



Economies of the Gift: Michel Leiris’s “Vois! Déjà l’ange ...” and Sociological Theories of the Circulation and Expenditure of Goods

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One of Philippe Lejeune’s first publications is a study devoted to the autobiographies of the French poet and ethnographer Michel Leiris, entitled *Lire Leiris. Autobiographie et langage*, published in 1975. This book is at the same time one of the first major works dedicated to the writings of Leiris, and among these without doubt one of the very few, if not the only one, which—together with Lejeune’s chapter on Leiris in *Le Pacte autobiographique*—continues to influence, more than forty years after its publication, the reception of Leiris’s work and to still enjoy a strong resonance in current research. The seemingly simple formula ‘Lire Leiris’ [Read Leiris] hardly reveals that Leiris’s works actually problematize our reading of autobiographies, and that Lejeune’s study takes this singular experience as a starting point. In the final part of his study, which deals with the first volume of Leiris’s autobiography *La Règle du jeu* [*The Rules of the Game*]—then a work in progress, the fourth and last volume not yet being published—Lejeune underlines a difficulty which any criticism of Leiris’s autobiographical work encounters. This difficulty consists of the fact that any critical discourse referring to a certain body of theory and its language can only repeat what has been already been consciously worked into the text by Leiris. Lejeune writes:

The work of Leiris is systematically and intentionally constructed according to basic techniques that exploit the structures brought about by the ‘human sciences’. And his knowledge of the human sciences is not, as for many critics, bookish and superficial learning, but originally an experience gained through *work* [...]. Any analysis of his text that would like to apply one of these ‘methods’ to which we are now accustomed exposes itself to a double error: to give as the point of arrival of the critical discourse what was simply

the starting point of Leiris's writing; or rather one of the starting points, removing from the text of Leiris the complexity of its weaving. [...] His writings build from and after most critical languages currently practised, which are both necessary to know to read him (and in this sense the recourse to these languages is essential for any introduction to the reading of Leiris), but not very useful for an interpretation.¹

This difficulty is indeed crucial to the reading of Leiris, who was not only engaged by his profession in the discipline of social anthropology, but who also had deep knowledge of psychoanalysis and whose autobiography is written in the context of an intimate exchange with a large number of contemporary artists. Yet, the problem indicated by Lejeune extends beyond the reading of Leiris and touches on a more fundamental question: how to deal with the relationship between autobiographical literature and theoretical languages and, more generally, between 'literature' and 'human sciences' (I retain Lejeune's inverted commas), between 'literature' and 'knowledge'? In discussing Leiris, Lejeune opens up autobiography studies to sweeping questions about the status of 'theoretical knowledge', which are more or less at the same time heavily discussed in philosophy and in the history of science. The calling into question, in the 1960s and 1970s, of a conception of the history of science previously seen as the progressive transformation of knowledge into objectivity and as accumulation of facts had repercussions on how the relation between 'literature' and 'knowledge' is conceived.²

Since then, the discussion about how to conceptualise the relationship between literature and (theoretical/scientific) knowledge has grown considerably. Over the past twenty years this has become one of the liveliest areas of research in literary criticism, yet from quite different perspectives.³ Among these, one can very roughly discern two sides: while one tends to conflate literary writing and theoretical writing by negating their specificities, the second focuses on their interweaving on the premise of a fundamental difference between them, even if their demarcation is relative and historical. The first refers in its understanding of knowledge especially to Foucault's *Les mots et les choses* and *L'Archéologie du savoir* to analyse the conditions of the production of objects of knowledge.⁴ It follows Foucault also in trying to detect the 'rules of the game' that during a specific historical phase make certain statements possible and exclude others. The discursive order is understood as passing through different modes of expression, different fields of knowledge and different practices and thus as conditioning theoretical thinking as much as literary production.⁵ The second, by contrast, which dominates literary criticism, generates studies in at least three directions. Firstly, there are analyses of literary texts that demonstrate how these respond to a specific body

of theoretical/scientific knowledge, absorb and transform it.⁶ Secondly, there are analyses of theoretical texts as literature, which demonstrate how seemingly specifically literary practices—not only the writing itself (in its generic variations), but also the rhetoric of figures—play a fundamental role in the production as well as in the circulation of knowledge;⁷ the interest focuses here on the convergences between ‘literature’ and ‘science’ at the aesthetic and epistemological levels while distinguishing between them in the (weakened) tradition of the idea of the “two cultures”. Thirdly, this perspective also generates analyses proposing that literature produces and transmits a knowledge *sui generis* distinct from theoretical/scientific knowledge.⁸

At first glance, Lejeune’s analysis of Leiris’s autobiographies adopts the second approach outlined above, more particularly the variant which looks at the ‘infiltration’ of literature by science and the ‘adaptation’ of scientific/theoretical knowledge by writers. His analysis does not, however, converge entirely with this variant since Lejeune is less interested in the introduction of a ‘knowledge’ from the human sciences into the text that the reader could identify than in the anticipation of a critical language that is indebted to such a science by the text itself. In this way, the relationship between ‘autobiographical literature’ and ‘theoretical knowledge’ is revealed as even more complex: autobiography becomes precisely the place for reflection on this relationship. Hence, Lejeune’s attempt is innovative not only in analysing how an autobiographical text draws on or is influenced by scientific ‘knowledge’, or is shaped by currents that equally encompass life writing and human sciences, but also in showing how the text itself negotiates a reading in the light of this knowledge.

Unquestionably, since the 1970s, certain fields of the humanities have been widely recognized for their importance for autobiographical self-fashioning and self-exploration, such as historical and psychoanalytic hermeneutics or the postmodern deconstruction of the ‘subject’.⁹ Yet, Lejeune’s approach—which dates back now nearly half a century—encourages exploring the relationship between autobiographical writing and ‘knowledge’ off the now well-trodden paths by (a) taking into account so far unexplored or less explored fields and objects of the human sciences, and (b) an increased reflection on *how* this relationship is at work and/or reworked in the text itself. Although Lejeune raised this issue in the limited context of a study of Leiris, his remarks have in my view the potential to fuel present autobiography criticism.

