

[NOTE: A somewhat different version of this epistolary drama originally appeared in *The Journal of Experimental Fiction—Raymond Federman Special Issue 23* (Spring 2002): 275-348.]

Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man(ic)-Depressive, or Journey to Chaos Theory as a First Principle of a New Realist Literary Aesthetic

An Epistolary Drama in Four Acts

**By
Larry McCaffery**

Playgiarized from original epistolary texts by Raymond Federman
Concept, set designs, editorial preface and end notes by Larry McCaffery
Additional unattributed textual samples selected by Raymond Federman from literary works by others.
Directed by Larry McCaffery
Music: Prefacing Act One: Charlie Parker, “Young and Drunk at 4 a.m.”;
Prefacing Act Two: Miles Davis, “Birth of the Cool”;
Prefacing Act Three: Sonny Rollins, “Tenor Madness”;
Prefacing Act Four: Parker’s “Lover Man” (extended remix version)
Ambient (“background”

) music for all three acts: miscellaneous samples from various compositions by Charlie Parker.

THE PLAYERS

RAYMOND FEDERMAN (RF)

). An aspiring young literary artist who is subject to wildly fluctuating mood swings—and whose education and growth to artistic maturity is chronicled in this play.

GEORGE TASHIMA (GT), A Japanese-American who is a couple of years older than RF, GT is RF’s closest friend at Columbia University and the person to whom RF’s epistolary monologues are addressed. GT played his first role as RF’s buddy and literary mentor when they were both serving in the Army during the Korean War; as the play unfolds, he departs for Paris to write the first great Japanese-American novel about the relocation of his family from California to camps in Arizona during WWII.

GLORIA. A sexy married woman RF is having an affair with. Gloria is one of the parade of women, RF claims to be madly in love with during his formative years.

JANE. A young woman poet RF is briefly involved with at Columbia.

CRISTINE. A young woman writer whom RF met in a creative writing class at Columbia and became immediately infatuated with. But RF’s feelings for her are clearly based on more than mere lust, and as such she represents an important shift towards a more mature conception of love.

JOHN WADLEIGH, Along with RF and GT, Wadleigh is the third of the young ambitious writers who meet and become friends at Columbia University and later begin referring to themselves as “The Three Musketeers of Literature.” Wadleigh is the villain of the play whose commercial success RF envies before gradually

recognizing that the path of true literary artistry must lead him in an entirely different direction.

DANIEL DODSON. A Creative Writing Professor at Columbia University.

WILLIAM OWENS. The Young Artist's most influential creative writing teacher at Columbia University.

RICKY (ERICA). A beautiful, wealthy woman whom RF meets at UCLA, she is the embodiment of true love whom RF eventually marries.

[CAMEO APPEARANCES]: T. S. Eliot, J. Alfred Prufrock, Samuel Beckett, William Carlos Williams, Aldous Huxley, Jean Genet, Humbert Humbert, William Carlos Williams, Allen Ginsberg, Ezra Pound, James Joyce, and miscellaneous others.

THE SETTING:

The repressive America of the late 1950s. A series of tiny one-room apartments in which the Young Artist lives and writes (to establish how utterly indistinguishable these processes are, the sets for all the scenes should be identical, other than changes in several visual details—in his clothes, books, posters he's hung on the walls, etc.— to help indicate the processes of change, education and maturation being undergone by the Young Artist). These claustrophobic rooms are the sorts of desperately empty dwelling spaces in which only students and the truly impoverished ever resort to living in. The furnishings are absolutely minimalist: at the back of the room at center stage an uncomfortable-looking cot whose main function is obviously not sleeping but a place to set a cheap hi fi record player and a heap of old 78 jazz recordings by Dexter Gordon, Wardell Gray, Sonny Rollins, especially Charlie Parker and other hip cats who dominated the bebop scene of the 40s and 50s and whose music will be heard continuously throughout the play; dominating the room at center stage is a long wooden table which is mainly used as a desk by the Young Artist, who sits facing the audience behind an old manual typewriter, furiously typing, pausing only to occasionally re-light a steady stream of foul-smelling Gauloises he chain smokes throughout the play, or to get up and change the hi fi when a tune concludes. At the very opening of each scene, a scrim will be lowered momentarily upon which will be projected replicas of the opening passages from each original letters providing the text for the monologues [directors may at their discretion decide to use these scrims to display other materials—photographs, book covers, passages from RF's other correspondence, etc.]

ACT I. A LOVER'S (DRUNKEN) DISCOURSE—AN OVERTURE OF SORTS

While the audience settles into their seats, a selection of old jazz records by Bud Powell, Dizzy, Monk, Miles, Pres, Dexter Gordon, Wardell Gray, and others from the 40s and 50s is heard playing from behind the curtain, as are the clearly audible sounds of somebody noisily getting up and walking over to change each record—a ritual that will be repeated before each act. Just before the curtain rises a final tune is heard in its entirety. For this opening act, it's Charlie Parker's "Young and Drunk at 4 a.m.," which drifts out from behind the curtain, sounding just the way RF's old scratched up 78 actually sounded back then on his cheap hi-fi, but it's lovely nonetheless.

Hey there!

one of these days when

Dear George, I am sorry to be so late answering the letter that you never wrote, but I have been very busy lately. The weather is fine, I am bored. I play golf, tennis, no sex alas, and no intellectualism, but who gives a damn after all, I'm only going to be teacher, so I cannot expect to much of life. If I were a nice kid, and we were only friends that's the sort of letter I would write you....But I am more than your friend, I am your lover, (Don't show this to anyone, my reputation would be ruined.)

Sometimes, often, I ask myself this question, What the Hell am I doing here? Tell you the truth I don't know. What a waste. I haven't been able to write one line since last I saw you. The season started with...Not with a whimper, with a bang. The people, the fools, the hypocrites came rushing in with their new clothes, new cars, more money, talking golf and business, looking older eventhough they try to look younger, the women particularly, and I stood there on a hill watching them

Setting: A warm June evening in 1956¹ at Copake Country Club, a summer resort for middle-class Jews located in the Catskills, where RF is working as a waiter during his summer vacation. A cramped, dimly lit cabin illuminated by a single electric light, which hangs down from the ceiling. Everything about this cabin reflects the poverty, loneliness and desperation which afflict the Young Artist at the outset of the play—and which are the source of his strong but unformed determination to transform himself into one of those major (and no doubt controversial) literary figures who were in the news all the time back in the 50s, writers like Hemingway, Ginsberg and Kerouac, Mailer, Salinger and even RF's beloved Camus, figures who actually mattered enough back then that people actually felt it was important to read their works, talk about them. Why many young Americans actually regarded writers as heroic figures and the literary profession as an almost sacred calling. Certainly the Young Artist feels this way, although it is also obvious that his journey to literary fame and fortune will not be an easy one to travel—particularly here at the outset.

The room is full of dark recesses and ominous shadows which the bare bulb seems to emphasize rather than dispel. At stage left is a doorway that will never be opened; at the rear of center stage a large window providing the room's only other connection with the outside world has been bolted closed by wooden shutters. The window is flanked by two large black and white posters: the first is the famous shot of Albert Camus sitting in his sports car, smoking a cigarette, the other is an old playbill announcing a Charlie Parker concert in Detroit. The long wooden table at front stage center is littered with an array of novels, poetry volumes, and magazines, whose chaotic overflow onto the floor has somehow resulted in symmetrical piles of hugely oversized literary works which reach halfway to the cabin's ceiling; these twin pillars will grow upwards in each act, reinforcing the general sense of claustrophobia and literalizing the impact literature is having on the Young Artist's creative life; the names of individual titles and authors offer hints about which works are currently exerting the most influence on his conception of life and literary art. Future directors may use their

1 The original epistolary fiction is undated but according to RF, it must have been written in mid-summer 1956.

discretion in selected titles and authors to emphasize, but for Act I the following works should definitely appear as oversized books: Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man, The Collected Poems of Yeats, Eliot, and William Carlos Williams, Howl, Boris Vian's J'irai cracher sur vos tombes, Long Day's Journey into Night, and several French titles, including Sartre's La Nausée and Qu'est-ce que la littérature, Camus' L'étranger, Le Mythe de Sisyphe, La Peste, and Baudelaire's Les Fleurs du Mal). A number of similarly oversized magazines are also visible, including Colliers, The Saturday Evening Post, and several copies (somewhat larger than the rest) of The New Yorker testifying to Young Artist's unrealistic, wildly ambitious dreams for commercial success and critical recognition.

Sitting alone behind an old Olivetti manual typewriter and facing the audience is the Young Artist, who is looking very young indeed in a Columbia University sweat shirt and shorts, his hair in the crew-cut style popular in the 50s. In between the deep, meditative drags he takes of the stream of Gauloises, RF uses his index fingers to peck away on the typewriter, which the audience now recognizes as the source of the clicking sounds they have been hearing.

RF is a manically depressive French-American Jew and aspiring writer who has suffered unspeakable losses at the hands of the perpetrators of the Unforgivable Enormity while still living in France during WWII; he subsequently endured further losses (of his home and country, of his native tongue) when in the late 1940s he went into exile to America, where he has struggled (mostly in vain) to overcome poverty, loneliness, ignorance, and a sense of alienation which has been exaggerated due to the disruptive effects of his incredibly thick French accent which tends to turn everything he says into a kind of marmalade or verbal delirium. As the play opens, RF is a 28-year-old sophomore literature major who has just mainlined his first hit of serious literature and found the rush was good.

More than good, it was a high that gave him access to an entire new world full of exotic formal areas to explore and thematic issues to ponder and examine; most important of all, it offered an entire universe new world of language he could begin using—the multidimensional universe of literary language, with its eloquence and symbolic potential, its beauty and profundity. These were qualities that RF, with his inarticulate longings and his flights of reverie that he couldn't begin to describe even to himself, desperately needed so he could begin telling and retelling his life-story, a story he sensed contained the very essence of the 20 century.

Unfortunately this was also a story whose power, poignancy, and richness and profundity couldn't possibly be told as long as he was held captive inside the prison house of language in which he was trapped, an utterly restrictive space that wasn't even so much a house as a cramped room or a closet built out of his own clumsy rhetoric, his limited vocabulary, his egregious mispronunciations which he consciously exaggerated so that his remarks would be laughed at rather than merely derided, the obscenities and slang which flowed off his tongue as natural by products of their source.

In short, this literary rush has put him directly in touch with the key that can open up doorways that will finally release the torrent of stories he wanted to tell about the traumas of his youth, his passions, his speculations about the meaning of life and death, his hopes, his lusts—all of which he has buried deeply inside “Frenchy,” the persona he has invented for himself as the good-natured, but basically ignorant foreigner whose dark needy eyes provide the only glimpse into his troubled inner soul, with its desperate longing for love and communication. He delivers the opening lines of his first monologue in an almost comically thick French accent, frequently punctuating phrases with theatrical hand gestures.

One of these days when . . . ²

[he hesitates, takes another deep drag off his cigarette, which he crushes in an ashtray already overflowing with cigarette butts.]

Hey there!

Dear George,

I am sorry to be so late answering the letter that you never wrote³, but I have been very busy lately. The weather is fine. I am bored. I play golf, tennis, no sex alas, and no intellectualism, but who gives a damn after all, I’m only going to be a teacher, so I cannot expect too much of life. If I were a nice kid, and you were only friendsthat’s the sort of letter I would write you But I am more than your friend, I am your lover, (Don’t show this to anyone, my reputation would be ruined.)

Sometimes, often, I ask myself this question, What the hell am I doing Here?⁴ Tell you the truth I don’t know. What a waste. I haven’t been able to write one line since last I saw you. The season started with ... Not

2 These mysterious opening lines of the play may be interpreted variously, but there’s no doubt that they serve as a highly compressed, poetic introduction of many of the major formal and thematic motifs—incoherence, failure, time (particularly its fleeting nature), a reflexive foregrounding of itself as pure artifice rather than as reflection of some preexisting condition, the anticipation of narrative that never is provided, the uselessness of language, etc.—which are developed in the “main body” of the play.

