Cocteau and the Gods

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René Galand, Cocteau and the Gods

Cocteau has found little favor among the poets whose esteem he prized above all else: the Surrealists. In this respect, Mauriac has compared him to the medieval kings and emperors who had been excommunicated and who secretly were in agreement with the punishment which the pope had visited upon them. Long before the Surrealists, Saint-John Perse, who was then known only as Alexis Leger, had expressed his contempt for Cocteau. He did not despise Cocteau because of the latter's homosexuality, but because of Cocteau's sycophantic attitude toward the celebrities whose favor he courted. Saint-John Perse could not stand Cocteau, to the extent that he warned the celebrated hostess Misia Sert that he would no longer come to her receptions if Cocteau was invited. Half a century later, Saint-John Perse had not relented. I still can hear the sarcasm in his voice when he discussed the election of the Prince of Poets, which had taken place in 1960. Saint-John Perse had been elected, and Cocteau had been so bitterly disappointed that he nearly broke down and withdrew to be comforted by his "doudou". This was an ironic pun, since the the word "doudou", in the creole of the West Indies, means "nanny"; it was also the pet name of Cocteau's companion, Edouard Dermit. For Saint-John Perse, there was also something pathetic and pitiful in Cocteau's joy when Saint-John Perse refused the title of "Prince of Poets", which went to Cocteau by default.

Literary historians and critics have been equally harsh in their assessment of Cocteau's work. Marcel Raymond characterizes him as "page impertinent du quartier des Champs-Elysées", "couturier de l'esprit nouveau", "esthète nourri de Wilde, de Mallarmé, de Baudelaire", "une intelligence merveilleusement prompte, un peu sèche, parisiennne s'il en fût jamais, et que l'on croiraît née au XVIIIe siècle, sous le signe de Voltaire". No compliment for a would-be poet, since the XVIIIth century, in France, is not exactly renowned for its poetic productions. Marcel Raymond does not use the word "kitsch", but he might as well do so when he states that Cocteau is too easily satisfied with "parades faciles" and "arabesques enrubannées". Jean-Albert Bédé sees Cocteau as "the astute magician and purveyor of his own publicity", always ready to jump on the latest bandwagon as he sponsored with equal ease Pablo Picasso and Giorgio de Chirico, Strawinsky and the "groupe des Six", the first appearances of American jazz, the clown act of the Fratellini brothers, and the motion pictures of Charlie Chaplin. Bédé depicts Cocteau as a "product of the bourgeoisie bourgeoisie", who, although "the prodigal son of a wealthy notary", "concealed within his nimble mind an ample provision of atavistic shrewdness or even conservatism." The British critic C.A. Hackett sums up his own assessment of Cocteau's achievement in the following words:"His works, from his early cubist to his later classic poems, is almost entirely derivative; and the virtuosity he has displayed in imitating numerous models, from Ronsard and Malherbe to Apollinaire and Valéry, has only served to emphasize a lack of inner vitality." In spite of Valéry's quip about the lion being made of assimilated mutton, no one really claims that a wolf, no matter how many lambs it devours, will turn into a sheep. Imitation does not necessarily imply a lack of originality, and Cocteau took pleasure in quoting the words of Radiguet:"We must copy the masters, since it is precisely in our failure to do so that we shall innovate." I do not entirely agree with Cocteau's critics. In fact, I believe that Cocteau's writings bear the mark of what Baudelaire called "this something essentially sui generis by the grace of which he is himself and not someone else" (Oeuvres Complètes [Paris:Gallimard, "La Pléiade"
1961]. p. 1235), the "dark and deep unity" which Baudelaire mentions in the sonnet "Correspondances". Talking of Goya, Baudelaire also stated that "there is in the works born of deep individualities something similar to those periodic or chronic dreams which regularly besiege our sleep. This is the mark of the true artist" (op.cit., p. 1018). There is no question that Cocteau's creations meet this criterion. This is where is true originality is to be found, in the dark and deep unity of vision where metaphysics, esthetics, psychology, and poetics merge with one another.