In this article, I would like not only to go back to one of Philippe Lejeune’s early objects of study, Leiris’s autobiographical works, but to focus also on the double question—and double difficulty—that these works represent and which was emphasized by Lejeune, that is to say, the

question of how a certain knowledge developed in the human sciences at a specific historical moment is introduced into an autobiographical text and how this text *prefigures and disfigures* a reading from the angle of these sciences. Taking into account Lejeune's warning, I will examine the relationship between autobiographical literature and the 'human sciences' in a chapter of the second volume of Leiris's *La Règle du jeu*, the chapter "Vois! Déjà l'ange ..." ("Look! Already the angel ..."). In the context of a tribute to Philippe Lejeune on the occasion of his eightieth birthday, an appropriate subject seems *de rigueur* and I will treat the theme of the gift. The theoretical knowledge involved here consists of ethnographic and sociological notions of a gift economy. If Lejeune discussed, among the various crossings between autobiographical writing and critical languages in Leiris, especially the text's anticipation of a psychoanalytic reading—so much in vogue at the time, the human sciences in question here will be ethnology, sociology and, to a lesser extent, economics. While Lejeune focussed his analysis of *La Règle du jeu* on the economy of Leiris's writing—"l'économie de l'écriture"¹⁰—I will in the following adapt this focus and apply it to Leiris's treatment of economics itself, thus charting some aspects of Leiris's 'economy of writing about economics'.

1. GIFT, EXCHANGE, EXPENDITURE: SECULAR AND MYTHICAL ECONOMIES

Leiris's entire autobiographical work is underpinned by an economic semantics put in place in particular to weave—or relativize—a link between writing, communication and personal or even existential commitment, such as in the use of these formulas so dear to Leiris: "payer de sa personne" (to pay with his very self) and "gage d'accord" (pledge of agreement). This economic semantics is particularly dense in the chapter "Vois! Déjà l'ange ..." of *La Règle du jeu*.¹¹ This is at least to some extent due to the central episode evoked in this chapter: the encounter of the NCO ("sous-off d'occasion") Leiris with the Algerian "soldiers' whore" ("la fille à soldats") Khadidja when Leiris was stationed in Algeria during the Phoney War from November 1939 to March 1940.¹² With regard to the content of the chapter, Leiris announces on the first page: "As for me, I want to tell the story of Khadidja, or rather *my* story with Khadidja, a prostitute I met when I was a soldier in Revoil Béni-Ounif [...]." [RG 181]¹³ But the evocation of transactions and the use of an economic vocabulary far exceed the scope of the trade of a customer paying a prostitute for her service. One might assume that the pervasive presence of the economic in this chapter is explained by the fact that the more the

relations between the sexes and the cultures are marked by an economic gap, the more a commercial dimension characterizes social exchange. One could, however, also argue that the essentially commercial context of this episode, in which a male soldier with a bourgeois background representing the colonial power acquires the venal love of a woman from the colonized country, serves as a background to the singular event—at least from the perspective of the autobiographical narrator and protagonist Leiris—of a non-commercial gift, the precious moment of an intimate exchange without purpose other than the act of this exchange itself. It goes without saying that such an act, if it materializes, can only materialize in objects without a quantifiable value of exchange. Indeed, it is the gifts of tiny objects, cheap trinkets and ephemeral gestures that constitute the crucial elements of the reminiscences narrated in this chapter and which for Leiris elevate the brothel adventure with Khadidja to the level of a “lived myth” [RG 182] (“un mythe vécu” [RdJ 463]). The ontological status of these gifts and gestures, however, is precarious, as they might well be nothing more than appearances. As to the narrator Leiris, the chapter undertakes the “tale [...] of a very commonplace adventure imbued with a fair amount of cinematic exoticism but elevated, in my eyes—because of the contributions of several outward appearances—to the dignity of a lived myth” [ibid.].¹⁴

In the story of Leiris’s encounter with Khadidja, three key events are decisive for the elevation of this episode to “the dignity of a lived myth” and for the figuration of the prostitute as an angel of death: 1) the present of a trinket, 2) the sex and 3) the farewells. All three events are integrated into manifestly economic semantics, with recourse however to different economic schemas. In all of them the occurrence of a material or non-material gift is figured so that it appears not as the element of a trade but of an almost sacred ritual, of a “lived myth”. What connects the concept of “lived myth” to economic relations is principally the idea of the event of an intense communication outside ordinary life. The rare and precious moments of such extraordinary communication are closely associated with the reception of gifts in “Vois! Déjà l’ange ...”. It is by remembering the small gift that another prostitute gave him on another occasion that Leiris establishes, from the beginning of the chapter, the link between a non-pragmatic intimate communication and the reception of gifts:

That girl [...] offered me very politely a little sprig of mint and I was infinitely grateful to her for her attention, since I attach an immense price to those trivial gifts which, coming at just the right juncture, are a sort of proof that at a given moment the outside world has responded to us and are then

preserved with a nagging fear that they will vanish like those astonishing objects one possesses in dreams and whose disappearance, upon waking, one deplores (before realizing that in fact the dream itself is the disappointing object one is so sorry not to hold in one's hand) [*RG* 188; translation adapted].¹⁵

What role do these well-timed “trivial gifts” play for Leiris? Obviously, Leiris's concern with gifts is situated in his on-going linguistic reflection in *La Règle du jeu* and elsewhere: his persistent meditation on ‘true communication’, on the possibilities of an unmediated accord with others, and on a performative and affective language. In the quoted passage, such gifts are qualified as *proof* of a sudden and unexpected response, a momentary communication. But are they also the media of such extraordinary communication—or are they in their quality as material objects merely the durable and preservable symbolic representatives of an essentially ephemeral contact? Are they presents (further on Leiris writes “the present which had so delighted me” [*RG* 222] (“le présent qui m'avait tant comblé” [*RdJ* 502])) in the double meaning of the word, because they are pure presence, their existence being limited to the fleeting gesture of giving? What happens to these gifts after being given? And do they require a particular form, a formalism of the act of giving, so that they can transform an ordinary exchange into a non-ordinary moment of contact with the “outside world”, into a “lived myth”?

One thing is certain: the economy in which these gifts are placed is beyond commercial relations aiming at the accumulation of goods. The particularity of the gifts received by the autobiographical hero is to acquire an emotional value inversely proportional to their selling price. The nullity of their commercial value places them in another economy, which could be called, in the language of the chapter, a mythical one. Moreover, as the quoted passage shows, these gifts—though they establish a communication between donor and recipient—are not reciprocal. They consist of unique, singular and unpredictable gestures, which do not obey any pre-established ritual nor are transformed into barter by the occurrence of a counter-gift. Hence communication—‘the response’ of the “outside world”—is also conceived of less as an exchange, but rather as a contact made possible via the gift (not the exchange) of a thing. In the episode recounted in the quoted passage, Leiris may pay the prostitute for her service, but not for the sprig of mint offered with great politeness. Only the absence not only of a payment but also of an equivalent counter-gift confers on the mint sprig the free and undetermined character of the gift.¹⁶ The singular action of an uncalculated act of giving breaks the continuum of time: as it does not take into account the future, it becomes the figure of pure presence.