3 Readers familiar with RF’s later work will notice that even here, in some of his very earliest correspondence, he is intuitively transforming what would normally be simply an “ordinary” letter to a friend into the kind of imaginative discourse that I would later refer to (in Federman, A to X-X-X-X) as “epistolary fiction” (see the “Epistolary Fiction” entry in Appendix I). In this instance, he opens this letter to GT by playfully apologizing for not having responded sooner to a letter that was never written in the first place! What follows in the rest of this opening paragraph is typical Federman playfulness—his catalogue of the dull routine of his summer (“...very busy . . . weather is fine,” etc.) turns out to be only what he would have written in his letter to GT if they were only friends (which they are not)—thus establishing precisely the same conditional status for this “real fictitious discourse” that he later uses at the outset of all his novels.

4 This same fundamental questioning of the meaning of existence would be one of the things that drew RF to the work of Samuel Beckett about the same time. RF would later introduce variations of this same question into all of his own major works. For instance, early in TIOLI RF’s alter ego is described as having arrived in America “my head bent down towards my hands (not even crying) simply asking myself what the fuck am I doing here” (n.p.).

with a whimper, with a bang.⁵ The people, the fools, the hypocrites came rushing in with their new clothes, new cars, more money, talking golf and business, looking older eventhough they try to look younger, the women particularly, and I stood there on a hill watching them, smiling at them and shaking their sweaty hands. I wanted to vomit. Money, what I must do for money, I wish I was good looking I would prostitute myself.⁶

I got a letter from Jane yesterday, [Fortunaly, (I mean fortunately) she keeps me going⁷. Have you seen the book review of the New York times this week. There was a translation of a poem by Mallarme⁸, the same poem I translated just before I left. Jane thinks my translation is far more superior. Are you writing. I hope not because if you say yes I'll be sick.

I have to write to John⁹. I think Mr. Wadleigh is going to make it this year, about time we have a publish man among us. I think I'll try for second best. Let me know what happens. Anyway I'll drop a line to John this week. Are you working, I mean as a gardener or what ever you're suppose to be doing in your mansion working for the wealthy Mr. Hill with his marvellous daughter that you can't wait to get your pants off for, don't bullshit me my friend, we know one another so well that it's impossible for us to conceal anythiing from one another, and that's why I love you kid? Still reading Joyce. I don't really understand what the man is talking about, but I am drunk on words¹⁰ he fascinates. I think I have found my master¹¹. You better look for one quick, you need it

George, George, Help. I am lost. I don't know if I'll be able to last the summer here. I came to a conclusion that in order to survive,

5 The reference here is to the concluding lines of Eliot's "The Hollow Men." Commentators have thus far not noted Eliot's impact on RF's own work, but RF's many references to (and plagiarisms of) Eliot throughout his correspondence from this period indicate that Eliot had a significant impact on his sensibility early on.

6 This is the first of many references in the play to the corrupting power of money—a temptation that RF must reject lest he become the equivalent of a "literary prostitute" (the fate of the villainous commercial hack, John Wadleigh, for example).

7 Jane's brief entrance is followed so quickly by her exit here that audiences may fail to recognize that she is the first embodiment of false love that RF must learn to reject before he is ready to become a mature literary artist. In this case, her falseness lays not so much "in her" as inside of RF, who at this stage still believes (incorrectly) that artistic inspiration, the source of what keeps one going, exists outside himself.

8 The Mallarme poem RF had translated was an untitled sonnet, "Une negresse par le demon secouee" (Negress Shaken by the Demon).

9 RF here introduces a trope that will recur in most of his monologues—i.e., the expression of RF's intending to write Wadleigh (rather than having already written him) —as a means of establishing Wadleigh's role here as artistic foil. Throughout the remainder of the play RF will provide accounts of Wadleigh's willingness to compromise his artistry in exchange for commercial success—a temptation that RF must confront and then reject.

10 RF is probably borrowing this "word-drunk" motif from Baudelaire's well-known prose poem, "Be always drunken" which reads in part: "Be always drunken . . . With wine, with poetry, or with virtue, as you will. But be drunken." Throughout the remainder of the play RF will often be depicted as being falling-down drunk with poetry (and with women), but far less susceptible to intoxicating effects of virtue or wine.

11 With this reference to Joyce, RF has now introduced the 20th century's most influential poet (Eliot) and fiction writer (Joyce), both of whom represent key features of modernism that RF eventually must reject. For example, Joyce—with his lyricism, remarkable range of voices and literary forms, his vast range of erudition and literary reference, his psychological and intellectual insights, and above all the astonishing linguistic precision and magnificent control of such an enormous variety of styles and subject matter— represents a kind of exalted literary mastery that RF ultimately rejects (in IV, II) as being unsuited to his strengths as an artist.

I must write¹², it is as essential for me as sex, and if I do not write I become frustrated and sexless. I can't wait to get back to school and Dodson, I got a crew cut by the way, if Dodson would see me he would lose complete faith in me. I hope that it grows back quick. I have been deserted by all of manking, even my cousin¹³ is associating with the mob. I am sorry, I know I am a snob, but it is too difficult for Me to lower myself, I hate dirt. If you can do it good for you, we'll meet anyway up there, on the path of glory, I'll get there on my hands and knees while you'll drive there in a cadillac¹⁴, but when the two of us will confront Satan, I'll be the one He will pat on the head and say to: "The world is now divided in three portions, (I mean the literary world,) Homer, Joyce And federman. While you will be classified with Rockefeller, Naimark and Tashimanism.

I wish you would read more of sartre this summer, you would comprehend life a little more deeply and also you would be able to discuss with me the finer points of life. EXISTENTIALISM¹⁵
Or FEDERMAN

I don't know if I'll be able to to come and see you again before the end of the summer, I'll try, but If you can I will be very grateful to you, because I have to have someone with whom I can argue, even if it is meaningless.

Anyway drop me a line soon. Love darling. You one and only
Competitor. And master.

Raymind¹⁶

CURTAIN

ACT II. BORN TO RUN, NOT TO THINK

12 This insistence that not only is his writing connected with life but that writing is necessary for his life is one of the important commonalties between RF's work and Beckett's; note too that these remarks are immediately followed by the reference to the other essential in life—sex, whose significance RF will later claim to be crucial to creativity.

13 RF's cousin Robert, with whom he will share an apartment in Manhattan upon his return to Columbia University.

14 References to automobiles as symbolic manifestations of his freedom and status will be a recurrent motif in many RF novels; see, for example, his treatment of "The Buick Special" in *Take It or Leave It*.

15 Although he had never studied literature seriously until his arrival at Columbia University in 1954, RF had been an avid reader ever since childhood and had already read a surprising amount of works by Sartre, Camus, and other leading French existentialists by the early 1950s. In an early scene in *Take It or Leave It*, for example, he proudly notes that by the time he had joined the Army during the Korean War, he was already suffering from "bookmadness":

I couldn't stop reading (books) it was like a sickness a real bookmadness. Anything. Even sometimes In English but mostly French stuff. (What a show off) anything I could get my hands on. Me (at the Time) I had already read all of CAMUS and a few JEAN-PAUL SARTRE (imagine!) and even some of LA BEAUVOIR. . . . La Nausee SSS Les Chemins de la liberte SSS (in three volumes) SSS Huis Clos SSS Tous les hommes sont mortels SSS etcetera SSS even Le deuxieme sexe SSS La Putain respectueuse SSS Le Mythe de Sisyphe (*TIOLI*, n.p.)

16 RF's apparent Freudian slip here seems to unconsciously suggest that he is still under the sway of GT's emphasis on rational analysis (mind); in the remainder of the play, he begins to recognize that mind is far less important to his own artistic sensibility than the emotions, the heart, the GUTS.

SCENE I. Unloosening the language . . .¹⁷

Scene: Six months later, the first day of classes at Columbia University in early February 1957. A small cramped one-room apartment located at 306 W. 105 St. in Manhattan. Before the curtain rises, the audience again hears the sounds of typing which mix with those of someone noisily fiddling with a hi fi set until Miles Davis's "Birth of the Cool" coolly starts up, producing exactly the cool effect the Young Artist needs right now to help him keep the exotic aesthetic stew RFD's got simmering in his creative pot from boiling over. A scrim is lowered displaying a replica of the opening passage of the epistolary monologue we are about to hear:

As the curtain rises, we see RF standing in front of his hi-fi set (now perched on a cheap sofa which has replaced the cot) waiting for "Birth of the Cool" to finish before putting on another Charlie Parker tune. He's now wearing a vaguely European equivalent of a college outfit and sporting much longer hair, which he's swept into a pompadour recently popularized by James Dean. At the rear of the apartment, the single window is no longer closed—though it might just as well be, since all that's visible through the dirty windowpanes is the blank wall of the tenement building next door¹⁸. On either side of the window posters of T.S. Eliot, Aldous Huxley, Sartre, Eugene O'Neill, and (larger than the rest), Samuel Beckett have joined Parker and Camus on the back wall. As he glides back to the wooden table where his Olivetti sits amidst the growing literary clutter awaiting his command to pour forth his in-blood once again, RF bobs his head in time to the music and snaps his fingers in a gesture whose significance would be instantly

¹⁷ In addition to providing the usual sort of exposition we expect to find early on in a play, the first scene in Act II offers the Young Artist his first opportunity to articulate his own views about the nature of art and the creative process. These opinions are offered in two separate passages where RF is sharply criticizing the literary methods and assumption of his two friends, GT and Wadleigh. The first occurs early in the monologue when RF mocks GT's emphasis on the spiritual and rational nature of art, and derides his belief in the primacy of THINKING in the creative process. The second follows somewhat later, when RF argues that the reason Wadleigh's fiction is not being accepted for publication is largely due to his foolish belief (one also held by GT) that personal experience must be the basis for all serious literature. As would be typical of RF later work, these materials are presented but are not actually present, since they owe their "existence" to RF's characteristic reliance on formal strategies of indirection and absence rather than direct statement. He achieves this by using the same guise he would later use in *Journey to Chaos* and all of his later critical writings—i.e., the development of an alleged critique of someone else's work, which really is just an excuse for him to present an analysis of and rationale for his own writing practices, permitting his own viewpoints to emerge in a conditional manner, or by implication. Thus, in addition to supplying insights about topics crucial to aesthetic he is developing, piece-by-piece, during the course of the play, he does so via experimental formal methods that will characterize much of his later writings. In so doing, he also offers us our first clear glimpse down the road he will soon be embarking on as a literary artist.

¹⁸ Directors may wish to devise some means of suggesting that this is the same wall before which Beckett's Malone sits, although this is strictly optional.

recognized by any of the other cool cats from the period¹⁹ At one end of the table a space has been cleared for a cheap plastic replica of Rodin's "The Thinker," which is balanced at the other end by a replica of the Eiffel Tower; these are tourist trinkets sent by GT to his (abandoned friend) soon after his arrival in Paris, where he plans to pursue his own dream of becoming a famous novelist. Adding to the chaos of books and magazines are several oversized books with titles and authors we haven't seen before (Long Day's Journey into Night, Waiting for Godot, Molière's Collected Plays, Ionesco's Rhinoceros, etc.) Before he resumes typing, he lights another Gauloise, inhales deeply, and then begins his monologue; he delivers his lines in his instantly recognizable thick French accent, although as will be the case in each succeeding act, his mispronunciations are slightly less egregious and less frequent; likewise, the vocabulary and phrasings he uses to construct himself will subtly but steadily improve in each act. Even more noticeable is the increasing sophistication of the content of these monologues, the expanding range of literary references and allusions, the confidence with which he addresses complex matters of aesthetics and philosophy, as befits a young artist who seems to be emerging from his cocoon of ignorance and adolescence and maturing before our very eyes. Reinforcing these changes are the sounds of the typewriter pounding steadily away as they move across the page chaotically and digressively, giving voice to wild flights of fancy and speculation, their furious sense of movement at times having to slow down while negotiating sudden detours into regions of self-doubt and occasionally even suicidal depression, but soon regaining their sense of manic momentum, as the rush forward in an insistent staccato rhythm.