Cocteau's metaphysics may be summed up in his celebrated aphorism: "The gods exist. They are the devil." His vision of man's relationship to the supernatural is not far removed from Shakespeare's characterization: "As flies to wanton boys are we to the gods. They kill us for their sport." This vision of the gods as murderous powers appears most clearly in Orphée, both the play and the film, in the play The Infernal Machine, in the film Le Testament d'Orphée, as well as in other writings, poems or critical essays. In the play Orphée, Death appears as a young woman wearing an evening gown under her coat. She is accompanied by two aides dressed as surgeons. They carry black bags with their instruments, and they wear surgical masks and rubber gloves. Death operates not so much with surgical precision as with the precision of an engineer. She uses an electrical apparatus, and she gives very precise instructions to her aides: a wave length of seven, a zone of 7.12, with everything set for a power of four, going up to five if needed. In order to touch living things, she must cross an element which distorts and displaces them, much like the refracting effect of water. Her apparatus enables her to make the necessary adjustments, which avoids the need for complicated corrections. While an aide uses a chronometer (an ordinary watch will do), and another aide executes a series a complicated signals, Death uses a reel to capture the soul of her victim, which appears in the shape of a white dove. One of the aides cuts the thread. Eurydice dies. Cocteau is well aware that these are stereotyped representations of death. Cutting the thread of life was the task of the Parca Atropos. Death represented as an attractive woman rather than as a skeleton with shroud and scythe is just a modernized version of an old cliché. The dove for the soul is also a commonplace. But this is a device to which Cocteau often resorts. The principle is simple: he substitutes the signifier for the signified. The device is most effective when the spectator is so caught up with the signifier that he loses sight of the signified. This is what happens for instance in the film The Blood of a Poet. The basic concept is indicated in the scene where the Hermaphrodite lifts the garment covering the lower part of his body, revealing a sign with the warning: "Danger de mort". In the two following scenes, we see a little girl who flies up to the ceiling of a room, and a firing squad executing a Mexican peasant. Both scenes are visual dramatizations of two rather vulgar stockphrases which can be literally translated as "She sends herself up" ("Elle s'envoie en l'air"), and "They fire their shot" ("Ils tirent leur coup") but which actually mean "She gives herself an orgasm", and "They ejaculate".

In The Infernal Machine, it is the Sphinx who brings death to men. She appears, not, as one might expect, as a monstrous beast of prey with claws and beak, but as a young woman in a white dress. Her companion is the Egyptian god of the dead, the jackal-headed Anubis whose powerful jaws crush her chosen victims. Through an accumulation of similes, her murderous power is associated with a gladiator's net, lightning, voracious insects, Chinese executioners, a snake ready to swallow its prey, poison, an octopus, a thread which envelops its victim from top
to toe like a boa constrictor and delivers it powerless to the jaws of the jackal-headed god. In her human form, the Sphinx yields to pity and allows Oedipus to escape, but his lack of gratitude is such that she flies into a rage: she is ready to spit in his face, to claw him, to disfigure him, to trample on him, to castrate him, to flay him alive. Anubis then reveals the secret of the gods: Oedipus did not escape his doom. For the gods, human time is like a folded cloth pierced by a pin. When it is unfolded, the holes made by the pin appear totally unrelated. The sequence of events which makes up Oedipus' life may appear equally disconnected, and yet, these events obey a secret law. They constitute a series of traps into which Oedipus must fall, as a brainless rat caught in maze. Taken together, they make up the infernal machine which the gods have built for the mathematical annihilation of mortal man. It is no surprise that Cocteau should have used Mérimée's story *La Vénus d'Ille* as the basis for a movie script. In Mérimée's story, a young man, in order to be more at ease while playing a game of jai alai, removes his engagement ring, and the handiest place he finds for it is the finger of an ancient statue of Venus which has recently been dug up. After the game, he cannot remove the ring. After his wedding night, he is found dead, and his bride has gone mad: did Venus, in the form of the bronze statue, come to claim the young man who had thoughtlessly become her fiancé?

