to the principal tenets of Foucault's epistemology' which 'attempts to turn on its head its implicit claim to radicalism.'³ This analysis is not something I want to do here though, undoubtedly, the exercise would be an interesting one; the subject of this paper is not Baudrillard. Instead I want to turn to the first question and the part of the second which takes us into debate on the subject of 'continuing presence' of the 'figure' and, thus, into the heart of the question whether Foucault should be forgotten or remembered, and why? Perhaps one could couch the question of his 'presence' in terms of the enduring power of Foucault and of his writings?! About this subject, the subject of the author in relation to the text, particularly about 'anonymity' there is much that Foucault has said or written, much which could also be germane to the question about how he regarded his own posterity.

At the same time, Baudrillard's thesis about Foucault is undoubtedly odd, for Foucault has rarely

ever been characterised as a conservative, though Habermas who labeled him a postmodernist and accused him of being against reason did start a trend in that direction.⁴ Indeed, the more usual way of depicting Foucault is as an anarchist, or even a nihilist.⁵ In one of the interviews he gave, Foucault himself interrupted his interviewer Gerard Roulet, who was going on about how 'Habermas has taken up this term in order to criticize it in all its aspects...', the term, of course, was 'postmodernity', with the question (tongue-in cheek? At any rate Roulet took it seriously and answered it exhaustively): 'What are we calling postmodernity? I'm not up to date?'⁶ Foucault complained that even the term 'modernity' perplexed him.⁷ Nor, he said, did he see any 'disappearance of reason' occurring - 'I can see multiple transformation, but I cannot see why we should call all this transformation a collapse of reason.'⁸

At the same time an 'epistemology' is precisely one thing Foucault claimed not to have, even if *Archeology of Knowledge* (regarded by many as having been Foucault's least successful book) did represent archeology as the 'successor subject' to epistemology. The force of Rorty's criticism in this case was that Foucault was still perpetuating a hegemonic tradition originating with the Enlightenment which views philosophy as the foundation of culture. But Rorty then refers approvingly to the later Foucault's Nietzschean turn to genealogy which, in its negativity, cannot certainly be characterised as an epistemology or a method.⁹ At the same time, Baudrillard was not referring to the Foucault of the *Archeology* when he accused him of hegemonic intentions but precisely to his genealogy.

But the truth is that Foucault was, from the beginning, as much against hegemonies, against the imperialism of 'method', as are Rorty and Baudrillard. Hence his rapid abandonment of the method of archeology. Rorty lauds genealogy because it is negative rather than positive. In other words it has nothing to do with setting up theories or searching for 'origins' or with discovering an episteme within an archive, as does archeology. It has to do instead with 'unmask-

ing', with the tracing out of 'descent' and 'emergence' (two Nietzschean metaphors) of some regime of knowledge \ power. As an analysis of descent, genealogy, Foucault says, is 'situated within the articulation of the body and history. Its task is to expose a body totally imprinted by history and the process of history's destruction of the body.'¹⁰ Emergence, on the other hand is about 'the moment of arising'; it 'seeks to establish the various systems of subjection; not the anticipatory power of meaning, but the hazardous play of domination'¹¹ - it is, therefore, about 'struggle'. But, Foucault says, about that struggle, 'no one can glory in it, since it always occurs in the interstice'.¹² Is the interstice where one finds Foucault? Does his 'negative' genealogy, indeed, qualify him as an anarchist or even nihilist? Would Foucault himself want to be remembered as such?

Let us put aside Baudrillard's challenge for the time being and ask, which would be the best way to remember Foucault? The question is evidently an ambiguous one; in one sense it could be about method, in another it could be about approach or style within a particular method, in another still it could be about characterisation, about how to actually represent Foucault. Methodologically, one obvious way to remember someone is, indeed, to do what I am doing now, namely write a paper about him/her. There are obviously other possibilities also (like having a soiree or a service, or opening a prestigious centre of studies, like the one in Paris, with an international conference), but writing about a writer seems the best way to remember him/her, and Foucault himself privileged writing above other forms of expression. The more interesting question seems to be, how does one go about the business of writing about Foucault? MacIntyre argues that the lecture is an inappropriate way to remember genealogists, who all, including the earliest among them Nietzsche, feel rather uncomfortable playing the role of philosophy professors.¹³ Genealogists are happier writing narratives and aphorisms than philosophical papers, happier telling anecdotes and stories rather than giving lectures. But Foucault was a bad genealogist in this sense, for he continued to give courses, like any other philosophy professor, at the College de France, until the end of his life. Nor were aphorisms and anecdotes his preferred mode of writing, though he could, on the other hand, nay should, be described as a writer of narratives.