19 One possible decoding of this semiological gesture might be paraphrased as something like, "Crazy, daddy-o, that Miles is one crazy cat with wings who's been flying real high since he left Bird's nest—just like me, dig? We're both like real real gone, daddy-o . . ." and so forth.

February 1957

George. Mon Cheri.

Sorry. At last I find a moment to write²⁰. Not that I have anything important to say.. but whatever it is it must be said²¹, Well,, as excepted²²I got six AAAAAAs. again this semester, I am beginning to believe that I am half a genius. What's your opinion on this. I tried my best, I swear to get at least a B to break the monotony but it was useless. Your friend Owens gave me an A and I had a long talk with him. He really thinks quite highly of my writing because my dear boy I am not like you, I am pouring out the stuff, story after story, and dammit they are beginning to make sense end be good, I believe Im going to be published before John even, not that I want to but if they force me to it I cannot refuse. No joking, kid My writing is really moving forward, During the one week that we had between sessions, I sat down and wrote everyday for five or sex hours. I just finished a long, long shortstory²³ about two old people in a home for old people, It was an idea that was in my head for quite awhile now.I wanted to write something tout a fait objective, leaving myself out of it my emotions, my sex,my life even, and I succeeded

20 The opening lines of Act II continue the motif of TIME, its fleeting nature, the preciousness of each moment, the resolve of the Young Artist to use it wisely—RF will use almost exactly these same lines as the opening of the monologue in IV, ii, where this topic reaches its impassioned culmination.

21 These lines are typical of the absurdist word play RF was encountering about this time in the theaters of Manhattan. And in fact, these monologues are absolutely saturated with lines whose meanings are literally absurd, nonsensical, paradoxical. Thus, just as he did at the outset of Act I, he casts the opening lines of the monologue in Act II in the form of a playful oxymoron (i.e., he doesn't have anything important to say but needs to say it anyway). But the presence of this sort of absurdist rhetoric can only partially be attributed to the impact which the plays of Beckett and other playwrights were having on the Young Artist during this period; a more important source likely has a more personal origin dating back to the years following his arrival in America, where he was forced to endure the frustrations of attempting to communicate in a non-native language. This would naturally have resulted in RF mangling the lingo in all sorts of ways, no doubt often with comic results, in the process of trying to express himself. And although this experience must have made RF constantly feel embarrassed, frustrated, and extremely self-conscious about his verbal deficiencies, his later exposure at Columbia University to Freud, the surrealists, and absurdist helped RF begin to see ways that such "mis-use" of language could be used to his advantage as a writer. Thus, he began to recognize that placing his own linguistic trips, stutters, and falls within an aesthetic contest produced all sorts of interesting options—for example, this could create a kind of running commentary about the misuse of language and the failure of words to communicate properly, which was certainly one of the hottest topics of the absurdist of the 50s. More positively and ultimately more importantly, developing compositional strategies designed to deliberately leave himself more open to producing such "mistakes"—for example, deliberately refusing to correct typo's and other "mistakes" that would naturally occur as he rushed ahead creating his epistolary monologues in a near frenzy of excitement—has become by the time of the play an important feature of his aesthetic, one analogous to the automatic writing practices of the surrealists and Dadaists. In this and other ways, RF for the first time began to recognize that consciously exaggerating his own verbal pratfalls not only helped shield him from derision but became a kind of textual machine capable of producing a stream of rich, often hilarious, and frequently revealing neologisms and absurdist phrasings. Thus, what initially seemed to be a frustrating and constricting limitation became for the mature artist a means of actually OPENING UP the language, a conscious strategy to allow its multiplexes, unexpected puns, and word-play to emerge in a manner similar to what we find in Finnegans Wake, some of the work of the OULIPO group, and other modernist experiments.

22 Yet another example of what might be called a "found puns" produced by a "typo."

23 Another absurdist oxymoron of the sort that RF delighted in using in his later work.

creating two characters I never knew before, they are alive, they think, talk, live and die. Personally I am very pleased with it, but you know how I am always pleased with every line I write. However I feel that I am developing self-criticism, and also my language is unloosening itself, I mean I begin to play with words, with ideas, and also with form. For example that last story, the one I mentioned, I have tried something entirely new about form. Are you familiar with the books of Aldous Huxley (Point and Counterpoint²⁴ Antic Hay) if not read them, well you will be quite impressed by the form and what this man has to say.

Your last letter disgusted me²⁵, I counted the word 'Think' in it twenty-two times and each time misspelled. Go ahead you jerk, think, skink, pink, fink, think or whatever you want to call it. and when you'll stop thinking, you'll realize that you are too old to write, that your hands are too shaky to be able to type, and that your eyes cannot see any longer. Well., then what will you do, all your deep

24 Although Huxley remained best known in the 50s for his dystopian novel, *Brave New World* (1932), his earlier experiments with authorial self-consciousness and reflexivity, such as *Antic Hay* (1932) and particularly *Point Counter Point* (1928) were, along with Beckett's work, influential examples of metafiction..

25 This outburst, and the one that follows a bit later about Wadleigh, are the first of several moments in the play where RF uses his two friends as punching bags to relieve his own doubts and anxieties concerning issues he himself is obviously struggling with. These attacks on his friends also allow RF to reveal some of the ways his own literary aesthetic differs from the realistic paradigm of art and literary creation which had largely dominated Western thinking since at least the rise of Romanticism and whose origins can be traced back to the Renaissance, or even ancient Greece. The key features of this paradigm that RF addresses might be summarized as follows:

In order to produce serious art, artists FIRST must go out and LIVE LIFE DIRECTLY, thereby creating a store of personal experiences which can be drawn upon later in the work (hence the related need for artists to avoid the TRAP of cloistering themselves inside the ivory towered prisons of academia); having stored up a sufficient amount of "content" or subject matter, artists then WITHDRAW from the world to THINK ABOUT these materials, a process involving carefully EXAMINING and OBJECTIFYING these experiences, breaking them down into their constituent elements and subjecting these to the RATIONAL ANALYSIS, all these eventually leading to an UNDERSTANDING of their nature and significance, of how these components relate to one another (causally, psychologically, historically, morally, etc.), and of how these elements can be most effectively arranged dramatically and so that their most essential TRUTHS (normally concealed beneath reality's confused exterior) can be revealed; THEN AND ONLY THEN are artists ready to begin actually writing or painting or whatever other process is demanded by their art form in transforming REALITY'S messy incoherence, ugliness, unfathomable mysteries and irrelevancies into the orderly realm of art, whose resultant beauty, harmony and meaning emerge via the imposition of the various formal mechanisms.

In his initial outburst directed at GT, RF offers a view of the creative process that contrasts this paradigm in several specific ways. In his view, the first duty of the artist is simply to START MAKING ART. To spend time THINKING about what he is GOING TO CREATE is to waste precious TIME that could and should be spent DOING THE CREATION; moreover, too much thinking may lead to PROCRASTINATION, DELAYS, or, the worst fate of all for any artist, NEVER BEGINNING AT ALL (a fate he narrowly avoids in Act III, I). His remarks in this monologue and elsewhere make it clear that RF primarily values literature on the basis of its emotional intensity rather than for its intellectual complexity or any "truths" it claims to present; it's equally evident that he endorses spontaneity and a blatant, even joyous subjectivity rather than control and objectivity (points he will explore in considerable greater detail in III, II). But his real point isn't to denigrate the intellect or to suggest that artists should NOT THINK about the art they are creating, but that they should THINK WHILE THEY ARE CREATING ART. His offering of Rodin's "The Thinker" as an exemplar of "a thinker, in the process of thinking, but in a work of art" directly anticipates the sort of self-reflexives and metafictional impulses that would characterize his own work, as well as that of many of his postmodernist contemporaries a decade later.

thinking do for you. Go, come now, sit down and write, no more excuses, I believe you have seen and experience enough to be able to write it down and if you find then that you need more, then think, but first write, , , , Idiot

I'll give you a good example of this 'thinking' in the process of creating. [*he reaches over and picks up the cheap statue of Rodin's "The Thinker" and considers it thoughtfully before resuming.*] Rodin was no idiot when he sculpted his "Le Penseur." He knew that the artist must think but why not do it while working. And so that's what he gave us, ironically enough, the statue of a thinker in the process of thinking, but in a work of art. Do the same my dear George.. Meanwhile why don't you go and see this statue. I believe it's still in Paris, unless the French have sold it for good, at the black market.

[the Parker song concludes as he is stubbing out his cigarette in the overflowing ash tray; so he stands and walks over to the sofa to change the record so that soon the scratchy squeaks of another Parker song are heard; he smiles, snaps his stack of books on his table; he sits down, he lights another cigarette and plunges in once more to the task of reinventing himself.]

Spoke with John this week, he said he will take care of sending you the package you have been expecting for so long. He is supposed to come up to my place pick up War and Peace by a certain guy called Tolstoy.(Thanks for the information I'll have to read this sometime). He told me also that he would get, you a Shakespeare book., I would part from mine but, well you know how books are dear to me/ Poor soul, why the hell don't you start reading in French Or is the french too difficult for you, or have you more excuses not to want to learn.

Notice kid I am throwing all the shit back at you because I believe it's time we had a father and son talk, you being the kid and I the old man. I don't give a damn how much you preach to me about life, and going to work to an office to learn (learn I mean) life and all that goes with it that's a bunch of shit and you know it's not because you had to work at Mr. Hill or shall I say Papa Hill for a few months that you have learn, more about the outside life. Bull shit, I say, I still believe in the ivory tower for the Artiste. And I am beginning to see what is wrong with John's writing and why he cannot publish anything²⁶. He is in the outside world as you call it away from the academic crap but he does not SEE that world, perhaps because he doesn't want to, I don't know if he's too busy looking for something else or blind or what, so he goes on writing books about the Korean war, long ago forgotten and which nobody wants to hear about. Let's face reality kid, you and I and John should start writing about what we know and feel, and what we have seen and heard, and I tell you we all have plenty to tell. This is what I believe I have been doing for the past few months and this is why Owens this morning (I saw him in the street) stopped me and sad, I quote word for word . . . "I read your last story, very fine I think this one will go someplace. . . . I showed it to Mrs. Rowman Editor of Collier and she is going to try her best to get it published for you (unfortunately not in Collier because perhaps you have not heard but three or four magazine went out of business in the States among which Collier. That was quite a blow for the shortstory market²⁷.) "Well"" he said, "I

26 RF here attacks Wadleigh for accepting the usual notion that great art involves the transformation of actual REALITY or LIFE actually experienced by the author (note the many ironies involved in the fact that RF—who had already built up several lifetimes of experiences even before arriving in America—is the one arguing this point). What's important for the artist, RF argues, isn't one's LIFE EXPERIENCES, nor REALITY AT ALL but the artist's particular VISION of things, the way these experiences are TOLD or PRESENTED.

27 Although only touched on briefly here, the disappearance during the late 50s of so many numerous com-

see you are moving ahead with each new story, I am looking forward to one of your novel.... Etc.”

Now I know what you are going to say another tap on my ego stop masturbating your ego and all that shit²⁸. I know it kid. but meanwhile I have been thinking about a Novel²⁹.... Yes my boy thinking and as soon as I finish school in June with a diploma and all and diploma and all As I'm going to get started and for good, even if I have to starve for awhile, or sell the golf club or the car, naturally I'll try not to, a little golf and driving around the block never hurt the creative spirit.