In Cocteau's works, the murderous power of the supernatural is also represented by the figure of the angel who smothers the living and tears out their soul without the slightest compunction. The angel appears in the film *The Blood of a Poet*. His dark form lies down over the body of the pupil who has been struck down by Dargelos' snowball and slowly absorbs him into his own. The same process is described in the novel *Le Grand Écart*. The protagonist has taken what he believes to be an overdose of cocaine. He feels on top of him "a weight of cork, a weight of marble, a weight of snow. It was the angel of Death who was accomplishing his task... He lies down on those who are going to die... The angel works coldly, cruelly, until the final spasm. His victim felt him to be ruthless, similar to the surgeon who administers chloroform, to a boa who, in order to swallow a gazelle, becomes dilated little by little, like a woman who gives birth." Death, of course, is the reverse process. Absorption takes the place of separation.

Cocteau's esthetics are largely determined by his vision of the human condition. Beauty is an essential attribute of the supernal powers whose encounter kills. Cocteau compares it to what the crew of the Superfortress 42.7353 saw after dropping the first atom bomb. They spoke of a powerful light and of a column with indescribable colors. Cocteau identifies beauty with the shock which man experiences when he comes into contact with these supernal powers through the terrestrial entities whose form they assume or the earthly phenomena in which they manifest themselves. Cocteau has listed a number of incidents in which he felt these powers' presence: "...a firework display a few days before the war, a wounded seagull which falls from the sky, the first time I looked at the moon through a telescope, the sinking of the Titanic read about in a newspaper, the gallop of a horse slowed down by the cinema, the accelerated blooming of a rose, I mention there, remembered at random, a few occasions in which the poetic fluid accumulated itself like a storm and fill me with discomfort, with forebodings, with poetry." A few individuals attract this fluid, much as Franklin's kite attracted lightning. Cocteau believed that the fireworks' display which he places on July 14, 1914 (although in fact it may have taken place one year earlier), was an omen: as he explains in *Le Potomak*, when war broke out, in the summer of 1914, it brought "a sufficient explanation of its troubles to a young barometer charged with
storminess." A few individuals are especially sensitive to the presence of supernal forces. Cocteau mentions the case of Isadora Duncan. She felt that the long red scarf which she was in the habit of wearing hated her. It was inhabited by a malevolent force. Isadora Duncan was aware of this threat, but she stubbornly challenged it. Eventually, the scarf won out: it managed to get caught in the wheel of the convertible in which Isadora was riding and to break her neck. Cocteau has a ready explanation for such a death. Artists don't really belong on earth. They are outside the norm, and their death seems to be the consequence of a mysterious repossession by the beyond: "The beyond drowns some and cuts the legs of others. Hospitals, murder, opium, love, it will use any means to finish quickly and recapture its lost children." Cocteau does not mention names, but we can easily think of a few. Drowning: Shelley, or possibly the ancient Chinese poet Li Po; leg amputation: Rimbaud, most certainly. Hospitals: Verlaine and Radiguet. The latter died of typhoid fever, and his death left Cocteau so despondent that Hemingway, who could be quite nasty, especially to homosexuals, called him: Le Veuf sur le toit, a pun on Cocteau's Le Boeuf sur le toit. Opium: Poe, very likely, and perhaps Jacques Vaché. Killing: Pushkin and Lermontov, both killed in duels, Chénier, beheaded on the guillotine. Love: Sappho, who died of unrequited love. Just as a strip of metal is the unconscious conductor of electricity, the artist is the medium of a power which he attracts, which he does not understand, but whose presence he feels, and which becomes concentrated in his works. As a child, Cocteau was able to forecast storms: "Storms ravished me like a caress from the sky. I foretold it the day before. I became the scene of its preparations. Lightning threw me into ecstasy." Similarly, Cocteau believes that such works as his play Orphée are attuned to the supernatural and have magic powers. He offers as proof the strange incidents which accompanied the performance of the play. During a final rehearsal, on the day before the opening, one of the actors had just said the line: "... with these gloves, you will go through mirrors like through water", when they heard a crash: the mirror in the next room had just fallen out of its frame and broken into pieces on the floor. At a later time, Cocteau was explaining the part of the glazier to his American translators. They had just told him that New York audiences would not understand what it represented. Cocteau was explaining that even in France glaziers were no longer seen around peddling their wares. Cocteau and his translators were walking through a public square, in the direction of the gate, when they saw a glazier appear in the empty street and walk out of their sight. They tried to follow him, but he had vanished, and nobody remembered ever seeing him around. In Mexico, an earthquake interrupted the scene where the Bacchants were going wild: the theater was destroyed and several people were injured. When the theater was rebuilt, the play was put on again. In the middle of the performance, the stage manager announced that the performance could not go on: the actor who played Orphée had fallen dead in the wings before he could come out of the mirror. And in London, the dove representing Eurydice's soul escaped after the run of the play. It came back six years later, just before the play was scheduled to reopen. Conclusive proofs, for Cocteau, that his play had set in motion invisible forces which could be detected only by such effects. How could this happen?