In order to situate Leiris's gift economy, it seems reasonable to compare his conception of the gift with two sociological and more or less economic theories which we can assume he had profound knowledge of: the reflections of the sociologist and ethnologist Marcel Mauss in his study of the gift *Essai sur le don. Forme et raison de l'échange dans les sociétés archaïques*, published in 1923/24, and the conception of expenditure that Georges Bataille developed with recourse to Mauss and of which he published a first sketch in his article "La Notion de dépense" ("The Notion of Expenditure") in the journal *La Critique sociale* in 1933.¹⁷ Both these theories choose as a starting point the idea of the gift, and both value the gift in order to conceive of forms of social interaction which seem contrary to the economic model apparently dominating Western civilization. Both are interested in social forms not primarily marked by the aspects of utility, productivity and the accumulation of goods, but by generosity and expenditure. Therefore, forms of giving situated in a ritual context and in relation to religion are of particular relevance to them.

As said above, it may be presumed that Leiris—who was studying ethnology with Mauss at the Institut d'ethnologie and was a friend and collaborator of Bataille—had an intimate knowledge of these two works. The question then arises as to the status of this intertextual relationship for a reading of his autobiography. Is there an interrelation between the autobiographical text and these works, which at least in the case of Mauss originate in the social sciences; and, if so, how to account for it? In the following I will first of all outline the main arguments of these two theories to establish a basis for further clarifying which idea—or ideas—of the gift are at work in Leiris's text. This will allow a comparison of the positions taken in the autobiographical text and the 'scientific' notions. This comparison, however, will not attempt to determine the relation between these texts in the sense of an influence that the human sciences may have had on the gestation of the autobiographical text. The idea of a unilateral influence of Bataille on Leiris is untenable, if only because of the inspiration that the former finds in the observations made by Leiris in Africa during his participation in the Dakar-Djibouti Mission (1931–33)—although Bataille does not refer to them in his article on "La Notion de dépense" but in other contemporary works.¹⁸ Instead, I will try to clarify the relationship between these texts by discussing the place of the modes of the gift operative in "Vois! Déjà l'ange ..." in the *narrative organization* of this chapter.

Based on ethnographic studies in Polynesia, Melanesia and the American Northwest, Marcel Mauss in his *Essai sur le don* compares several intra- and intertribal exchange institutions, including the *kula* system in Melanesia described by Malinowski in *Argonauts of the Western Pacific*

(1922) and the *potlatch* institution observed among the natives of the American North West, but also ancient European economic systems such as the Roman and Germanic economies. Mauss understands these forms of exchange as *total social facts*, which affect the totality of a society; in addition to their economic dimension, they also have social and religious dimensions. According to Mauss, the essence of giving is the establishment and maintenance of collective social bonds (between clans or between families). It is the inherent power of the objects given that creates these bonds, because “in the things exchanged [...] there is a certain power which forces them to circulate, to be given away and to be repaid”.¹⁹ The basis of social relations thus consists of a series of reciprocal exchanges—exchanges that are apparently voluntary and disinterested, but basically obligatory and self-interested. They are punctuated by three distinct moments distanced in time: the *obligation to give*, the *obligation to receive* and the *obligation to repay*. The reception of a gift almost inevitably calls for a counter-gift if the receiver is not to lose his or her honour. Mauss’s examples show, in addition to the institutional character of the practices of exchange, a ceremonial character. A particularly radical practice—one that fascinated a large number of European researchers—is the North American *potlatch*.²⁰ As an antagonistically organised exchange system, the *potlatch* is a borderline case, not only because the scale of the benefits may have fatal consequences for the giving society, but also because the ‘prestation’ may take the form of a destruction of goods.²¹

Mauss’s reflections show that a gift cannot be reduced to a single function in social communication. A gift is as much the medium of a communication as its agent (by its inherent strength) and as much as it is the object of the communication. Moreover, the social identity, the *persona* of the donor is defined by his or her performance. Finally, the gift represents a *pars pro toto*, a part of the donor him- or herself: “If things are given and returned it is precisely because one gives and returns ‘respects’ [...]. But in addition in giving them, a man gives himself, and he does so because he owes himself—himself and his possessions—to others.”²²

In addition to this ternary practice of giving, receiving, and counter-giving, Mauss identifies a fourth aspect that is the present made to the gods: the sacrifice. This addition reveals that his study is in a way the complement of an earlier study, the *Essai sur la nature et la fonction du sacrifice* (*Essay on the Nature and Function of Sacrifice*) (1899) that Mauss had written some twenty years before in collaboration with the sociologist Henri Hubert. While the previous study was dedicated to the relationship between men and their gods, the *Essai sur le don* places the relationships between men in the foreground. In both cases, however, the thing given assumes the role of a mediator establishing relations.²³

The guiding idea of Mauss's essay—compiled in his study without doing fieldwork himself—is that the economic systems observed in extra-European or archaic cultures with their three obligations to give, to receive and to give back are also operating in modern industrial societies. From reinforcing such forms of 'prestation', Mauss hopes for a more supportive society based on a less commercialised ethic.

Like Mauss, Bataille also starts from the idea that the capitalist economy does not obey only the principles of the accumulation of goods and utilitarianism.²⁴ He is less fascinated however by the circulation of gifts than by the extreme and agonistic form of giving of the *potlatch* with its risks for the participants. The sumptuary destruction of riches becomes for Bataille—who no more than Mauss had observed the *potlatch* himself—the prime example of a ritual form of squandering. Unlike Mauss, the principal notion for Bataille is not the gift but expenditure. Starting from various forms of dilapidation in foreign cultures as in his own, Bataille develops the idea of a "general economy", according to which activities of accumulation go hand in hand with activities of unproductive consumption. The latter are no less part of social life than the former, they are even, according to Bataille, predominant: luxury, war, games, art, perverse (because non-reproductive) sexuality, ritual sacrifices and bereavement can be understood as activities of immoderate squandering. The sacred and poetry are also placed entirely under the sign of intoxicating expenditure. What constitutes the sacredness of an object is not the rite, but an "operation of loss" ("une operation de perte"):²⁵ the immolation, the bloody destruction of men and animals. Poetry—when it deserves its name—is considered as "synonym for expenditure" ("synonyme de dépense").²⁶ According to Bataille, the significance of these wasting activities is essentially the loss itself; that is why this must be as large as possible. As the examples of sexuality and poetry reveal, the formalized character of the gift obeying culturally specific rules in which Mauss was interested is erased here for the benefit of the central idea of expenditure. In this emphasis on the destruction of goods, Bataille finally adheres much less to Mauss's study of the gift than to his earlier study written with Hubert of sacrifice. This latter also puts forward the argument that the gift supposed to establish a contact between man and the divinity is qualified for this task by the act of its destruction: what turns an object into a sacred sacrifice is its annihilation.²⁷ There is, however, a fundamental difference between Mauss's and Hubert's *Essai sur la nature et la fonction du sacrifice* and Bataille's ideas: these represent not only a radicalization and broadening of the notion of sacred destruction, but strip the sacrifice of all *telos*, of all addressees, since destruction has become gratuitous.