Sex, *ca va toujours*³⁰. I have difficulty keeping track of all my women. Gloria, I should say the forgotten Gloria, I am trying hard not to think of her because it hurts inside, a bit, not much though, was in Florida. My other girl, Cherie³¹, is in Haiti...I expect a nice present when she gets back. Jane, see her rarely, *passee*, AND THE rest, well hell with it.

I'm going to see the plays³² with Jean Louis Barrault who is in New York, for a few

commercial literary magazines had a major impact on American writing whose effects continue to be felt today. The whole story behind this decline is fascinating and enormously complicated, but the bottom line is that whereas up until this decline it was actually possible for moderately successful fiction writers to earn a living by selling their work to magazine like *Colliers*, *The Saturday Evening Post* and many others; by the mid 60s that market had all but dried up, meaning that other than the occasional maverick exceptions such as Donald Barthelme, serious writers were forced to either enter the academy, give in to commercial pressures, or abandon any hope of making a living as a writer. Ironically enough, while the viewpoints RF expresses here about the unsuitability of Wadleigh's work for publication turns out to be completely erroneous—in the next scene we discover that Wadleigh becomes the first of the 3 Literary Musketeers to have a story accepted and by Act III he has already launched a career as a commercial novelist under the pseudonym Oliver Lange; they are highly effective in demonstrating why his own work will never achieve the commercial success or public recognition enjoyed by his rival.

28 This passage contains several key revelations about RF's creative process that will become central features of his literary aesthetic. Among these:—the playful yet insistence of self-absorption, egotism and narcissism (“One must have the courage of one's own narcissism,” RF would later boast); masturbation as his central metaphor for artistic creation (like masturbation, art is always a “second-hand” experience); the need for total self commitment and sacrifice in the service of art—which is balanced by the beneficial (and even essential) role that relaxation, sports, sex and physical activities play in providing the necessary distance from one's work (the inevitable isolation that results from complete self-absorption is dangerous not only from a personal standpoint but because it makes self-evaluation about one's work impossible).

29 This is one of the earlier extent references to RF's first novelist treatment of his life story, a manuscript entitled *AND I FOLLOWED MY SHADOW* which he indeed began before departing for graduate school and continued working on intermittently for several years until he eventually abandoned it, in part because his work on Beckett had convinced him that his story required a radically different approach than the semi-realistic methods he had been using.

30 Sex will continue to be a major point of contention between RF and GT, with RF's constant announcements about sexual conquests and being madly and desperately “in love” being countered by GT's claims that RF deceives himself by confusing pure animal lust for love. Note the way that this passage reveals how self-deceived and immature RF's notions of love really are.

31 Christine, the lover who followed Gloria (and precedes Ricky), who followed Jane.

32 One of many passing reference to the theater that helps establish its impact on the Young Artist's literary sensibility. The mid-50s was, of course, probably the most exciting period in the history of American theater, with major works appearing on Broadway by Williams, Inge, and Miller and with the enormously exciting presentations Off-Broadway by the giants of the European avant-garde theater such as Ionesco, Pinter, Arabal,

meeks. Saw St. Joan with that Irish Bitch, not bad at all. Saw the Long Journey into night, O'neil. Quite a peice of work but to long, I suppose because of the title. School again today spring Semester. I am taking Burrell, just the novel course. A course in modern French poetry in graduate school another grad course on Moliere" Owens shotstories, naturally, and craft of fiction with him also and one course in philosophy, Æeathttiec,.. (correct the spelling, please. I am not to good at it yet I still need you or John to correct my stories, but who gives a shit as long as they are written).

I don't think I shall return to Copake this summer, it's time I began to starve properly. I'll try to get a Job in New York, perhaps in an office like you suggested to see life or perhaps drive a truck, is that better, and do some writing.

I am very glad to see that you are plaming a long trip around the world, I hope you make it and also find yourself a piece of ass along the way that would clear your mind from a few things. Meanwhile why don't you go see around Rue Saint Denis³³ and get a load of your chest.,let me know what the prices are now, just curiosity, And stip, I mean stop, talking to me about love and spiritual intercourse. Sex, is a good word, that people, Hill and others especially should not be scared of.

Well I have to stop for now. I feel better now that I have spoken to you the way I meant to for a long time, I have to run³⁴. I must go to the areoport to pick up Cristing coming back from Haiti with my presents.

Write soon kid. I miss you terribly. I need you, I mean I need yo intellectual and even physical support.

Your friend andonly friend.. Ton grand ami

Raymonde³⁵

and of course Samuel Beckett, whose work RF was first exposed to in 1956 when he attended a performance of *Waiting for Godot* starring Bert Lahr and E.G. Marshall.

33 The best-known red light district of Paris, this is a street where customers can stroll along inspecting ladies of the night who are standing in the street or in doorways.

34 In a typical Federmanesque move, one of the most crucial motifs in the play (and in RF's life-story generally) is introduced here in what appears to be a casual aside. This motif is, of course, that of running (with its implications of constant frantic movement, of covering as much "ground" as possible, etc.), or more precisely, of having to run (with its suggestions of fatality, of being pursued, the need for escape from fate, the Nazis, the past, memory or other personal demons), of being born to run (the latter phrase is, of course, usually associated with the title of Bruce Springsteen's landmark 1975 album; for an extended discussion of the uncanny similarities between the careers and works of RF and Bruce Springsteen, see my preface to the reissue of Federman's landmark 1975 novel, *Take It or Leave It*, "On the Road (not Taken) with RF's TIOLI"). Thus, this passage can be specifically seen as anticipating, among many other examples, RF's description of an episode that took place in Paris soon after the closet incident—one which he has said sums up the nature of his life-story as well as any other: "the lady holds his hand, while they walk to the police station only a few blocks away, but suddenly RF pulls his hand away and runs. He hears the lady shouting after him, "They'll catch you, they'll catch. RF is still running" (McCaffery and Federman, "Chronology for RF: A Collaborative History Fiction," Federman, A to X-X-X-X, p. 57.

35 This punning equation of himself with the so-called "real world" (i.e., Ray=monde/world) balances the earlier equation of himself with the world of the mind, which concluded Act I (i.e., Ray=mind) and thus completes the introduction of the two binary terms that will struggle for dominance inside his creative imagination

CURTAIN

ACT II. Birth (just a little late) of the Cool . . .

The scene: the same apartment in NYC at the conclusion of the spring semester 1957. Posters of Proust, Celine, and Pound have joined the other figures on the back wall, and there's several new oversized volumes prominently displayed on either side of the desk as well. On his 29th birthday, the Young Artist announces his plans to leave behind the comfort and security he has found at Columbia University and embark on the next phase of his artistic development.

New York, May 15, 1957

Mon Vieux George

I know, I know, I am a bastard. I have not written for a Hell of a long time, but so have you, or so have you not. So let's skip the crap and the excuses and go down to business.

First: you ... John told me about the last letter he got from you, ((O By the way, before I forget. Our friend John Wadleigh called me last night guess what. Yes, you got it ... John just sold his first story³⁶. You bet I'm happy, because I was scared I would sell a story before him and would have been a bitch of a thing to do to him.) Well, he told me about you thinking of giving up writing and going into the medical world. What can I say. Naturally, I know you have thought this thing out carefully, but to tell you the truth it hurts me. Because, because, well you know I had great hopes in you as a writer. But perhaps you are the smart guy, and this does not mean you have to give up writing completely. I know an old famous poet - Carlos - I believe is his name, Oh. yes, Carlos Williams, who is a doctor and a great poet at the same time. I just read his last book of poems called A Journey to love quite fine, quite.

George I know whatever you decide you have done so after long and careful deliberation and hours of strenuous thinking, so I am all for you boy, except that I wish we could have sat down and talk together about it. Well, anyway you are coming back, and do hope we will be able to talk again like the old days. That is if I am still around. And with this let's go on to the main body of this letter:

Second: ME. . . I am still writing, and for that matter like mad. I have now an agent. Owens himself sent me to his agent because he felt it was time. Naturally I have not yet sold anything, and I don't expect to in the near future, but I am writing. Owens wants me to start immediately on a novel, and I intent to³⁷ As you know I am finishing in June with flying colors. I feel a little empty now, perhaps sad to leave the good old Columbia, and Dodson, and Owens, and Burrell ... and etc... because with the rest of the play.

36 This revelation completes the portrayal of Wadleigh as the embodiment of the degraded version of the literary artist willing to sell his soul for commercial success; while the critique RF offered in the previous scene was erroneous concerning the commercial value of Wadleigh's work, his analysis of its artistic value remains valid.

37 The novel RF would later abandon, AND I FOLLOWED MY SHADOW, referred to earlier.

, then I felt safe, I felt I did not have to be by myself and think for myself, and also they would pat me on the back once in a while and I would feel good, and I would go home to my little square room and feel good and sorry for myself, and at time I would shed a little warm tear for myself....Well, no more. I am a man, a college graduate now. I was twenty-nine, today. Well, well...I'm catching up with you. I am writing. I'm writing. I don't mean to show you up, but I really feel that I am coming into my own, and you know why, because like you, although I did not have to go to Europe or anywhere else to find this out, I did some thinking, some serious thinking. I discovered that it is not enough just to put down words that look pretty on the sheet of paper, well typewritten, those words have to say something, the writer who puts those words down has to be aware of the world around him and the people in that world. I know this must sound like a lot of shit to you. But Proust said "The world was not created once, but as many times as there are artists in it." I must see the world with my own eyes, my own individual little blinking eyes, have my own vision of the world and put down what I see and feel and as Pound Ezra said "Think occasionally." I have reread the stupid stories I used to write when you were still in New York and I saw how idiotic and shallow I was in those days. I was drunk then with my writing because I could write one or two nice sentences in English., after all it was good for me I was a foreigner. No more. No more. I hope you believe me. I am writing one short story after another now, but let me tell you something, it's hard. It's hard work, I thought writing was easy just wait for the inspiration to come and that's it. What a lot of shit that was. I just finished a 30 pages short story³⁸ I believe my most serious piece of writing. But this is going to surprise you. I don't think it's good. What I mean, I don't think the story is complete. It is finished but not complete, I have not fulfilled all the demands of the situation and the characters and everything in other words, I am not satisfied with it. Anyway the story was discussed in Owens class last Tuesday and received quite a fine reception. Owens spoke with me about it after class and he told me that this material was what I should begin my novel with. The story is about Detroit about a young foreigner who gets involved with young colored musicians. It is the education of a young man, toward a new life, it is the shattering of his dreams into reality, it is the problem of negroes in America seen from the eyes of this foreigner who discovers the problem as he learns the language... And many other things I want to put in this novel. The reason I am telling you about it, is that I have a need to talk about it now, and also because I hope that you would also stop thinking about yourself and think about your friend, write sometimes, and tell me what you think of my idea.

Tell me also what you intent to do now. Do you expect to come back soon? Tell me all those things I am interested after all I am your friend. I hope. Even though I am a prick a bastard a sonofabitch a selfish idiot, perhaps a salaud too. How is that for a piece of self-analysis.

Now, to go on with Me. The great news is this. I was awarded an 1800 dollar fellowsip³⁹ at

38 This early unpublished story, "Over to the East Side," is actually one of the most skillful of the early stories RF wrote in the 50s and directly anticipates some of the narrative material in *Double or Nothing*.

39 Yet another of RF's brilliant "found puns":

U.C.L.A. Los Angeles. I will be teaching two courses in French literature there in the fall., they also pay the trip out there for me, 150 dollars. I will also be able to study for my M.A. I have been receiving some very fine letters from the head of the department there, Mr. Lapp. And they are all looking forward to greet me in September as one of their colleagues. I am all excited and disappointed. Naturally I am glad because with this money and still the G.I. Bill I will not have to work while going to school and I believe I'll be able to do some writing, on the novel. I am finishing on June fourth, and then for the rest of the summer I am going to work on the novel, perhaps not writing it immediately, but doing some thinking. I still don't know what I will do this summer. I might stay in New York, I might go back to Copake, and do my thinking on the golf course or while screwing gloria. By the way I have not seen her since Christmas. It was a clean break, it hurts still a little bite, and I know she thinks of me. Because this morning for my birthday I received a card with only one initial on it G. I think it was very sweet of her to remember me this way. Oh. love. What a disease. I just read *The Magic Mountain* so you know why I have all those pains in my chest.