A universally acknowledged way of writing about an author is to do a critical study of his or her works, and Foucault, in this respect, has had more than his fair share of critical studies. But is writing a

critical study of his work the way he would have wanted to be approached? How about writing a biographical sketch of his life? Of course, it could always be argued that it is irrelevant what he would have thought about the matter. That response, however, whoever it is made about, counts only for those who may not feel the figure of a writer, a writer's presence; those who simply see the writer as a piece of public property to be appropriated and put aside, or who cannot relate to the writer in any personal way; those who merely see the writer as a subject for study or entertainment but who do not feel any presence in his or her works. If one feels the presence of the author one is also respectful of that author's opinion. Writing a critical work on Foucault is treating him as a subject for analysis, finally it is coming up with a theory about him and about his work. Writing his biography is telling a narrative about his life something he himself repeatedly refused to discuss. In either case, one is trying to pin him down, make him more accessible to oneself and to an audience. Perhaps a good clue to the question of how one should write about Foucault, if one wants to write about him in his own terms, would be to see how he himself wrote to 'remember' another, dead, author, Raymond Roussel, though the situation is not the same since Roussel, at least at the time Foucault wrote about him, was a relatively obscure writer?!¹⁴ Perhaps one could write a genealogy of Foucault?!

It turns out, in fact, that one of the difficulties of remembering Foucault in writing lies in deciding how one should write about him. In a sense, this is not simply the problem with Foucault, it occurs with all authors who somehow have the power to retain a presence, who somehow seem to live as strongly outside their work as they do within it. Foucault himself was certainly interested in the question why we need to retain any kind of presence at all, any 'figures' in our culture, particularly why we have an interest in retaining the figure of an author. And I could, of course, since this is precisely what I am doing, writing about an author, turn the question on myself. Why am I writing about Foucault? Maybe because I find Baudrillard's suggestion that we should forget him intriguing? Or maybe because the tenth anniversary of his death is a good excuse to write a paper about a writer who is still very popular (or, at any rate, whose name is still very popular)? Maybe, I am one of those who harbours a hidden ambition to pin him down, to respond to his own challenge, to the gauntlet he seems to throw down to the reader!? Responding to these questions would mean writing not about Foucault but

about myself! Maybe I should write what I think my prospective readers would want to know about him? But that would involve me in a hermeneutic of the reader which assumes, in turn, that I know the reader, his/her interests and motives, which I do not, or that the reader is, at least accessible to me, which s/he is not.

I could speculate that some readers would want to know about him, personally, as a personage, as a figure. Others may be more interested in what he wrote and what he said, what his views and concerns were about different things. Yet the question arises, but why do you want to know these things? And what, of what he wrote and said, would you regard as relevant to his memory? Maybe you want to hear about Foucault's work because you think that you will find it interesting, or uplifting, or enlightening, or different, or because it will add to your knowledge of contemporary philosophy, or because it will add to your intellectual baggage, or maybe because you are just curious? Those of you who are students may only want to know more about Foucault because his works are prescribed for your course of studies, in which case you would be particularly interested in the question whether he is worth remembering as an assessment of his worth! This is a not a good motive, though it may be a pragmatic one. What about curiosity? Is that a good motive? What kind of curiosity is curiosity about a writer?

Whatever the answer, curiosity about Foucault is very understandable. After all, over the years, he has become a celebrity, a canonical figure of academic and intellectual life; knowing Foucault, or at least knowing something about him, is still very academically and intellectually up-market. In some corner of some seminar about him one is almost bound to hear someone whisper, maybe even loudly, 'perhaps to show-off some familiarity with his name, that 'Foucault died of aids didn't he?' How does that fact, or any other fact about how an author dies, affect how he or she is remembered, or whether he or she should be remembered?