In order to provide some explanation, Cocteau resorts to psychology. By way of illustration, he mentions the case of a young woman who was psychologically disturbed. She was a single child, and she had such a possessive love for her parents that she would not allow them to have any pets. She was barely five when her mother became pregnant again. The girl was told
that heaven was ready to send them a little boy or a little girl. As she heard the news, she froze. When the time of the delivery arrived, she locked herself up in her room. The baby was still born. The girl fell gravely ill. After she recovered, she still would not talk to her parents. Finally, a psychoanalyst got her to talk. She explained what she had done. It was the night when her mother was going to give birth. It has snowed the day before. The little girl was not sleeping. In her nightshift, barefoot, she walked out her room, took a long hat pin, and went to the cabbage patch. With her hat pin, very carefully, she pierced every head of cabbage. When she was done, she went back to her room, got into bed, and went to sleep: "I pierced all of them, every one, she said to the psychoanalyst. I pierced them all and I got back into the house. I was very happy. I slept well." She slept well, but she woke up with a high fever. In France, as you know, babies are not brought by the stork: they grow in a cabbage patch. It was explained to the girl that this is just a story for children, and she seemed to be all right. Unfortunately, at the age of fifteen, she overheard the psychoanalyst talking about her case. He was saying: "Do you know the real tragedy of this cabbage story? The child really committed murder. By instinct, she used the methods of witchcraft, and witchcraft is no joke." She acted like a witch doctor. Cocteau explains that "a primitive who feels fear, makes a statue representing a god of fear. He fears the god born of his own fear. He expels his fear in the shape of an object which becomes a work of art because of the intensity of his fear, and who is taboo because this object, born of his moral weakness, becomes a force which commands him to reform himself." The statue is an artifact, but it has become the seat of a numinous power which radiates the psychic energy which its maker concentrated into it. The true artist, for Cocteau, is the man who is attuned to the supernal forces at large in the universe and who concentrates them into his works. Just as some fish are able to concentrate electricity in some parts of their body, the artist makes a vehicle in which he concentrates this poetic fluid: ".. music, painting, sculpture, architecture, the dance, poetry, drama, and the muse which I called Cinéma, the tenth muse, are traps in which man attempts to catch poetry for his own use..." "At the contact of the vehicles which have been the most efficiently designed, painting, sculpture, music, poem, do we not experience a poetic shock, as if we were holding the handles of an electrical apparatus...?" For Cocteau, beauty is the shock which man feels when he comes into contact with some form of supernal energy. The authors of works who do not cause this kind of shock are not authentic artists: this is the case, in Cocteau's opinion, of writers like Gide and Valéry. Unlike Rilke, they did not "tease the angel". The paintings of Chirico, on the other hand, radiate such a malevolent energy that they would drive to suicide someone imprudent enough to look at them for too long a time. Like the sorcerer, the artist deals with forces which are far more powerful than he is, forces which can easily overwhelm him and destroy him. He wants to capture the supernatural. He runs the risk of being caught.