I have been fooling around a little with quite a girl who I believe you know, (believe ... the i before the e ...) I know. her name is Cristine Callan, the girl with all As⁴⁰. A genius, a very fine writer, a bitch, a tough sort of bitch, but who can be very sweet at the same time well we've been sort of going together you know what I mean. I asked her to marry me. she refused. I think she was smart anyway she will decide one of those days. Perhaps she will come with me to California when I go sometimes in August. I hope you are back before that if not, I will make a point to come to New York just to see you. Or better perhaps you will come to Los Angeles to see me. Well we'll see. You see mon vieux george life must go on, or I should say life is only beginning, a little late for us, but perhaps it's better. I don't know. Fight. I miss you kid, I wish I could sit down and have long talk with you. Remember last year about this time what fine evenings we spent talking about stupidity, you and me.

Raymond

CURTAIN

ACT II—IN A SILENT WAY: MADNESS IN THE MIDST OF THE DARKNESS

Scene I. I Can't go on (the Road not Taken)

40 The same girlfriend RF had referred to in the previous scene. Note the way this scene dramatizes how much he still has to learn about love, this despite his recently acquired literary knowledge—the references to Thomas Mann and the “disease” of love, etc. In this regard, the most revealing detail is the Young Artist's almost casual remark about having proposed marriage to Christine, even though he has only been “foolin around a little” with her (fortunately, she refuses!). Note, too, the ways that RF's comments about Christine's grades at school suggest her potential to satisfy more than merely RF's carnal lusts; more subtly, they also call attention to her status here as a purely literary invention by pointing to the alphabetical “bits” responsible for her existence as language (“the girl with all As”).

Sonny Rollins' "Tenor Madness" reaches its concluding crescendo and then the curtain rises in the dead of November night in 1957 to reveal the barely visible darkened silhouette of RF performing his record-changing ritual in the cramped office room in the UCLA Comparative Literature Department which he uses as a living space. RF shuffles slowly towards the table and sits down once more before the typewriter as a Parker tune begins to circulate around the room, which is illuminated only by the distant glow of the Los Angeles skyline drifting in through the back window. He sits motionless for several moments before striking a single key, which produces a sound that fades away slowly into the darkness. A few more key strokes are heard, the clicks and clacks seem strained, exhausted, anguished, mournful, as if each life's note is being summoned up out of the blackness of the room only with the greatest difficulty. After a few additional strokes, the dark outline of RF pauses and then the jazz and typewriter sounds abruptly cease completely. After several moments, the indistinct, muffled sounds of RF sighing, clearing his throat, etc. We hear him angrily rip from the typewriter the sheet he has been writing, the outline of the page he holds up is somehow clearly visible, almost blinding in its blank whiteness. He seems to examine its contents for a moment before he begins speaking slowly . . .

THE EASIEST OF COURSE WOULD BE TO BLOW my BRAINS OUT-----

bang! [accompanied by loud sound of a gunshot]

[a long pause as the roar of sound slowly dissipates]

THIS WAY we WOULDN'T HAVE TO BEGIN

Another long pause, then the barely discernable sounds of the Charlie Parker tune resume and slowly become louder and louder throughout the rest of the scene. As the house lights gradually are turned up, we see the Young Artist reach down and pick up a new piece of paper, which he angrily slides into position in the typewriter. He pauses for another moment, and then emphatically strikes the typewriter producing a tentative harsh click; then another determined click is heard, and another, the sounds slowly gathering rhythm and momentum until the pace has become frantic, furious, until their sounds and those of Parker reach an almost deafening crescendo . . .

CURTAIN

Scene II—Comes a voice [saying] . . . I must go on⁴¹

In the moments before the curtain rises, Miles Davis's "Kind of Blue" is finishing as the scrim is lowered containing the opening passage of Federman's epistolary monologue for this scene:

41 Thomas Hartl provided some of the endnotes for this act.

Daytime a few days later. As the curtain rises we see RF again going through his record-changing routine in the same room, which now seems transformed from the somber scene we saw previously by the bright sounds of a Parker tune that starts up and by the daylight streaming through the same back window through which the same L.A. skyline can be seen. There are several visual clues (a sports jacket, a new hair style) suggesting the rapid maturation he has undergone since his departure from New York and as he walks over to the table and resumes resume his place behind the typewriter, he reminds us of the young Jean Paul Belmondo, who is preparing for the role in Godard's Breathless that will make him famous. Several new faces, including those of Godard, Robbe Grillet, Rabelais, Apollinaire and Roland Barthes peer out at us from posters which have joined the others on the increasingly crowded back wall. As he begins pecking away, the uptempo rhythm of his self-composition confirms that RF is today most definitely in one of his manic modes rather than the depressive one we saw in the previous scene. The music he's playing on his typewriter today is, however, different from anything we've heard before, the pacing is frantic, crazed, and furious but somehow the whole feeling emerging out of this chaotic jumble somehow seems more confident and determined—and as deliriously excited as the squawks coming out of Parker's sax.

11/18 LA

Dear Fellow-poet.

Sometimes in the midst of darkness comes a voice (it was yours this time) and it seems that the touch of a hand is enough to help you in a great moment of indecision. Really man, I'm going through one of my darkest moment of maturity or mutation⁴² or whatever you want to call it. Enough of that shit I told myself. There I was sitting in front of my typewriter banging away a lava, a vomit of words, pouring out the story of my life, when suddenly I stopped and asked myself, who the fuck is interested in reading the stupid-ignoble indecent-filled-with-lies-story of my life. Which by the way was not even the story of my life, of some little idiot who I made believe was me because his life which was a mere reflection of what I thought my life should have been, a poor mirror of a cheap dream and it went for pages in a more or less confused style, formless, depthless, idealess, almost wordless, and this I wanted to place under a leather cover and call it the great novel of my life and perhaps after that blow my brains out. Something happened, luckily. I don't know if it was you, your last letter, which said anyone, can pour out words on a piece of paper, or something like that and then everything went black. I'm in a vacuum I suppose other

⁴² Another moment where RF reflexively reminds us of the artificial, symbolic nature of what appears to be “naturally” occurring in what seems to be the “real world” plane of existence here.

things have helped to bring about this situation. I know whenever I get a letter from you it will be to remind me of the academic trap over which like a fool I'm trying to leap without falling in⁴³ I'm aware of it, and perhaps cynically I do wish to fall in, it would be another good excuse. But can we go on fooling ourselves, you and I. Yes you and I. Very rarely in your letters do you speak of yourself, but you don't have to my friend because you use my ears to listen to myself talk, and we are one, you into me as me into you⁴⁴, I suppose it is again a mistake, the same mistake I made with my whole life⁴⁵, that with distance and time to think that we will see the things more clearly, that is a joke, we never see a thing more clearly across an ocean or across a century, it is transformed, deformed formless, it becomes a dream, a vision false to reality, and dammit I don't give a shit about what they all tell me about art, and fiction and this whole business of writing. I'm a realiste and I want to write about life, and the only thing I know about life and people which I believe is real is what I see before me, around, under me (if I'm fucking) above me if I'm dreaming, all this must be taken on the spot before it becomes transformed⁴⁶. Perhaps it is the same with you and me. I'm growing fond of you George. You should hear me talk to my friends here about you, because I have some very interesting friends here which I want you to meet someday, perhaps you will see some of them in Paris this Summer if you are still there. Well as I speak to them about you, I wonder if I'm describing you the way, the way I think I remember you⁴⁷, the way we used to talk together, in N.Y. or in Brewster, and then I decide that I really only know you through the letters we have written to each other during those long year, and now when I speak of you I think I speak of a george that I'm beginning to

43 A perpetual outsider who seems to have spent his entire life on the margins, it is hardly surprising that RF's feelings towards academic life and his academic colleagues (or "cacademics" as he has referred to them) have been deeply divided from the outset. On the one hand, RF has always seemed amazed that someone like himself—an orphaned foreigner who arrived in the U.S. with nothing except a thick French accent—should have wound up spending over 40 years as a distinguished university professor, an internationally renown Beckett scholar, and the author of dozens of books of fiction, poetry, and criticism. On the other hand, his own background and class have made him particularly sensitive to the sorts of pettiness and hypocrisy that is so widespread in just about all academic environments.

44 Perhaps the most pointed suggestion in the play that GT may actually be a complete fabrication.

45 In the next few lines RF rapidly sketches out the line of literary development that he would spend the entire rest of his life pursuing. Clearly departing from the underlying assumptions of traditional realism, RF's brand of "realisme" accepts that no matter how carefully one looks at and analyses it, life will never make any sense to anyone because from moment to moment the world is constantly being transformed and distorted. The sorts of coherence and predictability, progression leading to clarity, and so forth which are the staples of the great realistic tradition in Western fiction are illusions concocted by people who aren't able to face up to life's absurdity and accept it for what it is—a journey not to wisdom but to chaos.

46 Whether consciously or not, RF here is echoing Kerouac's admonition (in "Principles of Spontaneous Prose") that writers need to seize the moment of perception and transform this into words immediately, before it has lost its vibrancy and freshness. This same principle had been expressed, in somewhat different terms, in Wordsworth's "The Prelude" and in Rimbaud's A Season in Hell.

47 Memory, particularly the unreliability of memory, has understandably been an issue that is absolutely central to just about everything RF has ever written, including these lines—"I wonder if I'm describing you the way . . . I think I remember you"—with their emphasis on the way that memory provides only a distorted version of the past.

make up in my mind perhaps not so good as the real one⁴⁸, but one which will serve to start a scene, swell a progress, an easy tool no doubt⁴⁹, one which will someday become a great xxxx character in one of my unwritten novels. In other words what I want to say is that dammit I would like to see you, to talk to you soon before I forget the color of your eyes. I think it's time we both dropped the curtain of irony and hypocrisy, that we face each other like the bull and the matador and that we came charging each other. Naturally you know who would win, I'm the bigger one, and I'm faster, although you are very sneaky, naturally like all little yellow bastards like you, but you must not forget that I'm a dirty jew with a big nose, and worst of all a godless-jew. (By the way have you learned the French word for dirty jew so you can insult me when you get back: Youpin.?) I decided if I cannot get you to talk by sweet words, and dammit I have tried, I will make you talk by insulting you. Now, drop the cover and tell me about all the great thoughts you must have accumulated for the past two years. I suppose you must think that I'm running out of ideas myself and that I cry to the old budha in Paris for a new way, or that I kneel before the master humbly begging for help. Attention mon petit. Je continue⁵⁰ I have been thinking about some very serious thoughts. Yes I think about thinking. As I say above I have stopped writing, now I know what the thing is, when even a writer, or I should say a make-believe writer like us stops writing, it's easy to find an excuse, just say: "I was not ready I had to do more thinking in order to deepen my way of seeing things, so please my dear fellow-men don't blame me, you'll see I'll come back soon, better than before, and then I will be able to write the great novel which All the owens and dodson and others have seen in me and which must be there. Sure it is there, my life, think, only my life by itself is symbolique. Look at me in this world, fighting, orphan, suffering, fucking left and right, don't you think all this is good material for novels. So dear friends and fellow-man be patient, I'm thinking. There was also the other friend across the ocean with the great ideas and the fluent style who said this before me and which I followed, always following humbly almost on my knees, the Japanese way. He even had a better idea. I will serve mankind, I will perhaps become a doctor, yes a doctor (not of philosophy, a real witch-doctor and I will save life, lives) dedication to human-kind. Poor fool life is cheap, why not save souls, become a missionary, or perhaps a dictator, or a communist leader, or why not just a soldier and fight for the world, the freedom of the world, or why not be the first to land on the moon. No, not even that . . . Young men, you and I, have you thought that perhaps you could become writers. Not cheap novelists turning

48 Later RF will argue that the constructs of language are not only every bit "as good" as what they might signify in reality but often far superior.