One may ask a similar kind of question about, say, Van Gogh. Why is it that someone like Van Gogh continues to fascinate so many people? Is it simply the quality of his work that does it? Is it the eccentric creativity of his expressiveness that fascinates? Or is it his eccentric 'life'? I am thinking, for instance, about the numerous films made about Van Gogh's life. Van Gogh is another who, like Foucault, retains a presence. As with Foucault's sexuality (Foucault himself

pronounced sex boring!) what fascinates many with Van Gogh is, of course, his madness. I am sure that at one time people must have whispered that Van Gogh committed suicide in the same tone of hushed awe or sensationalistic matter-of-factness that some people use today when they refer to Foucault's 'aids'.

But nobody really needs to worry about having any alibis, of being accused of sheer curiosity by the ghost of Foucault. Why would Foucault worry that people want to know about him out of sheer curiosity? Did he not himself, after all, describe his own interest in life and in philosophy as a matter of curiosity?! To what extent do the circumstances of his or her life contribute towards our evaluation of an author? Would it have made a difference to the way we regard his work had Van Gogh not been mad and committed suicide, or Pollock an alcoholic who smashed himself in a car? Would it make any difference if Foucault really did die of a brain tumor after all - except in a technical sense, that is? And, to return to the question, why should the motivation of the reader be any more important than my own motivation as a writer in determining how I should write about Foucault?

In his own writing about the relationship between art and madness, in the early years of his career as an author, Foucault said: 'It is of little importance on exactly which day in the autumn of 1888 Nietzsche went mad for good, and after which his texts no longer afford philosophy but psychiatry: all of them, including the postcard to Strindberg, belong to Nietzsche, and are all related to *The Birth of Tragedy*. But we must not think of this continuity in terms of a system, of a thematics, or even of an existence: Nietzsche's madness - that is, the dissolution of his thought - is that by which his thought opens out onto the modern world.'¹⁵ The interesting paradox Foucault was to return to again and again throughout his life is already at work in this passage; the identification of authorship with the life of the author goes together with the necessity of the author's dissolution through the act of authorship itself. Nietzsche's madness needs to be considered as his 'opening out onto the (modern) world'. But must madness be the filter through which the author opens out in this way? How does Foucault himself 'open out', since he was not mad? Where does Foucault open out onto the (modern/postmodern?) world? Through his homosexuality? Why did the author of *The History of Sexuality* pronounce sex boring?

What does Foucault understand by authorship? This is, indeed, the question. In his essay on the

subject of the author, he asks what should be ascribed to Nietzsche as author: 'what about the drafts of his works?' he asks, 'Obviously. The plans of his aphorisms? Yes. The deleted passages and the notes at the bottom of the page? Yes. What is, within a workbook filled with aphorisms, one finds a reference, the notation of a meeting or of an address, or a laundry list: Is it work, or not? Why not? And so on, ad infinitum. How can one define a work amid the millions of traces left by someone after his death?'¹⁶ It seems impossible, then, to do a genealogy of the author because genealogy 'requires patience and a knowledge of details, and it depends on a vast accumulation of source material'.¹⁷ But what is the source material for a genealogy of a dead author and how do we accumulate it, and when do we know that we have accumulated enough? This is the issue Foucault is raising here for those who would want to remember an author. In short, doing a genealogy of Foucault as an author does not seem on, at least on his own terms!

But, is this not also the case, then, for writing his biography?! How does one write Foucault's biography, supposing one elected, in fact, to remember him by writing his biography? Maybe what is interesting about the writing of biographies about authors, particularly authors who are also figures, is not what they tell us about the authors but what they tell us about ourselves. This being the case, I don't think one can simply ignore the question raised a bit earlier; why do we want to retain the presence of an author at all? Why is the biography of an author more important for us than the biography of John Smith? Why is the figure of the author required in our culture, why isn't the work enough? Is it a good sign if, say, in our culture, having moved away from a hegemony of theories and epistemologies we are now moving towards a hegemony of personalities, of figures, of heroes, and what would that 'moving away' mean to us? Are biographies, some of which have already appeared, the way Foucault would have wanted to be remembered, supposing he really wanted to be remembered? For it may well be the case that Foucault actually agreed with Baudrillard! That Foucault himself wanted us to forget Foucault...!

