

MICHEL FOUCAULT

*J. W. Mohr*

You too now, after Barthes and Lacan; only Derrida remains unravelling the text of tradition and history. The end of an era? Eras were what captured your imagination, what you formed as images of knowledge and power. Between Marx and Nietzsche you recaptured the oppression of mind and body. But not for you the amor fati or the overcoming of the overman, although you were one of those re-evaluating the values; not for you the revolt of the masses because you sensed that repression was not only the desire of one class but of all classes. And so, following Sartre and Camus of your own tradition you remained a moralist to the end, which came when we were waiting where you would ground the moral of the stories you told.

You wrote what Saussure no longer dared to write at the end of his time and his era. But all you could do in the time that was given to you was to undertake an archeology of knowledge, to trace the order of things which names reason and madness, disciplines and punishes, gives birth to clinic and prison to sterilize and capture the mind, body and deeds of the Pierre Rivières and the Herculine Barbins which represent us all.

But what is this order about, that time after time emerges feeding on repression of the natural order and yet representing the gloria mundi? Time always overtakes our undertakings, Synchronic constitutions dissolve and reform themselves in diachronic cycles. By the time the anomaly discloses itself as the other case, knowledge is replaced by a new power which forms its own knowledge. The translation of the will to know into a history of sexuality is a sign of our time but also grounded in Genesis. Aristotle, the prototype of the kind of knowledge/power which fascinated you, only gives us a gloss in beginning his great Metaphysics with: All men desire by nature to know. He soon concedes that knowledge cannot be derived from nature nor from necessity or desire. You knew that it was not the nature of things but their order which counted and defined us. But who establishes the order, whose will is being done? Modernity, and this was your age, can have no answer for that. It does not even raise the question. Its whole project, its reason/madness is to consign it to forgetfulness. And so you remained stretched out, as we all are, between nature and order, a rake which has not yet produced any new confessions.

You started one of your last interpretations, that of the case of Herculine Barbin with the question: Do we *truly* need a *true* sex? You may well have asked: Do we truly need truth? But then you could not have concluded that "... one might have imagined that all that counted was the reality of the body and the

*J. W. MOHR*

intensity of its pleasures." You, I suspect, knew much more of the reality of the mind and the intensity of its pain. The mind (the sterilized and scientized soul) needs truth; any kind of truth, but can find it only in matter and body, its substance. But this substance without the possibility of transsubstantiation is opaque, it cannot reveal truth, not even through a glass darkly. Truth has to be etched upon it. "For centuries, it was quite simply agreed that hermaphrodites had two sexes." This simplicity, grounded in a different understanding of the body, is deceptive as you go on to show. "... at the threshold of adulthood, . . . , hermaphrodites were free to decide for themselves." Condemned to choose, Sartre would have said. "The only imperative was that they should not change it again but keep the sex they had then declared until the end of their lives." This is neither simple nor does it deserve the gloss of 'only'. No imperative does.

But we are promised more on that subject to complete the corpus, the body of your work which remains incomplete for sure. All bodies are incomplete and yet complete in themselves. The end of an era? Of course. What has been cannot be repeated. Every death that touches us is the end of an era. But what of it? To look at your work and to say that it was good in all its completeness and incompleteness is affirmation enough. Some asked us to forget you while you were alive; even this call now turns into recall and memory, a memorial to membership.

Howe Island, Ontario