49 The passage RF is appropriating here is from T. S. Eliot's "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock" :
No! I am not Prince Hamlet, nor was meant to be;
Am an attendant lord, one that will do
To swell a progress, start a scene or two,
Advise the prince; no doubt, an easy tool,
Deferential, glad to be of use. (lines111-115)

"Prufrock" obviously made a strong impression on RF due to the frequency with which he refers to it in his correspondence from this period.

50 French: "Watch out, boy. I continue."

one book every three months, like our friend John⁵¹ who is still banging away on his type roller, I bet he'll get there too, that bastard, but why not do like him and get it over, no we the others we are the deeper type of writers, the thinkers, who have something important to say to the world, so let's pause a moment to think.

Forgive me Dear friend, I got carried away with myself in what precedes, but I have not the courage to burn this, I never destroy anything I have written⁵², so read and forget it, and go on thinking. Time is slowly passing by us, not even by us, above us, and leaves us un-ouched, only a little of the red on our face fading away into the dark, a little quick blow of the wind taking a few of the hairs away, and there goes a little scar on the left breast which was a kiss yesterday and today only a little wrinkle, not fat, we never get fat⁵³. The words are bubbles inside a broken bottle which cannot die. Je suis degoute. La nausee⁵⁴.

La chair est triste n'lrs et j'ai lu tous les livres. (mallarme).⁵⁵ I have read them all now, or almost most, and I'm almost ready to write the great american doctoral dissertation on the greatest french writer⁵⁶, but meanwhile the novel, and the teacups and the marmelade and the shit and the war and Tokyo, only a shadow⁵⁷, a postcard left unwritten lost in the bottom of a suitcase which we find on a cold evening among friends who listen to you. The words are little balloons coming out like vomit out of a broken jaw. I dreamed of a man, but he died with the morning light. I saw him standing and smiling with his ego protruding like a hardon, masturbating⁵⁸ himself in front of twenty or thirty virgins who were dying to know the secrets of esthetics and the form of the formless, I had to do it I told myself, after all we were chosen, You and I. The great sufferers of the twenty century, all collected in a dusty encyclopedia⁵⁹, enough to tell yourself that the world is a fucking place to live in. And the guys are still trying to cry that the world is no good. Some of them in San

51 I.e. John Wadleigh..

52 And indeed, as RF's literary executioner, I can verify that RF's has somehow managed to retain copies of just about everything he has ever written, including not only copies of nearly every letter he has ever received from his friends and colleagues but even copies of his own letters.

53 RF has always enjoyed boasting about his muscular, svelte physique, although after he quit smoking in the late 80s, he did complain about the weight he gained.

54 French (with accents lacking): "I am disgusted. Nausea." The last term is also probably a reference to the title of Jean-Paul Sartre's most famous novel, *La nausee* (1938; translated into English in 1965 as *Nausea*), a title which was also used as the name of a song on X's 1980s punk masterpiece, *Los Angeles*; I mention the latter because although many commentators have noted the influence of jazz on RF's work, to my knowledge no one yet has examined the many commonalties between RF's aesthetic and that of punk.

55 French quotation from Mallarme's poem "Brise marine": "The flesh is sad alas! and all books I have read."

56 Probably a reference to Samuel Beckett.

57 Another reference to *And I Followed My Shadow*, the work-in-progress he eventually abandoned.

58 Another masturbation reference which here, as is typical in RF's writing, suggests an obscene expression of a "second hand" experience.

59 RF here engages in a bit of what he would later term "pre-remembering" —i.e., remembering something (in this case, the fact that he and GT will indeed one day be collected in an encyclopedia) that hasn't yet occurred.

Francisco, are Howling⁶⁰ America “Go fuck yourself,” and I, myself, me, in a little redbrick-building get a big kick shouting at the tip of my voice, fuck you too, encule, because he said it before me. Read all about it mon petit George, desertor, louzy american, dammit, I think I will write a political essay about the conformist in America⁶¹ and all the stinking yellow americans who are afraid to face reality and go to Paris and la petite Ilse du rever⁶² to find themselves, forgetting that america is sinking into a pool of shit⁶³. I’m in it up to my neck, and It stinks and if I don’t do something immediately, I’ll drown. And why not. I heard a voice in my love, in my sleep sayin stop, stop it all, pause a moment and think. I did and look where I am. Lost in a whirlpool of wind, a cloudless sky, where the rain is dried out, sometimes the smog burns your eyes and if you cry you have a good excuse. I think I’ll sleep well tonight. I have heard the voice of the mermaid-typeroller-typefucker-typewriter singing to me⁶⁴, I have masturbated my fingers, it’s good practice, said a voice across the ocean, and now, to sleep with you and I. The world will go on. They will land on the moon tomorrow, and if they red or black or yellow, or fascists or anarchist or russians what the fuck do I care, I have my fingers to remember the words, that came to my eyes, The inner voice of a fool, crying that the world is no good and sinking into a little dream, spermless.

Once when I was ten I saw a great-brown-cow⁶⁵ who ran after me and when finally I was out of reach I took a stone and threw it right in his eyes. Then I laughed. How I know this story does not mean a damn thing to you, but to me do you know what I could do with that. I could make a lovely little poem for example which would go something like this.

I was young and then cow came running after me
and naturally I was not afraid because the old man
told me not to be afraid, but inside I was pissing white. . . .

60 Allen Ginsberg’s controversial Howl had been published by City Lights in 1954. RF clearly admired and identified with what Ginsberg had accomplished in Howl, for just a few lines later in his letter he says “fuck you too . . . because he said it before me.”

61 Throughout his later career, RF did indeed write political essays on these and related topics having to do with American conformity during the 1950s, although they were usually disguised within works of fiction. See especially his novels Take It or Leave It and Smiles on Washington Square.

62 French (misspelled): “the little island of the dream.”

63 RF himself left America in disgust in 1958 and moved to Paris, where he worked for three miserable months in a restaurant; he then decided that taking America made more sense than leaving it had, and returned to Los Angeles where he began work on his Ph.D. degree in Comparative Literature.

64 RF is here alluding to the following passage which occurs near the end of T.S. Eliot’s “The Lovesong of J. Alfred Prufrock”:

I have heard the mermaids singing, each to each.
I do not think they will sing to me. (ll.123-5)

65 This animal imagery is central to the title poem in RF’s first poetry collection, *Among the Beasts*, whose opening stanza reads:

I stood face to face with a bull
And threw stones at his eyes
And struck his back with a stick

and so on . . .⁶⁶

and after that they would write great dissertations about this and my friends George in Paris would have to come back to shake my hands and tell me, well old-boy you made it and I would have to blush yes, I did think I would, and after we would drink together and be happy, and naturally we would cry a little, and after the moment of separation we would say goodbye, for ever perhaps perhaps not, but we would belong to different worlds, you and I, you to yours and I you mine. Aurevior mon petite pote.⁶⁷ It is dark again, another day fucked away on senseless words spoken in a cafeteria, or between two classes, poetry, and whatever you want, but there must be poetry, if not we are finished, are we not all a little bet of a poet and at least we keep quiet when other people think so. So long.

I must go. . . . on⁶⁸. . . to where there are no more dreams and where people don't think anymore.

Above is written what I would call a tranche de mon esprit⁶⁹ synthesized, into what I would call the ideological, pheneological specie of a modern thinking mind, one who believes the universe has placed a lot of hope, himself a symbol of hope for human-kind⁷⁰, who more or less chosen like christ or budha or mahomet for that matter to save the little people from the end. I have tried, tried to explain to you the best that I could what is my situation here at the university, if I have not succeeded, if you need more explanation write to me and ask precise question. I am no prophet nor was meant to be, for the son of man spoke unto thee (chap 2. line 3) the bible. Dante also said it better than I ever will. And tomorrow, again three times, or never (five times) this is how literature is made not with ideas my friends, but with words taken collected, grouped, synthesized, polished, washed and dried, perhaps also translated too, merde pour le lira. tout cela voila la literature ⁷¹but the books the real books where they are. Here I say, and at that moment the old man with broken teeth pointed to his forehead and wept. I think I understood him. but what could I do, I had been there too. It was too late.

Sitting on the branch of a tree I was watching the moment is now coming to was it not so, and will it happened again. The tenses of the verbs, that it important, think of that my

66 As Thomas Hartl has noted, "These three lines read like a blueprint for RF's poem "Among the Beasts," referring to the experiences of the brutality of nature and the banality of procreation that RF experienced while living and working on a farm in southern France between 1942 and 1945; the "old man" mentioned in both texts is the farmer for whom RF worked..

67 French: "Goodbye my little buddy."

68 Perhaps an echo of the famous words uttered by Beckett's narrator, which conclude *The Unnamable*: "I can't go on, I must go on, I'll go on."

69 French: "a slice of my mind."

70 Although rarely mentioned by critics, RF very much could and SHOULD be seen as a symbol of hope for human-kind.

71 French: "shit for those who will read it. There you have literature."

friends, the past tense, the present and the future in the same sentence. Apollinaire⁷² did it. I will try. I have to, I have to, I have to find something new, not really, from dust you came from dust you shall return, but in between that happens, George please tell me, tell me before it's too late, too late and then what and if and then it's too late.

I'm really pissed off at myself⁷³. I wanted to write you a very intelligent letter, well organized, with words following each other in an orderly manner, and perhaps a nice introduction, a middle perhaps too, and a nice powerful ending, but I got lost, forgive my insolence, and also to have lost all this time writing this and now making you lose your time trying to understand the confusion of a mind which perhaps will extinguish itself the way a *vers-luisant*⁷⁴ does, with the swiftness of an elephant falling into a puddle of mud, and little bubbles, the words rising to the surface to explode like atomic bombs, but little ones, not bigger than my eye. Yes my yes, eye, kid that So.

I am tired, I'm tired, but we must go on⁷⁵, then go ahead and I'll still be here waiting⁷⁶. I have dreamt my life three times this week, but each time I was never sure it was correct⁷⁷. Don't worry I'll try again⁷⁸. Aurevoir, auwiedersen, mahi-mochi, sayonara, and pan dans le cul.

Ton Grand ami⁷⁹

Raymond

72 Guillaume Apollinaire (1880-1918) invented the word "surrealism" and was one of the first to experiment with concrete prose in his *Calligrammes* (1918).

73 What follows is a description of the disparity between RF's original plans for a text versus what he actually wound up writing—remarks which could apply just as well to nearly everything RF has ever written and certainly would be relevant to all his novels.

74 French (misspelled): "fire fly."

75 Another unattributed appropriation—this one borrowed from Beckett's *Waiting for Godot*—is one of the hundreds of quotations we see a young RF playfully and intuitively introducing into the rush of composing these monologues. It should be noted that RF was already practicing this textual practice that he would later term "playgiarism" long before critics such as Barthes or Derrida began making the case that writing has no original source, and instead always results out of the endless play of signification.

76 RF has repeatedly claimed that "My life is a story," and that this story must be continually retold despite his awareness of the futility of ever getting it "right." In these remarks to GT we see RF not only already presenting his life not as being "real" but as a subjective construct—a dream, a fiction, something he has made up—but as a failed or provisional invention which must be continually revised.

77

78 Here RF self-consciously and reflexively announces the failure of what he had been writing—but holds out the promise that the next version will be better. RF would later recast this trope into the conclusions of many of his novels. Although this method had been employed most notably by Beckett and Borges, variations of this reflexive announcement about the failure of what one is writing appeared in numerous metafictional works from the 60s such as Vonnegut's *Slaughterhouse-Five* and Ronald Sukenick's *Up*.