This thought struck me as I was reading Walzer's fortuitous comparison of Foucault with Kafka. Kafka left instructions with his friend Max Brod to destroy his work when he was dead. It most certainly seems that Kafka wanted to be forgotten otherwise why leave such instructions? Or did he want to be forgotten? 'Foucault is not the Kafka of the prison or the asylum; his account is neither surreal nor mysterious.'¹⁸ Evi-

dently Walzer mentions the two together by way of contrast rather than comparison and in a very different context of discussion from the one I am pursuing. But the comparison of Foucault with Kafka on this point is intriguing. It would appear to have made no sense for the already much published and much publicised Foucault to have repeated Kafka's gesture. Foucault himself specifically took up Kafka's gesture in association with Roussel. Roussel left a posthumous book 'How I wrote Certain of My Books' which held forth the tantalising suggestion of a hidden 'secret' in his work; a trap to lure the reader. In fact, whatever else it was that Roussel wanted in life it was certainly not anonymity. Foucault comments, 'In a way, Roussel's attitude is the reverse of Kafka's, but as difficult to interpret. Kafka had entrusted his manuscripts to Max Brod to be destroyed after his death - to Max Brod, who had said he would never destroy them. Around his death Roussel organized a simple explanatory essay which is made suspect by the text, his other books, and even the circumstances of his death'.¹⁹ Roussel's 'tantalising secret' was his way of ensuring his immortality! But Foucault himself, like Kafka, expressed the wish for anonymity while he was alive!

As early as 1969, in fact, he was saying things like, 'I am no doubt not the only one who writes in order to have no face. Do not ask who I am and do not ask me to remain the same: leave it to our bureaucrats and our police to see that our papers are in order. At least spare us their morality when we write.'²⁰ How serious was he about 'writing to have no face'? In effect, throughout his career he deliberately and notoriously made the business of pinning him down, of characterising him in any way, difficult, by constantly shifting position, by constantly affirming his privacy and his unwillingness to be taken for granted, by constantly revising the state of his oeuvre, re-describing it in different ways, sometimes radically, in terms of the current focus of his work and of the methodology he was using, his archeology his genealogy, his ethics, by writing in a manner that carried him through the fields of philosophy, cultural history, sociology, medical history, and literary criticism.

Thus, *Madness and Civilization* (1961), was about 'return(ing), in history, to the zero point in the course of madness at which madness is an undifferentiated experience, a not yet divided experience of division itself.'²¹ It was an archeological search for 'origins'. In 1977 he said, 'When I think back now, I ask myself what else it was that I was talking about, in *Madness and Civilization* or *The Birth of the Clinic* but power?'²² In 1981, he proclaimed that 'The goal of

my work during the last twenty years has not been to analyse the phenomena of power, nor to elaborate the foundations of such analysis. My objective, instead, has been to create a history of the different modes by which, in our culture, human beings are made subjects.²³

In his very last interview before he died, asked whether, in view of his recent courses on the hermeneutic of the subject 'your present philosophical research is still determined by the poles, subjectivity and truth.' He replied that 'in fact this has always been my problem, even if I have expressed in different terms the framework of this thought. I have tried to discover how the human subject entered into games of truth, whether they be games of truth which take on the form of science or which refer to a scientific model, or games of truth like those that can be found in institutions or practices of control.'²⁴ On being asked whether there is any complementarity between power/knowledge, the axis of relationships that had engrossed him in his earlier work, and subject/truth, which was his present interest, he explains how he sees the assimilation of his former work, including his work on power/knowledge within his central project of narrating how the subject enters into a certain game of truth.