2. THE GIFT IN “VOIS! DÉJÀ L'ANGE ...”: A PURE PRESENT?

Let us return after this excursion into sociological meditations on the gift during the interwar period to the autobiographical text of Leiris and more precisely to the quoted passage of “Vois! Déjà l'ange ...”, which recalls the gift of a mint sprig received in a brothel. On the basis of this brief passage one can identify convergences and differences with respect to the concepts of the gift in Mauss and Bataille. First of all, it must be remembered that the gifts evoked by Leiris are represented, as in Mauss and Bataille, as non-commercial acts, which are appropriate for instituting a universe beyond everyday utilitarian means-purpose relations. Leiris takes up in the quoted passage the praise of the gift launched by Mauss and Bataille in their studies of the 1920s and 1930s. As with Mauss (especially), gifts in “Vois! Déjà l'ange ...” are both the medium and the agent of communication and liaison between people. Gifts for Leiris, however, differ fundamentally from the institutionalized forms of giving described by Mauss: they are neither collective nor reciprocal. Nor do they form part of a regulated system of repeated exchanges—a crucial aspect for Mauss as collective relations require sustained exchange relationships. For Leiris, only unique and unilateral presents, individual, spontaneous and unexpected acts of giving which do not call for a counter-gift, are likely to allow an instantaneous and ephemeral contact with the other person. The indispensable conditions for the intensity of this contact are the singularity and incommensurability of the gift, also in the sense that the gift must in no way be predetermined by culture or religion or—more generally—by a social system. The gifts mentioned in “Vois! Déjà l'ange ...” are essentially non-institutional.

By detaching the gift from the aspect of reciprocity and by accentuating the performative dimension, i.e. the gesture, the *act*—ephemeral and unique—of giving, Leiris seems closer to the thinking of Bataille than to that of Mauss. Yet, the minimalism characterizing the ‘prestations’ in Leiris’s autobiography allows us to measure their distance from Bataille’s “general economy”. Bataille finds the paradigm of expenditure in the extreme form of the *potlatch*, in which enormous riches are consumed. In Leiris, the gifts work according to a homeopathic principle. The lower their exchange value, the greater their emotional effect: They “move us especially because of the fact that their content appears out of proportion to its infinitesimal container” [RG 193].²⁸ Only gestures of giving which seem insignificant arouse in Leiris the—perhaps illusory—feeling of an intense communication:

certain caresses that are completely innocuous, sometimes reduced to an apparently negligible gesture that nevertheless gives the illusion (but was it really an illusion?) that it ties you, just as much as the act of love, to a creature [ibid.].²⁹

The smallness and transience of the objects received and the emphasis on the very act of giving indeed merge gifts and gestures in “*Vois! Déjà l’ange ...*”; as the example of the mint sprig also shows—a thing practically stripped of its thinghood and reduced to the mere gesture of giving. If the gifts received obey a minimalist principle, we also find in Leiris the maximalist idea of expenditure without reserve, yet with regard to the narrator-protagonist himself. Leiris systematically measures his own conduct according to a standard whose highest value is the complete and definitive destruction of his person, the squandering of his life in a complete sacrifice of himself—only, however, to see how far he is from it. Regularly, the weakness of his deportment becomes the target of self-deprecation or exposure of shame. Either Leiris denounces the frustration of his standards that collide with his mediocrity, or he reveals the ridiculousness and incongruity of his attempts to play the generous one.

If the gifts received in “*Vois! Déjà l’ange ...*” are not marked by an excessive expenditure, they are however placed—here as in *Bataille*—under the sign of loss. The transient gestures endowed by Leiris with immeasurable value are always threatened with being revealed as illusion, and the gifts received tend to disappear.³⁰ Leiris also emphasises, in the passage quoted above, the fear that presents received will vanish “like those astonishing objects one possesses in dreams and whose disappearance, upon waking, one deplores (before realizing that in fact the dream itself is the disappointing object one is so sorry not to hold in one’s hand)”. The analogy with the dream also shows that his fear concerns less the given object than the portion of lived experience in relation to which the object, once given, is rather the representation or touchstone of its occurrence, whereas originally it was the medium and agent of communication.

After these rather general observations on the co-presence of different economic orders in Leiris’s text—the minimalist principle of the gifts received and the maximalist principle of the expenditure of personal resources—let us now by way of example turn to the first of the central incidents in the meeting with Khadija narrated in “*Vois! Déjà l’ange ...*” and look more closely at the autobiographical account of the gift of a trinket made by Khadija to the autobiographical protagonist Leiris.³¹

The “basically venal adventure” [RG 195] (“l’aventure à base de vénalité” [RdJ 476]) between the autobiographical hero Leiris and Khadidja the prostitute begins in a fairly secular economy. While Leiris abandons himself for the first time to Khadidja’s stimulating services, their price negotiation is still in full swing. The climax of Leiris’s ecstasy coincides with Khadidja’s proposal of “20 francs”, which concludes their transaction. The transfer from a commercial economic register to a non-commercial one takes place on the day when Khadidja surprises Leiris by offering him an unexpected gift. Leiris decides then to give up his “greedy caution” [RG 203] (“prudence avare” [RdJ 484]) and to expose himself to the health risk of a “total pairing” [ibid.] (“conjugaison totale” [RdJ 483]), to proceed thus to a sexual union by which he wishes to realize “nothing except communication with another person in its most literally naked form” [RG 208] (“rien sinon la communication avec autrui, sous sa forme littéralement la plus nue” [RdJ 489]). It is this day that marks in Leiris’s story the beginning of the “lived myth”. The events of this day are all treated in an economic register. For Leiris, they are placed under the sign of expenditure. Already during a mid-day visit in the brothel, the idea seizes him to

play the generous fellow, who not only spares no expense and therefore gains in popularity, but, in the cordiality that induces him to give excessively, throws all sense of jealous appropriation to the winds [RG 200].³²