79 French: "your good friend."

[CURTAIN]

ACT IV—LOVER MAN

Scene 1. My failure is a success

Just before the curtain rises, Charlie Parker's noodlings in "Now's the Time" are joined by those of RF, who's beating out a dreamy counterpoint melody on his typewriter; near the end of Parker's song, the duet becomes a trio when they're joined by the call and response sounds of birds⁸⁰ chirping come-hithers to one. The scrim is lowered with the opening of the next monologue displayed. It reads:

The curtain rises on a tiny one-room cottage in Santa Barbara during March 1960. A dapper looking RF, now attired in the usual graduate student style of the day (slacks, sports jacket, etc.) removes "Lover Man" starts another platter spinning, and then heading back once more to his typewriter. The chirping are coming through the back window, through which a grove of orange trees is seen gleaming in the sun. The back wall of the cottage is now completely filled with posters, whose new additions include several movie ads—The 400 Blows, Breathless, and other French New Wave films—as well as lecture announcements for Barthes, Foucault, Michel Butor, Nathalie Sarraute, and several additional photos of Beckett. When he starts typing the monologue he's delivering, a new melody of self-creation emerges to interact with bird chirps and Parker's noodlings, one whose melody still seethes with emotion but now a certain tenderness joins the anger and exhilaration we've heard earlier.

Santa Barbara, 1960

Dear old George

At rst I was furious, then I laughed, then I smiled, then I went to sleep, dreamt for awhile, made love with love, dreamt again, and then it was vacation time, and Ricky and I climbed the mountain and skied down the snowy slope, and meanwhile George thought I was an idiot, admitting that my story was (is) a failure, un echec, everyone of my artiste creations until now have been failures this is why I go on.

80 The grove of orange trees and sounds of birds here evokes not only RF's new sense of confidence, personally and artistically, but also anticipates the tree and (especially) the bird-imagery that RF will later associate with the closet-episode. Cf. The closing stanzas of "Escape": But through a crack in the wall/I saw a tree the shape of a leaf/and one morning a bird flew into my head/I loved that bird so much/that while the blue-eyed master/looked at the sun and was blind/I opened the cage/and hid my heart in a yellow feather. RF reinforces the significance of this bird imagery by employing it as a semiotic analogy in the crucial opening lines of his concluding monologue (see Act IV, II).

If I had written my masterpiece I would be an old man now, no man ever sits down to write his masterpiece, but only thinks so afterwards and only before the foreign eyes have touched his sacred work, true I am an idiot, and admitting that my story STINKS (notice I am now speaking from your point of view) mine is too obscure at this point to be formulated or justified, admitting all this, still I am glad to see that my story⁸¹ did inspire you two of your most successful pages of prose, unfortunately you are not a critic, but another creator peddling as I do your inner self. I am quite pleased I must say with your reaction to my story, this does not change in anyway my feeling about my work, nor for that matter the reaction of others (idiots too, I suppose) who have now read and liked and discussed this story with me, although you have a good all on your side (the New Yorker just rejected the so called story⁸²) (perhaps Esquire may have less taste, I shall wait and wait and forget my pride.) Still I feel a word or two of explanation are necessary at this point. Nothing to justify or defend my story, for it is there, it is written (in four copies) it exists for what it is, and the worse of all, I am the one who wrote it, that, you cannot deny, even though all your reactions were negative, the story has now taken its place among my other failures and among the many other failures I shall spew out of my inner confusion. But still a word or two of explanation I feel are necessary here (I said that, shit, I begin to sound like Mister Marant himself. Perhaps he and I are the same person⁸³, and perhaps this is why you dislike this poor gentleman to be. You are too good to me, you like me too much, and you love Ricky too much, to be able to accept any kind of desecration of my own self or whatever is connected with myself.)

Enclosed you will find a love poem which I wrote for Ricky⁸⁴. (I have written quite a few love poems for Ricky, simple poems, honest, warm, in which I say in my most simple way I love you Ricky, and naturally she liked them, she keeps them in her own special file, Works of Raymond published and unpublished, but besides that she also liked very much my story which you disliked so much. A word or two of explanation seem necessary at this point. I know I said that, but one must repeat oneself before one can arrive at some kind of originality, if only the repetition in itself becomes the originality. A rose is a rose is a rose, or a fart is a fart is fart, who knows the real answer. Let's talk literature.

I believe I have now written enough (shit no, this sounds to pedantic

81 RF is referring to "The Toothbrush," one of his earliest stories consciously conceived in terms of formal experimentation that he had recently sent to GT, who apparently didn't much care for it. The story was eventually published in Panache.

82 RF's continued efforts to publish his work in The New Yorker and Esquire even at this point in his development allows us to see that for him, artistic maturity does not necessarily involve completely eliminating a desire for commercial success and critical recognition, but only that one must not compromise the integrity of the work in order to achieve this. In fact, RF would continue to send his work to The New Yorker throughout his career and although his efforts have thus far not yielded any acceptances, a highly laudatory review of Aunt Rachel's Fur did appear in The New Yorker in May 2001.

83 This reflexive admission of the congruency between RF and his character also reinforces the possibility that GT's may another fictitious alter-ego than the real we assume him to be.

84 "Humanity 100"—included in Appendix IIIA.

as a start.) I'll try again. I believe...What do I believe? good question. From the time when you and I sat at Columbia University in Prof Owens writing classes a lot of sh have passed under the bridges and into the frying pans. In those days I was so anxious to vomit out of my twisted guts the story of my life, so much so that all over the paper a huge I repeating itself over and over, a little I, feeling sorry for himself, a big I who had had many experiences, who thought he had suffer who thought he had a right to tell the world his story, and the suffering and the love and the dirt and the fucking and the starving and the spit in the yes, and the cold and the sweat and the lice and the tears and the crap and all the rest, all this was to be the contend of my stories and of my novels and of my poems, and it came out like shit out of a⁸⁵

(a gap or absence is introduced in the form of a missing page)

I decided to get involved in politics but soon I discovered that I did not give a shit about politics, so I tried a little of social awareness, but then I discovered that that too is for the shes. I revolted and decided to become a professor, but that too is for the snails. Shit if I go on I'll have the whole zoo in there. Bear with me, I'm getting to the point. I do hope that in the middle of this wordy mess you nd the truth which I am now slowly but surely ltering to you. There are a few things that a writer must consider now adays. 1. that people rarely read anyone, or else best lousy bestsellers and I have no intention of writing a thing like that. There are two types of artists, the creator and the artisan. I am neither of these and yet I do sit from time to time to write. Perhaps I have something to say, but no one listens, and I don't really give a damn. No I do give a damn, I want to write because I want to be famous, let's admit now and get it over, but meanwhile I want to shock the bourgeois (before I become one myself) a little. No that's true. I think at this point I could honestly sit down a write a nice decent story (in good English, without any obscenity in it, and almost with a moral to it.) I could easily tell a nice little story, I have so many little stories inside of people, and me would be touched and I would be a nice little writer, and I could even if I wanted to imitate.....Oh let's say thomas Hardy, George Eliot, perhaps even Conrad, not bad I know they are great and I shall never reach the bottom of their bottom, but they lived at a time which is not my time. Even dostoeivsky who is still the greatest of them all does not, or could not write the way he did if he lived in our time, This is the rst question I asked myself and answered to myself. This one I did answer. I cannot, I will not write like them. I am. Raymond federman, a foreigner, having lived my life (good or bad that ja not the question) that life has shaped my mind, I should say twisted my mind, that life in itself is of no importance, it is only one life among millions and millions of other lives, what counts

85 This "missing text" motif is a formal mechanism that RF will later introduce in some of his later works, perhaps most notably in the gap that occurs in the climax of *The Voice in the Closet*. RF does, however, manage to complete this interrupted scatological analogy ("it came out like shit out of a ...") later in the monologue with the lines: "The solution to my problem would be to print my stuff on toilet paper."

is the place and the time in which this life was spent: 1928 to ??????????
and then what? What? This is what I want to write, not what happened,
who gives a shit about that? but where and when it happened. Naturally
I could write a history book, but fortunately I detested facts, and even
though I have a tremendous memory, I tend to forget things too
quickly, therefore, this is where my imagination, my creativity or whatever
you want to call it comes into play. Well this answers the first question.
The second is easier. For whom do we write? I could say for New Yorker
if those sonofbitches had accepted my story, but they did, therefore I shall
reject that first hypothesis and move on to something else. I am more and
more convinced less and less people give a damn about what I write,
and I could easily say well shit with them I'll write for artsake, but
unfortunately I don't have the talent and the courage or the modesty of
a James Joyce or a Beckett. And besides that my language, I mean my
written language is too simple to fit in that intellectual circle. I am
a writer for the poor, this is the bitchy thing about the mess, even though
I try very hard to become an academic champion, I am still proletarian
of a writer. Therefore I shall write for whomever wants to bend down to
read me. The solution to my problem would be to print my stuff on toilet
paper, I thought of it, but it's too materialistic for my ideal. I was
going to say I write for myself, but that's false because as soon as I have
finished something, anything, even a letter I have to show it somebody.
Well that answers that question. Now to the third and most important one, How does
one write?

In my short-story which you disliked so much I tried something of great
Importance, not to you, not to the literary world, but to me. First I
tried to break a few rules (perhaps here again I am wrong, for before I
can break the rules, I should learn a few, but this is part of me, of
myself, swift as the arrow that kills the bird, but I am not a bird,
therefore I don't give a shit about the rules.)

What I tried in that story first was to fool around with the language.
Here I am caught in the trap of the american cliché which I use and
misuse daily besides imposing to it an atrocious accent which I cultivate
for personal reasons. Still I have chosen to write in this so-called
american idiom. Before I can become an accomplished writer I have
either to master this idiom or else destroy it, break it, make little
pieces out of it and then build for myself a language which will become
my tool. The first one would be the easiest way out, but I prefer the
second one, therefore I shall never really learn this language by heart,
instead I shall fool around with it until I get something new out of it.
This was basically the starting point of my story. Every word Mr. Marant
(by the way which means in French: funny guy) is a cliché, a straight
forward cliché taking out of the mouth of a good american and twisted
by the melodramatic mind of my character, twisted because this poor guy
is so logical in a completely illogical situation. The second thing I tried
to do was to create a man (if you can call him that, but I hope to go even
further than that, to reduce man to its inner beast, and still come out
with something human)(don't you recognize me in this. Subjectivity seen
from inside out.) By the rules and conventions and moralas of our society

Mr. Marant is all wrong. I grant you that, and yet, admit that the poor guy is somehow likeable. In his naiveté he remains with some kind of integrity. True to his background, his environment, his heredity, that I cannot say, for no man living today can remain true to that, and yet we try like mad, or I should say most people do. I gave up long ago. This is perhaps what makes of me the great cosmopolitan which I really am. Somehow this Mr. Marant who lives on Park avenue, who speaks at times like a bum, acts like a reverted humbert humbert, this poor chap who does not understand a thing about manners, rules, regulations and all the rest, this poor guy somehow ts in the situation. I might even go further and say, he is the typical picaresque character of our modern society. Coming through one door into one corner of the social scale and going down the window into another level and yet wearing a suit and tie when he should be waling naked among the clouds. Confusing isn't it? I resume:

1. language (rst element which this story tries to shape or unshape.)
2. characterization (logic into the illogic).
3. the shortstory as a form, rebellion against the writingclasses.
4. suspense presented backward.

naturally I could go on and reveal to you all the little secrets of my creativity, but I decided, just now not to go on. If only you had not let your sensitivity, your goodheartedness, your love for me and for Ricky, your angelism, and all the rest of you that is good and honest interfere with your reading of my story you may have seen what I was trying to do. But you didn't and that's good. For this proves to me again that once more my failure is a success. For now I must go on, and I will, I'm thinking of writing a sequence to this story, Mr. Marant goes to the Psychiatrist, or else Mr. Marant gets drafted into the army. Can you see that, the double life of schizophrenic characters. Well enough for now. I let you untangle the mess of my re ection about literature. It is always nice to talk to you. You are so patient. And your letters to Ricky are really magni cent. You have really found a great friend in her, and I admire you, respect you the more for it. Someday when we get married (soon now) we might adopt you. So long george for now. About the R.F. to Cristine, those are the ways one remembers, there are more in those two initials⁸⁶ than she will ever be able to know or understand, and you too. Words are so useless, I nd this out everyday, especially now after having thrown away so many of them on this paper. Salut. Write soon.