At all times one must come to terms with a deliberately elusive Foucault; one who is changing tack, sometimes out of sheer devilry, all the time, deliberately laying a false track, refusing to stand still long enough to be labeled or, as Walzer put it (though Foucault first used the metaphor for himself), 'situated on the chessboard of available positions', consciously, disconcertingly perverse. Rorty's ideal figure, in effect, of the ironic 'strong misreading poet'? Perhaps, nevertheless, the truth is that the Foucault who taunted his reader in *Archeology of Knowledge* with 'No, no, I'm not where you are lying in wait for me, but over here, laughing at you,' actually found it necessary periodically to identify continuity in his work, to focus it in some way.²⁵ Couzens Hoy interprets this tendency in this way: 'Foucault himself continually reflects on his own development and offers his own interpretations of it, often with honest self-criticisms.'²⁶ But how does this periodic rationalisation of his work's 'progress', this need to see his work over time as consistent, coherent, developmental, cohere with the anarchic, literary, Foucault - the strong poet? Why was he so intent on viewing his work as a project? There seems to be another paradox at work here somewhere! My view is that it is only explained through understanding what he meant by 'ethics'.

In the foreword to the 1970 English edition of *The Order of Things* Foucault complained bitterly against 'certain half-witted commentators' in France who had dubbed him a structuralist, though, at that time, some aspects of his work very evidently were so.²⁷ One feels the sheer annoyance behind his terse statement. Subsequently he was to insist repeatedly in his interviews that he was never a structuralist, or indeed a Freudian or Marxist. Why?

In *The Order of Things* Foucault went one better than his mentor Nietzsche in predicting not the death of God but that of man. He augured, in the very last lines of the book, 'that man would be erased, like a face drawn in sand at the edge of the sea.'²⁸ What did he mean by that? In effect, what it sounds like is an echo of Heidegger's pronouncement about the end of 'humanism', the postmodernist sounding the death knell for modernity's anthropocentric culture. It accords with Rorty's observation that what is really at issue in this version of anti-humanism is not so much the idea that culture should be centred in 'man' but, more radically, whether it needed any 'centre' at all, in 'God', 'Science', 'man' or in anything else. Foucault's response to it was typically radical - the process of cutting the king's head had to be complete everywhere not just in politics, and the head of the 'author' had to fall with the rest; it had also to be erased by the sea. The archeological 'structuralism' of his work at the time, which projected discourse as something autonomous and self-sufficient, probably satisfied that anti-humanist ambition. His disclaimer against being labeled a structuralist was no reflection on structuralism on his part, any more than his rejection of the label of Freudian or Marxist was part of any polemic he had against Freud or Marx. His problem wasn't with any of these positions as such it was, as I said earlier, with being situated in any position at all, with being turned into 'a subject' by anyone but himself!

At the same time, one feels inclined to question Foucault's motives in claiming to want anonymity. What is its true explanation? Is the claim to anonymity the renouncement of the hegemony of the author as I have just suggested, or the tongue in cheek buffoonery of one who knows full well that anonymity is the very last thing he could claim for himself, one wonders? He who had even made the front cover of *Time Magazine*, who had granted interviews almost indiscriminately to other popular journals, who had encouraged his own presence with every means attainable? Was it because he knew, in effect, that it would be impossible to forget him that he claimed to want anonymity? How serious, in short, was Foucault about

his anonymity? If Kafka's real desire for anonymity is in doubt what about Foucault's? In effect, it is interesting that Foucault did, eventually, imitate Kafka's gesture. In 1977, he told a friend (Jean Pierre Barou) 'When I die, I will leave no manuscripts, and when he was actually close to death, he ordered another close friend, Herve Guibert, to destroy the drafts of the final volumes of *The History of Sexuality* and all the preparatory material connected with them. Foucault, in fact, appears to have had little sympathy with Brod's decision to preserve Kafka's manuscripts against the writer's wishes and himself expressed the wish, in his last note, for no posthumous publications.