This attitude, which illustrates the relationship between gift and prestige analysed by Mauss, leads him to offer Khadidja to his companions—an offer that is however not accepted. The at least partial exit from commercial relations continues in the afternoon. Leiris spends this afternoon with Khadidja, without her requiring him to spend any more money. Leiris interprets this honest and hospitable conduct as the vestiges of a sacred prostitution.³³ He begins to be ashamed of his “reticence toward someone who had just demonstrated to me that there still existed in our day [...] something analogous to what sacred prostitution must have been in the ancient world.” [RG 203]³⁴ To have avoided a physical union for fear of contracting syphilis now appears to him as a lack of generosity.

On his further visit to the brothel that evening, Khadidja, while going about her usual work and encouraging Leiris’s companions to order plenty of beer, slips suddenly and discreetly into his hand a jewel she had found: a pendant in the shape of the ‘Southern Cross’. The jewel is worthless, a common trinket. But not only its worthlessness ennobles it in Leiris’s eyes. Above all, the fact that it was not bought, either by Leiris or by Khadidja, makes it suitable to become the object of a mythical economy

that stretches even beyond the Algerian episode.³⁵ The pendant becomes the tangible and transportable object into which the “lived myth” is condensed. On his return to France, Leiris offers it—without any calculation, as he first stresses and then calls into question—to his wife instead of a conventional souvenir and as a metonymical *pars pro toto* sacrifice of his own person:³⁶

Beyond any opportunistic cunning, it also seemed to me that by presenting as a gift this jewel that had its own history, I was making a more valid gesture than if I had simply given the traditional gift of a travel souvenir: the object that had come to me without my buying it represented my own property and in some sense a portion of myself which I was giving up [...]. [RG 224]³⁷

However the vague hope—or calculation?—that his wife would return this jewel to him after his death by putting it in his coffin as “a talisman or a viaticum” [RG 226] (un talisman ou [...] un viatique [RdJ 505]), as he himself had previously placed five dice endowed with a pseudo-hermetic significance in the coffin of his friend Colette Peignot, is dashed. Under the Occupation, the Gestapo confiscates the jewel—as the chapter reports—during a raid that could have well cost the life of Leiris and his family. In this way, the ‘Southern Cross’—once more, in a way, a metonymical sacrifice of his person—returns to the secular market of non-sacred transactions. At the same time, Leiris’s gift to his wife is preserved from the destiny of being converted into an exchange of goods, the initial gift being rewarded after a temporary interval by an equivalent object. It remains an absolute gift, not integrated into a system of exchange, of any kind whatsoever, the impossible figure of a pure *present* because not aiming at a return, not opening a temporal interval to be closed by a counter-gift.

So far, the very partial reading of the chapter from an economic perspective confirms what we observed in the introductory quotation about the reception of a mint sprig: Leiris participates in the Maussian and Batallian praise of the gift, but adopts a position on his own which, while converging in certain respects with their theories, differs significantly from them. His position combines the idea of generosity without ends (in the double meaning of the word) as regards the attitude of the giver with an extreme minimalism as regards the given object, which tends to dissolve in the performative and ephemeral act of giving. Leiris’s text thus develops a proper conception of the gift, a reflection of theoretical value, even if it is sketched out in an autobiographical text and even if it is more or less implicitly formulated and without postulating a validity other than one restricted to the autobiographical author-narrator-protagonist. Still, this conception represents, beside Mauss and Bataille

and in dialogue with them, a third possibility of thinking the gift.³⁸ It should be stressed, however, that this conception is far from appearing as a solid truth at least of a personal kind (and even less an objective truth), because it is as much queried as it is sketched. Statements in the text concerning a gift or giving attitude are regularly subject to questioning, which translates into the recurrent use of the question mark or the rhetorical figure of the comparison ('x is like y', 'it is as if'). This last figure is also used in the passage quoted above on the reception of the mint sprig, where the idea that the gift is the proof of an intimate communication depends on the mediating word 'as' ('comme'). Now, comparison is a figure which seems simple but which proves to be complex because, while excluding an identity relation, it incites speculation on the scope and the epistemological status of the similarities between the entities compared. Already by the syntax, the gift is thus explored in Leiris in all its ambivalence. Another very Leirisian syntactic figure is the phrase "it seems to me" ("il me semble") used in the sentence quoted above on the transmission of the 'Southern Cross' to Leiris's wife. If we can speak of a position of Leiris's, it is projected thus practically 'within brackets'. At best, it is a precarious affirmation, permanently weakened by the syntactic structure and endangered as we will see in what follows by the overflow of the narrative itself.

4. ECONOMIES OF THE TEXT

I have traced, with a great deal of simplification, different ways of depicting lived experience in "Vois! Déjà l'ange ..." according to economic models (which extend far beyond the passages discussed here). In the following, I would like to determine the exact role of the reference to gift economies in this chapter—a chapter, which, far from being limited to the events of the Algerian episode, summons and links a multitude of other biographical elements. This narrative structure, rich in interrelated ramifications, is one of the main stylistic features of the first three volumes of *La Règle du jeu*, which Philippe Lejeune accurately analyses as a "braided writing" ("écriture tressée") and a "system of delay" ("système du délai").³⁹ This structure of the text, however, seems to contrast strongly as much with the idea of the gift as pure presence as with what Leiris calls a 'lived myth'. This contrast appears at least if one considers a passage at the very end of the chapter, which opposes—once again in Leiris's recurring mode of questioning—to the observation of a ubiquitous "morose utilitarianism" ("utilitarisme chagrin" [RdJ 519]) the rare moments of a true human agreement:

[...] can I despair completely [...] as long as this world appears to me as the place where a quantity, even if infinitesimal, of acts and words came into being in which a human accord was formulated in a pure state, so to speak, and which (even if only in the lightning flash of a fortunate throw of the dice) organized themselves into crystals of a design so perfect they made me cry out in admiration? [RG 240]⁴⁰

If certain moments spent with Khadidja, such as her giving a present to Leiris, had just the quality of being organized in “crystals of a design so perfect”, and if, at another level, the “braided writing” itself tends to organize the different moments of life “in crystals” and to thereby create a structure whose constituents are connected so as to repeat the same pattern according to a regular network, this tendency of textual crystallization is offset by the abundance of biographical material deployed. This abundance cannot but produce some ‘profanation’ of the mythical by placing the banal next to the singular and by narrating much less glorious episodes that follow the meeting with Khadidja. In effect, the multitude of events evoked leads regularly to the co-presence of different, hardly compatible notions of the gift. For example, the hope of the autobiographical protagonist Leiris that his wife would give back the ‘Southern Cross’ to him after his death suggests the idea of a circularity of the gift that opposes the insistence on its non-reciprocity.