CURTAIN

Scene II. I shall go on . . .

As one of Charlie Parker's gorgeous renditions of "Lover Man"⁸⁷ moves along unpredictably towards the finish line, the scrim lowers to reveal the

86 RF claims he has been using initials as abbreviations ever since he can remember; occasionally, as here, he introduces playful word games into this usage (i.e., the RF to C reference here can be decoded as Raymond Fucks Christine.

87 Parker would later make a guest appearance in Take It or Leave It doing a sex solo , ah, of course that's supposed to read sax solo, in "Remembering Charlie Parker".

opening from the final monologue:

The curtain rises on the same cottage room in the late spring of 1960. RF is smiling broadly as he starts up another platter on his hi fi and as he heads back to his typewriter, the snap of his fingers, bouncy gait, and other mannerisms all seem to radiate his current sense of satisfaction and confidence he's feeling.

Salut Georges

Finally, I find a moment to write a few words⁸⁸ across the land to you no my dear fellow, and I insist your ancient perspicacity seems to fail you these days, for you judge me wrong, words are no more pretty little birds flying their gentle flight from my head to my hand and onto the white sheet of paper, no more, I only want to use them to transperse them to get beyond them, and if you have not seen this in my last letter then you, yourself are still caught up with the surface of things. Dig, man, dig, deeper and deeper, you used to speak thus to me, am now the father to the whole source of my own creation: You. Or are you to wrapped up in trying very hard not to be what you are. Your jewishness pleases me, for you are trying very hard to become what I try very are not to be, but we are stuck with our exterior, I, with my long nose and my cut up dick and you with your slanted eyes. I thought to master that I would have first to master the language, go through it, fool, around with aesthetics in other words learn my trade' like a shoe repairman, and I tried, but, then I saw time slipping through my fingers, literally saw time slipping past me, and I decided to throw all this to hell and get down to the heart of the matter. How? that is the question, every new poem I write is a failure, every new thought I get leads a little further into the nonsensical, I open a door and behind it there is a sign which cries to me WRONG DOOR and I try again and there are million of doors and I keep trying. Last night I sat alone, halfway between LA. and S.B. coming back from a delicious weekend with my dearest Ricky (who by the way told me she wrote you a letter, please do answer her, she will like that very much, she knows you very well and likes you, and she is like all of us who have (I hate to use the word) suffered a trifle, in great need of reassurance, the kind word from the kind man, and you are that man. Naturally she is uncertain, insecure, for I do give this kind of feeling around me, I disturb people, I make them uncomfor- table, and that is my purpose, and I shall exploit this, to push down

88 RF begins his final monologue with a quiet confidence by noting he has "finally" been able to "find" (and hence gain control over) time and language—two recurrent topics he has been shown to be struggling with throughout the play. This is one of the final act's first indications of the maturity and wisdom he has gained that has enable him to come to grips to the major sources of personal and aesthetic conflict that needed to be resolved before he was ready to embark on his journey towards literary artistry.

their throats what I have to tell them, but to Ricky, I want to give the best in me, for she has opened a new world to me, sincere, honest, real. I did not read her letter, but I am sure you will discover that in what she said to you. Therefore, I urge you to write to her, to be yourself as I know you to be . . .) well there I was sitting alone half-way between L.A. and S.B. having a cup of coffee late at night in one of those roadsidejoint when I lifted my head and the 28 clock started to smile at me. The long thin red head of the second was speeding around and I found myself counting the seconds and I wasted exactly 326 of them over this cup of coffee, in a complete state of loathing, passive, doing nothing but warming my little digestive system and trying to keep myself awake for the next 50 miles of driving and I suddenly saw that everyday I throw away thousands and thousands of those little pieces of time...What then, shall I just say, well enough of this, I shall wait, and the world shall go on after me, and let to others the care of this world.... I could easily, and yet I won't.... But neither will I sling a rifle on my shoulder and go out there to fight the ones who are wrong or right. Who knows. The only thing I know how to do, the only thing I can really do, is teach and write. And I am not kidding when I say teach. I suddenly realize that I have learned quite a few things in these past few years since you took me by the and let me between the two frigid statues of Columbia University. I have read many books, and ignored many and understood a few, but what I have gained, I see now that many have not yet gain, and that perhaps I can give them that much, plus whatever is true of me, for little by little, I see that too, there is in me a certain Raymond Federman who has a few personal opinions of the world, of man of the world perhaps nothing original, but that much I can give them, naturally I don't mean all this to sound very angelic, of evangelic, no, for This inside I still hate man in general and all his stupidity, and So I shall not tell them how good man, and the world is, on the Contrary I shall tell them that we are all bastards, that the worse thing for a young man is his parents when they impose on him a set of values which does not function for his time, I shall them him that beauty does not exist, that whatever has been said before is false, because when it was said the world was different, in spite of what everybody says, I do not believe that homer or dante, or shakespeare would have written what they have written if they could have flown from N.Y. to L.A. in four hours I do not believe they would have said what they said if they had been communists, or whatever, therefore, I believe what they tell me, I like the way they said it, but I shall not say it the same way, and I shall not say the same thing. If one starts thinking in this line then one I believe can have a different point de view, a new vision of the world, and this is what makes something original, for now you have notice how stuble I have left off the teaching for the writing. Damn right my boy I shall go on writing. By the way, please get the new copy of BIG TABLE⁸⁹ when it comes out #3, in

89 The issue RF is referring to included his translations of Jean Genet's "The Beggars of Barcelona" (an excerpt from The Thief's Journal) and of Renee Riese Hubert's poem, "Sizes."

a few weeks, you will see your beloved friend all over the place, nothing original, only translations in that issue, but there are a few things said by others which something should also be read by the naïve americans, this is when I decide to use my only genuine talent (french) I did quite a few translations lately, I don't know yet what the Editor of Big table will publish of the stuff I sent him
put, please read it and admire me. Meanwhile, this guy, the editor is a tremendous guy to work with. He has asked me to do an article on Samuel Beckett, naturally you still don't know who he is, but ask cristine, she will tell you, I have began working on this article and I am quite excited about it, I believe it might turn to be quite a piece of creative writing. After all if I intend to write my Ph.D. thesis on Beckett this is quite a good start⁹⁰. The title of the article "THE MISSING LING" more or less about the insanity of man. I shall send you a copy, if only for editorial work when completed, this article will not appear in the next issue, but the following. Meanwhile I go on writing poetry, or something like poetry, I have pushed my anti-poetical notion of conventional poetry so far that I am coming out with some kind of weird pieces of writing, a paradox in itself, for how can I oppose to centuries of good established beauty with my horrifying pieces of so called modern poetry, and yet, even if I reject the word poem for my little pieces of writing others do say to me, I do like your poem, or I think your poem stinks, but still the word poem is there. I don't know any more, anyway, enclosed you will find such a piece, read it, and say something about it, anything, but try to be intelligent. Maybe I'm being naïve, but that's good too. I refuse to grow old. My new life here is interesting because it seems that I am against everybody, somehow my position, I mean intellectual, is either twisted, or else they are so backward in this academic Hell that we don't understand each other. I grow, not old but I grow. I really wish I could see you soon. By the way what are you doing? I am so involved here telling you about me, that I almost forget that I am writing to you, and yet you are the purpose of this letter, the epistolary form is the most convenient form of literature, one picks up somebody, one person and one shares his thoughts for that person, and only that one person, you get the difficulty with writing is the audience, the public, in the letter it's easy because you know the friend to whom you are writing will read the whole thing, for perhaps somewhere in the back, at the end of the letter the writer will sneak a little about the receiver, and this is why you go on

[As this final scene draws to a conclusion, the lights are slowly dimmed, the Charlie Parker music also fades, and the frantic pace of RF's delivery slows, with something close to lyricism replacing the playfulness, manic energy and occasional anger we've heard in his voice for much of the play.]

reading this crap. and now back to me, throw the ball didi (waiting

90 RF did complete his thesis on Beckett, which was later revised and published in 1965 as Journey to Chaos: Samuel Beckett's Early Fiction.

for Godot page 43) There was a slight improvement in your last letter, less of you and an attempt to say something, I like that, my critical mind is now seeking such titillating elements as you feed to my intellect, such as your conversion to judaism. I like that from you, but it is a dangerous game. The great problem with people like us, I mean you and I, is that we are in motion in a world which itself is in motion. I think back of the days we together began to write a few shortstories. If nothing had changed then we would have gone on writing the same shortstories and perhaps we would have published them and we would have been happy, but now I look back and I reread sometimes those trashy little pieces of writing and I see how great the gap is between Raymond the Phi betta Kapa Student of Columbia University and the so called instructor of Santa Barbara, and I must say that all this academic shit has left me quite unmarked, the fire is still burning in me, it is more furious than before, the only thing good this whole process has given me is developing some kind of inner perception which I was wasting then in my little emotional outbursts. As for you you went a different road, a long detour through the decaying continent, and you came back broken and broke and disturbed because you hadn't found the tolerance, the understanding which only exists inside of you, not outside, out there in the world. And so you came back to us, and now again looking at each other across a crooked line, we stick our shoulder to the wheel and we try again. Something like three years have passed, and yet the novels (yours and mine are not written, John's published, but who is further ahead. That is the question, and cristine has cut her hair, good for her, and I have almost forgotten her, although sometimes I would like to sit down with her and talk and explain to her, that romantic agony stopped in the 19th century and that the only thing left for us is the agony. And yet I go on behind the scene being a romantic a sentimental bastard. And therefore I shall get married and have three children already made, and I shall be happy, and I'll go on writing letters to my friends, and someday I shall stand up and shout to you from across the country, I made it, I published a novel, and I will then say to myself, you idiot, that novel was already published, because as soon as I opened my eyes and first looked at the world the novel was there. Words are useless little bubbles. but they are beautiful when they fly away blown by the wind into the sun. Tell me what my cousin Robert is doing is he teaching—I give up the idea of getting a letter from him, perhaps he won't even show up when I invite him to my weeding and you too, I won't pay for your trip if that's what you think you'll have to itch hack all over the country, but I expect the two of you here, even if you don't approve of my big step into bourgeoisie. I am an angry young man, even more, a furious young man, and I shall stay young because I write poetry, and because no one likes my poetry, and I don't give a shit. I sit in my huge beautiful apartment and stare at the wall I wait for my Ph.D. just a question of patience and then I shall be called Doctor and then. I shall laugh purely and then I'll go on writing letters to a friend who is going on writing a novel and then I shall also write a

little novel between meals and sex and the kids and the books and the virgins in school and I shall be happy and one of these days the red hand of the second shall laugh at me and I shall spit in the face of the clock. Well enough of this for now. Read this carefully, a few words of wisdom may have slipped off my fingers. Read the poem to and put it in a special file, might be the beginning of a new cycle, or again it might again be a wrong door. Salut mon vieux ecris vite, donne le bonjour a Cristine, Jeanne, Robert and the rest...

[the stage is now is almost completely dark and the music gone, leaving only the determined sound of the typewriter, clicking into being the following concluding lines of this in a play which is really just the opening section of a much longer work, the huge, ongoing book of RF's life-story that RF has continued to write. The stage lights come back up just as the RF delivers his final words with a sense of renewed energy]

I leave you now, still the same failure I was when we first met, but perhaps tomorrow . . .
Yes! Perhaps tomorrow . . .

[The Young Artist looks up from his typewriter and stares directly at the audience. Long tableau as the light fade to black. The sound of typing resumes..]

CURTAIN