Yet one cannot avoid the suspicion of Zarathustrean irony whenever one deals with Foucault! Even with his final acts. Particularly since, in this instance, he could not have been insensitive to the popular acclaim he had received as Sartre's successor, as philosophical guru, as 'the superstar of French thought'; the 'intellectual' par excellence.²⁹

But, the word **intellectual** strikes me as odd,' he once responded to a question by an interviewer. 'Personally I've never met any intellectuals. 'Writers, painters, doctors, teachers, composers, economists', he says, tongue in cheek, he's met, and 'people of whom I have never really understood what they do. But intellectuals, never. On the other hand, I've met a lot of people who talk about "the intellectual",' he adds, on a sinister note. But listening to them is not very reassuring because they blame the intellectual for pretty much everything: 'And I catch a glimpse of a radiant city in which the intellectual would be in prison or, if he were also a theoretician, hanged, of course. We don't, its true, live in a regime in which intellectuals are sent to the rice fields. But have you heard of a certain Toni Negri? Isn't he in prison simply for being an intellectual?'³⁰ This is, again, the disconcerting Foucault; the 'unmasking' Foucault who is seeking out motives and who discovers them in the exercise of domination over a self. The Foucault who would ask us, as I indicated earlier, what are your motives for wanting to remember me? Don't you mean your biographies and critical studies to discipline me?'

But in an entirely different mood from this one, and in other interviews, Foucault expressed his preference for the 'specific' intellectual, the individual pragmatically fighting out specific battles within contained contexts of power, in the 'interstices', 'where their own conditions of life and work situate them', in his/her own name, as opposed to the 'universal' intellectual with emancipatory 'theories' about justice

and right, speaking for a collectivity.³¹

But fighting for what? The question finally leads up to the complaint which led his critics to classify him an anarchist. Foucault, as I said earlier, would identify himself with no political position, would admit to no allegiance. Since he didn't even have a theory of freedom to contrast the appropriation of the self he unmasked with, what did he want us to fight for? What is there to fight for without some vision of emancipation, of a better life and a better world? It was pretty clear what he wanted us to fight against; the 'normalization' of the self through the different forms of bio-power typical of modern life was his great quarry; the objectifying and subjectifying processes that turn the individual into a 'subject', the panopticon society with its gulag type institutions justified, galvanised, and rendered more efficient by the human and social sciences. We also know which battles he fought as a specific intellectual, against the penal, mental, and other disciplinary institutions of our times. Walzer comments that 'Foucault's political theory is a "tool kit" not for revolution but for local resistance'.³² Walzer is also critical of Foucault because 'despite his emphasis on local struggles, he is largely uninterested in local victories'.³³ This is broadly what causes him to characterize Foucault a nihilist. Did he need a theory of freedom or emancipation for his fight? Can one fight without such a theory? 'I've always been a little distrustful of the general theme of liberation', he says elsewhere. The danger, he continues, is that the discourse of liberation can lead to the belief in the existence of 'a human foundation which, as a result of a certain number of historical, social or economic processes, found itself concealed, alienated or imprisoned in and by some repressive mechanism'.³⁴

Rorty argues that there is an alternative to having theories of emancipation; writing utopian narratives.³⁵ In Foucault's case, however, the narratives, or 'fictions' he relates are purely dystopian. *Madness and Civilization*, *The Birth of the Clinic*, and, most particularly *Discipline and Punish*, could easily fit within this genre together with the classics of dystopian writing. As Walzer himself admits with reference to these works, 'it is impossible to read them, whatever disagreements one has, without a sense of recognition'.³⁶ Put in another way, Foucault's narratives 'disconcert'.³⁷ As Couzens Hoy also points out, 'Foucault paints the picture of a totally normalised society, not because he believes our present society is one, but because he hopes we may find the picture threatening'.³⁸ Is the dystopian writer who disconcerts but refuses to project an alternative utopia necessarily

a nihilist? I think not. Is Foucault a nihilist, that's another question.

Isn't 'nihilist' simply one more label to be rejected for Foucault? It is time to return to the question: isn't 'author' itself, innocuous as it may sound, a label Foucault would have wanted to reject? Is the honest yen for anonymity compatible with authorship? Can the 'particular' intellectual claim for him/herself the role of author? Roussel's major preoccupation was to be remembered, to be a figure, an author. Foucault doubts Kafka's honesty with Max Brod when the former asked for his writings to be destroyed. Many of Foucault's own views about a variety of things were expressed in the interviews that he gave rather than in his writings. Today, these interviews are included in a number of printed collections as part of his general oeuvre; i.e., they are treated as writings. The transient quality of the interview is thus subverted. Indeed, there are no signs that Foucault was ever moving away from being a writer first and foremost.