Above all, a movement of doubt (a doubt not only suggested by rhetorical figures, but also explicitly formulated) affects as much the postulate of the pureness of Khadidja’s gift as the assessment of the autobiographical protagonist’s reaction to this gift. In fact, Khadidja’s gift becomes the object of a severe query: was it really so disinterested? Or was it much rather a calculated investment? And wouldn’t it have been more fitting and human to repay this gift with “something more tangible than a dreamily romantic thought” [RG 231] (“quelque chose de plus tangible qu’une pensée du type fleur bleue” [RdJ 511])? Wasn’t the idea of offering Khadidja to his companions ultimately far from an existential generosity and more like the behaviour of a soldier (“reître”) towards a “prize” (“une prise”) [RG 229 (RdJ 508)]? Were not the protagonists Leiris and Khadidja acting continually in different economic systems, and did they not fail to meet each other in seemingly non-commercial gifts and gestures far more than in the regulated trade of venal love? The ability of a gift to create an intense connection between individuals appears just as dubious as the idea of an existential expenditure conducive to illusions. Eventually, not only does the emotional ‘value’ of Khadidja’s gift become unstable in the course of the chapter, but also the ‘value’ of the (sociological) interpretations of the gift as establishing a world apart, beyond the commercialized

relationships of everyday life. The excessive movement of Leiris's writing brings about a re-evaluation not only of the lived experience by deploying the ambivalence of the gifts received and of the attitudes adopted or ascribed, but also of the terminology applied to this experience.

One could describe this process of devaluation, from which only the 'unmediated communication' of the sex with Khadija remains excluded, in the terms of Mauss's and Hubert's study of sacrifice, thus as a phase of desacralisation required after a sacred gift. But we can also assume that the historical context of the writing of the chapter, here the 1950s, contributes to questioning the application of a mythical vocabulary to this Algerian episode. Not only had Leiris's post-war ethnographical works sensitized him to the 'Muslim question'.⁴¹ In addition, the Algerian War, which was to break out a few months after the publication of the chapter in *Les Temps modernes* in 1955, already loomed large and presumably affected Leiris's writing, even if the text does not mention this conflict. More generally, the retrospective critical assessment of his attitude towards Khadidja as naive romanticism can be read against the backdrop of Leiris's anti-colonial and anti-racist commitment during the 1950s.

In this context, it is significant that a large part of the multiple biographical material connected by Leiris's "braided writing" to the Algerian episode consists of self-quotations and reminiscences that are roughly contemporary with the episode. The adventures of the meeting with Khadidja are reflected in memories related to Leiris's friend Colette Peignot, Bataille's girlfriend, who died in November 1938. Together with this friendship a much wider context is evoked: the context of the interwar period's ethnographical, sociological and artistic fascination with the sacred. To this context belong also the many self-citations in "Vois! Déjà l'ange ...", which are extracted from the notes Leiris took in the late 1930s "for a book on the sacred" ("en vue d'un livre sur le sacré" [*RdJ* 1644; trans. RS]) and which he assembled under the working title "L'homme sans honneur" ("The man without honour")—notes marked considerably by his exchanges with Bataille and Peignot.⁴² The key term discussed in "L'homme sans honneur" is the 'sacred', but we also find in these notes an attempt to define 'the myth'. While the term 'myth' seems in the right place in "L'homme sans honneur", it appears to be rather obsolete in the context of *La Règle du jeu*, as one of the notable differences of this text with respect to the earlier writings of Leiris is the replacement of the reference to the sacred by more secular registers like play and the game.⁴³ Indeed, the term 'lived myth' with its sacral connotations belongs much more to the interwar period than to the 1950s, when Leiris was composing the second volume of *La Règle du jeu*. To a considerable extent, the organization of the story of the Algerian episode

in “Vois! Déjà l’ange ...” with its qualification as ‘lived myth’ thus draws on concepts that had significantly lost their attraction during the Second World War and seem worn out in the 1950s.

In view of the relative obsolescence of the terminology of the sacred in “Vois! Déjà l’ange ...”, the formal presentation of the chapter as a kind of “memorial wake” [RG 235] (“une sorte de veillée *in memoriam*” [RdJ 515]) is significant. At first sight, the chapter appears principally as a vigil for the meeting with Khadidja (and also for Colette Peignot). Yet, it can be read just as much—especially given the strong movement of doubt in the chapter—as a vigil in memory of the concept of the ‘lived myth’ itself and even more generally of the intellectual cosmos of the interwar period. This cosmos, which for Leiris was marked by the reflection on the sacred (of everyday life) can be characterized—at least as far as the circle of intellectuals around him is concerned—by a search for alternatives to Western social life, alternatives sought preferably in the so-called primitive cultures and especially in their sacrificial practices. It is in this context that the interest in non-commercial modes of exchange flourished, too. In particular the works of Mauss and Bataille on the gift bear testimony of this search. Their reflections, like those of Leiris of the 1930s which are quoted in “Vois! Déjà l’ange ...”, take their rise from a shared intellectual context marked by the accentuated interest in forms of social cohesion other than those displayed by capitalism or communism, forms located especially in cultures outside Europe or archaic ones.⁴⁴ Eventually, the reflection on the gift in “Vois! Déjà l’ange ...” appears not only as the conjuring of a distant event in the past but as a kind of exploration of notions related to that era and now turned historical. If the ‘Southern Cross’ was for the protagonist Leiris, as long as he carried it in his pocket, “like a coin attesting to a vanished era or the entry token to a paradise of my invention” [RG 229] (“comme une monnaie attestant une époque disparue ou comme le jeton d’entrée d’un paradis de mon invention” [RdJ 509]), it epitomizes in the chapter not only the vanished encounter with Khadidja, but also the now vanished era in which the idea of a ‘lived myth’ installed by a ‘pure gift’ seemed still valid.