In the interview I referred to earlier Foucault's reply to the question about his continuing wish for anonymity was that 'in our societies, characters dominate our perceptions. Our attention,' he continued, 'tends to be arrested by the activities of faces that come and go, emerge and disappear. Why did I suggest that we use anonymity?' he continues, 'Out of nostalgia for a time when, being quite unknown, what I said had some chance of being heard. With the potential reader, the surface contact was unrippled. The effects of the book might land in unexpected places and form shapes that I had never thought of. A name makes reading too easy.'³⁹ Did he have his own relationship with Roussel in mind when he was saying these words? Probably. The wish to assert oneself as an author, he went on to suggest, proceeds from the author's own vanity.

Less than nine months before he died Foucault was interviewed about his book on Raymond Roussel. The surrealist writer died in 1933, roughly, as it turned out, when he was of the same age as Foucault himself when he died.⁴⁰ The book itself is not one of the most referred to in the literature on Foucault, as he himself remarks. But the interview, printed with the English version of the book provides a clue about a way he would have liked to be remembered which is, at the same time, compatible with this wish for anonymity. Foucault says that curiosity was what first made him interested in Roussel, whom he had never heard of until 1957. He became curious about the writer when

he picked up one of his books by chance while he was waiting to be served in a book shop: 'I was like all other students of philosophy at that time, and for me the break was first Beckett's *Waiting for Godot*, a breath-taking performance'.⁴¹

Beckett was followed, Foucault says, by other novelists and writers, but, clearly, Beckett's play remained especially significant for him! Meanwhile, harking us back to some of the comments I made earlier, Foucault was asked in his interview whether it was Roussel's psychological problems' (Roussel was constantly under the influence of drugs and had attempted suicide not long before his mysterious death) that had attracted him to the writer. He answered no, though, in effect, in the book itself he had made a lot of Roussel's 'madness'. 'The private life of an individual,' he continued to say in the interview, 'his sexual preference, and his work are interrelated not because his work translates his sexual life, but because the work includes the whole life as well as the text.' Then he went on, in a manner again reminiscent of his earlier comments about Nietzsche in *Madness and Civilization*, 'the work is more than the work: the subject who is writing is part of the work.'⁴² 'The subject of the writing is part of the work'!

In the first page of 'What is an Author?', Foucault quotes a line from Beckett's play which, he says, 'formulates the theme' of the author for him. The line goes: "'What does it matter who is speaking", someone said, "what does it matter who is speaking." In this indifference,' Foucault continues, 'appears one of the fundamental ethical principles of contemporary writing'. Foucault continues to explain why he uses the word 'ethical': 'because this indifference is not really a trait characterizing the manner in which one speaks and writes, but rather a kind of immanent rule, taken up over and over again, never fully applied, not designating writing as something completed, but dominating it as a practice.'⁴³ This 'immanent rule' can be illustrated through two of its major themes: (a) having 'freed itself from the dimension of expression', writing is now about 'creating a space into which the writing subject constantly disappears', and (b) 'writing's relationship with death... The work, which once had the duty of providing immortality now possesses the right to kill, to be its author's murderer, as in the case of Flaubert, Proust and Kafka. That is not all, however,' Foucault concludes, '...using all the contrivances that he sets up between himself and what he writes, the writing subject cancels out the signs of his particular individuality... he must assume the role of the dead man in the game of writing.'⁴⁴

Two insidious notions continue to interfere with this happening; one is the notion of 'a work', the other is that of 'writing'. These, 'intended to replace the privileged position of the author actually seem to preserve that privilege and suppress the real meaning of his disappearance'.⁴⁵ Also, 'it is not enough to keep repeating (after Nietzsche) that God and man have died a common death. Instead, we must locate the space left empty by the author's disappearance, follow the distributions of gaps and breaches, and watch for the openings that this disappearance uncovers.'⁴⁶ One problem with the 'author function' for Foucault, in fact, is that it is hegemonic and ideological, it 'marks the manner in which we fear the proliferation of meaning.'⁴⁷ So death to the author as well as the king and the universal intellectual! These are the figures Foucault wants eliminated from our future culture.

The author is effaced by indifference; not everyone has the privilege to go mad! A more accessible form of dissolution, of 'opening out onto the world'. With the author's death 'all discourses, whatever their status, form, value, and whatever the treatment to which they are subjected, would then develop in the anonymity of a murmur.'⁴⁸ We would be left, to return to the suggestive image with which Foucault ended *The Order of Things*, with the soft sound of the sea; a sea of 'polysemous texts' functioning within a different 'system of constraint' which, like some future utopia, 'will have to be determined or, perhaps, experienced.'⁴⁹ Foucault, in fact, does not advocate the end of writing but that of the author; what he advocates is a culture of authorless, unappropriated, polysemic texts - 'an anonymous text posted on a wall probably has a writer - but not an author.'⁵⁰ But is he serious? A faceless culture of anonymous texts! Is this a scenario for utopia or another futuristic exercise in dystopian writing?

How does his cultural and political anarchy coincide with Foucault's final turn to 'ethics' in his last phase of writing. Ethics', Foucault says, is about 'ascetical practice... not in the sense of abnegation but that of an exercise of self upon self by which one tries to work out, to transform one's self and to attain a certain mode of being'.⁵¹ Ethics is about care of the self, it is about self-creation, about constituting one's self as a self, one's life as a work of art.⁵² For Foucault, this constituting of one's self as a self is to be achieved through writing: '...it is better to try to understand that someone who is a writer,' he said in his Rousset interview, 'is not simply doing his works in his books, in what he publishes, but that his major work is, in the end, himself in the process of writing his books.'⁵³ Care

of self, he concludes in his final interview, perhaps effecting the last conscious synthesis of his work with his life, is 'like a movement to articulate one's existence to the point where there would be nothing else before it but the possibility of death.'⁵⁴ This is the kind of articulation, he says, that Rousset himself succeeded in effecting towards the end of his life. Rousset's gesture of suicide in Palermo should be read as his statement that 'the work must be set free from the person who wrote it.'⁵⁵ So, what conclusion with regard to our question about remembering/forgetting Foucault? Foucault said that 'by treating him as an author like others', he would have felt that he was 'betraying Rousset, normalizing him.'⁵⁶ Obviously, not having wished it on Rousset, this is not a fate he would have wanted for himself; anonymity is always preferable to normalization. Noting the comparatively scarce interest the book on Rousset had generated among his commentators he said, 'No one has paid much attention to this book, and I'm glad; it's my secret affair. You know, he was my love for several summers... no one knew it.'⁵⁷ Forgetting Foucault? Yes, if this means granting him the kind of anonymity he wanted; i.e., that of not being 'studied' or being represented as a 'figure', as an author. No, if he could be retained as 'a secret affair'; as a clandestine lover.

Footnotes

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25. op. cit., p. 17.
26. Couzens Hoy op. cit., p. 2.
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31. Foucault, M. 'Truth and Power', in Gordon, C. (ed.) (1980) *Power\Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings 1972-77* (Sussex Harvester Press) p. 126.
32. op. cit., p. 55.
33. *ibid.*, p. 59.
34. *The Final Foucault*, op. cit., p. 2.
35. See R. Rorty (1989) *Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity*, Cambridge University Press
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40. op. cit.
41. *ibid.*, p. 174.
42. *ibid.*, p. 184.
43. 'What is an Author?' op. cit., p. 101.
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48. *ibid.*, p. 119.
49. *ibid.*, p. 119. 50. *ibid.*, p. 108
51. *The Final Foucault*, op. cit., p. 2.
52. Working Sessions with Rabinow, P. and Dreyfus H., in Rabinow, P. op. cit., p. 350.
53. op. cit., p. 184.
54. *Final Foucault*, op. cit., p. 9.
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57. *ibid.*, 185.

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