How then—to conclude—can we define the relationship between Leiris’s autobiographical text and a specific ‘knowledge’, here that of the sociological and anthropological reflection on the gift, and a theoretical language related to it? As we have seen, the autobiographical text puts forth a certain notion of the gift which ultimately proves to be indebted to a bygone intellectual context shared with other ‘thinkers of the gift’ like Mauss and Bataille, with whom Leiris had in common—despite a number of differences between their theories—a desire to project the gift as a counter-economy superior to commercial transactions. I have tried to

show how Leiris's narrative not only displays the aporias generated by this praise of the gift, but also reflects on its historicity. Hence, the difficulty of referring in a reading of Leiris to a certain theoretical discourse consists, as Philippe Lejeune has already pointed out, of the fact that theoretical concepts or discourses only represent—in his words—“the starting point of Leiris's writing”. They are then drawn into the textual movement of Leiris's autobiographies, which explores them at the level of writing itself.

At the level of the *writing*, the transience not only of the gifts received in this chapter but also of the instability of their evaluation develops an inexhaustible productivity. With regard to the movement of writing, one could actually speak of a gift according to the Bataillien maximalist logic of expenditure, not only because of the sheer abundance of material connected to the Algerian episode, but also with regard to the destructive moment of the writing: the narrative presents itself as the destruction of a memory, which, once externalized, *given* in the text, for Leiris will become irretrievable: “will bury itself in a recess of my memory without my ever being able, probably, to grasp it again” [RG 215].⁴⁵ We remain with the gift of Leiris's autobiographies—certainly no small gift—which Leiris confers the hope that they generate—beyond the “braided writing” with his “system of delay”, which like the gift embedded in a circle of exchange opens up a temporary interval—moments of pure presence and ‘true communication’ with the outside world which is the reader.

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NOTES

- 1 Trans. R.S.; original: "[L]’œuvre de Leiris est construite systématiquement et intentionnellement selon des procédés de base qui exploitent les structures mises en évidence par les ‘sciences humaines’. Et sa connaissance des sciences humaines n’est pas, comme pour beaucoup de critiques, apprentissage livresque et superficiel, mais expérience vécue originellement dans un *travail* [...]. Toute analyse de son texte qui voudrait appliquer une de ces ‘méthodes’ dont nous avons aujourd’hui l’habitude s’exposerait à une double erreur: donner comme point d’arrivée du discours critique ce qui était simplement le point de départ de l’écriture de Leiris; ou plutôt l’un des points de départ, enlevant au texte de Leiris la complexité de son tressage. [...] Son écriture se construit à partir de et après la

- plupart des langages critiques actuellement pratiqués, qui sont donc à la fois nécessaires à connaître pour le lire (et en ce sens le recours à ces langages est indispensable pour toute introduction à la lecture de Leiris), mais assez peu utiles à une interprétation.” Lejeune 1975a, 154.
- 2 The conceptualization of this relationship is particularly at the heart of Michel Foucault’s work, even though he develops diverging views over the course of his work. While his writings before *Les mots et les choses* [*The Order of Things*] conceive of literature rather as a counter-discourse with the ability to subversively elude the rules that structure the order of discourse, in *Les mots et les choses* (1966) and *L’Archéologie du savoir* [*The Archaeology of Knowledge*] (1969), literature – with the exception of the work of de Sade and some other happy few – seems to have lost this singular atopic power, the discursive order conditioning what is classified as ‘literature’ no less than what is classified as ‘theoretical discourse’.
 - 3 For an overview cf. Roland Borgards, Harald Neumeyer, Nicolas Pethes, and Yvonne Wübben (eds).
 - 4 See note 2.
 - 5 See e.g. the work of Joseph Vogl, who terms his approach ‘poetics of knowledge’ (Poetologie des Wissens). Cf. among his various articles on this topic the latest one, “Poetologie des Wissens”.
 - 6 Cf. e.g. Clark and Rossini (eds).
 - 7 See e.g. the works of Hayden White and of Bruno Latour. Among recent studies cf. e.g. Hallyn.
 - 8 Cf. e.g. Hörisch.
 - 9 Cf. Wagner-Egelhaaf, 18–62, and Smith and Watson, 204–206, especially the latter, however, rather with regard to autobiography criticism than autobiographical writing itself.
 - 10 Lejeune 1975a, 151.
 - 11 I understand the terms ‘economy’ and ‘economic’ in a broad sense designating all transactions between people concerning goods (material/immaterial, ‘natural’/symbolic) and including also transactions tinged with sacredness.
 - 12 Leiris 2017, 212, original: Leiris 2003, 493. Subsequently, the quotations from this book will be referenced both for the French original and the English translation by the initials *Rdj* for the French and *RG* for the English version followed by the page number.
 - 13 Original: “Je veux, moi, raconter l’histoire de Khadidja ou plutôt *mon* histoire avec Khadidja, fille publique que j’ai rencontrée quand j’étais soldat à Revoil Béni-Ounif [...]” [*Rdj*462].
 - 14 Original: “récit [...] d’une aventure très vulgaire dans laquelle il est entré pas mal d’exotisme de cinéma mais qui – grâce à la complicité de quelques apparences – se hausse pour moi jusqu’à la dignité d’un mythe vécu” [*Rdj*463].
 - 15 Original: “Cette fille [...] m’offrit avec beaucoup de politesse un petit brin de menthe et je lui sus un gré infini de son attention, attachant un prix immense à ces menus dons, qui, venus à point nommé, sont comme la preuve qu’à un instant déterminé le monde extérieur nous a répondu et sont ensuite conservés avec une légère crainte qu’ils ne s’évanouissent tels ces objets étonnants qu’on possédait en rêve et dont, au réveil, on déplore la disparition (avant de constater que c’est le rêve lui-même qui est cet objet décevant qu’on se désole de ne pas tenir dans sa main)” [*Rdj*469].
 - 16 Cf. Bourdieu, 177. Bourdieu identifies the time interval between gift and counter-gift as a condition for the illusory idea that a given object may represent a unilateral gift that does not form part of an exchange of equivalents. Contrast this with Derrida, who is not fooled either by the lure involved in the so-called ‘gift exchange’, but sketches ‘the possibility of the impossible’. According to him, a true gift requires not only the absence of a counter-gift, but also the absence of any trace left by it. It must not be remembered that

- a gift has taken place. See the analysis of Mauss's essay on the gift by Jacques Derrida in *Donner le temps I: La fausse monnaie*.
- 17 The praise of an unproductive expenditure characterizes the writings of Bataille well before this article. It is also part of his 'heterology'. Cf. e.g. his article "Le bas matérialisme et la gnose".
 - 18 Such in his paper on sacral rites presented on 5 February 1938 at the Collège de sociologie. Cf. Bataille, "Attraction et répulsion II: La structure sociale", 158–159.
 - 19 Mauss 1954, 41. Original: "dans les choses [...] il y a une vertu qui force les dons à circuler, à être donnés et à être rendus". Mauss 1989, 214.
 - 20 Marcel Mauss uses the Native American term 'potlatch' to designate, generally and independently of a particular culture, institutional forms of exchange representing the "agonistic type of total prestation". Hence, he also denotes the *kula* of the Trobriands as *pollatch*. See *ibid.*, 5 (Original: *ibid.*, 151–153).
 - 21 The English translation keeps Mauss's French term 'prestation', as there is no convenient English word to capture its full range of meanings, which encompasses any thing or series of things given freely or obligatory as a gift or in exchange, but also services and entertainments. Cf. "Translator's Note" in Mauss 1954, xi.
 - 22 Mauss 1954, 45 (Original: „Si on donne les choses et les rend, c'est parce qu'on *se* donne et *se* rend ,des respects' [...]. Mais aussi c'est qu'on *se* donne en donnant, et si on *se* donne, c'est parce qu'on *se* ,doit' – soi et son bien – aux autres.“ Mauss 1989, 227).
 - 23 In this, both gift and sacrifice are different from the "blood alliance", which operates a direct fusion between human life and divine life: "une fusion directe de la vie humaine et de la vie divine". Hubert and Mauss, 38–39.
 - 24 Numerous studies discuss the importance of Mauss's book on the gift for Bataille. Cf. e.g. Leveratto.
 - 25 Bataille. 'La notion de dépense', 9.
 - 26 *Ibid.*, 10.
 - 27 Cf. Hubert and Mauss.
 - 28 Original: "émeuvent d'autant que leur contenu paraît hors de proportion avec leur infime contenant" [*Rdj*474].
 - 29 Original: "certaines caresses tout à fait anodine, parfois réduites à un geste apparemment négligeable quoique donnant l'illusion (mais était-ce bien une illusion?) qu'il vous lie, autant que l'acte amoureux, à une créature" [*Rdj*474].
 - 30 Leiris's file for "'Vois! Déjà l'ange'" mentions yet another gift which is not evoked in this chapter: the ring that Leiris received from the Ethiopian Asammanètch during his stay in Gondar in 1932 [*Rdj*1192]. On his return Leiris offers this jewel to his wife. She wears it – like the 'Southern Cross', the gift of Khadidja, for a certain time attached to a small chain on her wrist until she loses it the day that Leiris passes his examinations in Abyssinian. Cf. Leiris 1992, 312.
 - 31 For a more detailed analysis of all three events cf. my study of the figurations of the body in Leiris's autobiographies: Strätling, 283–313.
 - 32 Original: "faire le généreux, celui qui [...] ne regarde pas à la dépense et gagne ainsi en popularité, mais, dans la cordialité qui le porta à donner avec excès, fait litière de tout sentiment d'appropriation jalouse" [*Rdj*483–484].
 - 33 Cf. Poitry, 208 for Leiris's ideal of a sacred prostitution.
 - 34 Original: "réticence envers quelqu'un qui venait de me démontrer qu'il existe encore de nos jours [...] quelque chose analogue à ce que devait être dans le monde antique la prostitution sacrée" [*Rdj*481].
 - 35 For the different facets of the symbolism of the cross in "'Vois! Déjà l'ange ...'" cf. Poitry, 214–222.
 - 36 With Henri Hubert and Marcel Mauss one would have to term this 'offrande' (offering)

- and not 'sacrifice', because the offered object is not destroyed. Cf. Hubert and Mauss.
- 37 Original: "Hors de toute ruse opportuniste, il me semblait qu'en faisant don de ce bijou qui avait son histoire, j'accomplissais un geste plus valable que si j'avais simplement procédé à l'offrande traditionnelle du souvenir de voyage: l'objet qui m'était venu sans que je l'eusse acheté représentait mon bien propre et comme une portion de moi-même dont je me défaisais [...]" [Rdj 504] Guy Poitry shows that the text suggests reading the transmission of Khadidja's present to his wife as the passage from a 'left sacred' to a 'right sacred', thus a reading according to the ethnographic categories so popular in the works of the Collège de Sociologie (Poitry, 229). Cf. by way of example Caillois, 364–402.
- 38 How rich Leiris's autobiographical reflection is in view of a theory of the gift becomes particularly evident if it is considered in the light of the postmodern deconstruction of the gift, notably Jacques Derrida's attempt to 'think the gift'. In fact, Leiris anticipates in many ways Derrida's ideas. I cannot discuss at length the parallels in this article, but I would like to mention at least that Derrida also tries to conceive the pure gift as an unforeseeable event that interrupts circular exchanges and insists on the performativity of the gift. See also above note 16.
- 39 Lejeune 1975a, in particular 155–158 and 160, for Leiris's "écriture tressée" see esp. Lejeune 1975b, 270, 279.
- 40 Original: "[...] puis-je tout à fait désespérer [...] tant que ce monde m'apparaît le lieu où ont surgi une quantité même infinitésimale de gestes et de mots en lesquels un accord humain se formulait, si l'on peut dire, à l'état pur et qui (fût-ce dans le seul éclair d'un coup heureux de dés) s'organisaient en cristaux d'un dessin si parfait qu'ils me faisaient crier merveille?" [Rdj 519–520].
- 41 Cf. Leiris's note in his personal diary of 26th January 1948. Leiris 1992, 458.
- 42 Cf. "Notes pour «Le Sacré dans la vie quotidienne» et «L'homme sans honneur»" in *Rdj* 1644–1654.
- 43 Such a shift from the sacral register to a more secular one like play/game took place also in the social sciences around Leiris. See e.g. the shift in the works of Roger Caillois from studies of myth in *Le mythe et l'homme* (1938) and of the sacred in *L'homme et le sacré* (1939) published in the interwar period to an essay on games in *Les Jeux et les hommes: le masque et le vertige* published after the war in 1958, thus three years after the publication of "«Vois! Déjà l'ange ...»".
- 44 See Keller's particularly rich study on the interest in the gift in France and Germany in the interwar period; Keller, 344–373.
- 45 Original: "s'enterra dans un recoin de ma mémoire sans que, probablement, [...] jamais [pouvoir] la ressaisir" [Rdj 495].