The girl who instinctively rediscovered voodoo, like the primitive who makes a statue of the god of fear, act out of instinct. They obey orders received from their unconscious. Similarly, "the poet receives orders". He receives them "from a night which the ages have accumulated in his person, into which he cannot descend, which want to come to light; he is only its humble vehicle," Rimbaud had said: "JE est un autre." For Cocteau, the true creative power is not JE, the conscious I, but the mysterious forces welling up from the unconscious. This is the basis of Cocteau's poetics. The poet must reduce himself to the subordinate role which the Muse or the
Angel require of him. Art is the instrument through which their murderous beauty is made visible. The artist may not see it clearly, but he senses that which is totally invisible to others. This is due to the fact that he functions on a different rhythm, just as a movie camera, when it is accelerated or slowed down, reveals unsuspected aspects of reality. Plants, for instance, when their growth or their movements are accelerated on film, show themselves to be as obscene and murderous as the most beastly of humans. This is what makes drugs so attractive to artists, according to Cocteau. Drugs modify the speed of their perceptions. Opium, for instance, gives them the intuition of a universe composed of worlds which coexist without having any knowledge of one another: "Life and death are as far apart as heads and tails of a coin, but opium goes through the coin" (Opium). Poetic illumination operates in the same manner. It transcends the limits of space and time, it makes miracles possible, it makes the angel appear. According to Cocteau, in Professional Secret, the angel is situated exactly at the border of the human and the non-human: "It is a young animal, radiant, charming, powerful; it goes from invisibility to visibility with the shortcuts of a diver, the winged thunder of a thousand wild pigeons. The speed of the radiant movement which compiles him prevents us from seeing him. If this speed were to decrease, undoubtedly he would appear. This is the moment when Jacob, a true wrestler, jumps on him." The artist is no Jacob, in fact, quite the opposite. The angel jumps on him and compels him to work for him, for the angel, that is. In Opium, Cocteau tells of his encounter with the angel: "One day when I was going to visit Picasso in his apartment rue de la Boétie, I felt, in the elevator, that I was growing with something terrible and eternal. A voice was shouting to me: 'My name is on the plate!' A shock awakened me and I read on the brass plate on the handles: 'Ascenseur Heurtebise...' Shortly thereafter, I was haunted by the angel Heurtebise and I began to work on the poem. At my next visit, I looked at the plate. It bore the name: OTIS-PIFRE. The elevator had changed its trademark." The angel has no consideration whatsoever for the artist who is only his instrument. As Cocteau puts it in his Journal d'un Inconnu: "I was only his vehicle, and he treated me like a vehicle. He was preparing his exit. The attacks grew more frequent, and became a single one comparable to the approaches of childbirth. But a monstrous childbirth, devoid of any maternal tenderness." The angel's violence is described also in a number of poems: "The Angel Heurtebise, with an incredible / Brutality, jumps on me. For Heaven's sake / Don't jump so hard." The angel's brutality, however, deserves the artist's praise. It leads the artist away from earthly temptations, away from the frivolous pleasures of this world and toward his true mission. Without him, the poet would remain weighed down by the "human, tender mud" of this life. The angel guides him imperiously toward his higher calling, he shows him the way to another world. For this, the poet gives him praise: "You know where lies on the map / My mysterious path / And as soon as I wander / You seize me by the hand / Angel of ice, of mint, / of snow, fire and ether, / Heavy and light like air / your gauntlet torments me."

Some individuals partake of the essence of the angel: Rimbaud was one of them. Cocteau has endowed some of his most memorable characters with this angelism. Foremost is the figure of Dargelos, whom he describes in his Portraits-souvenirs as "the first symbol of the wild forces which inhabit us, which the social machine tries to kill within us, and which, beyond good and evil, manoeuvre the individuals whose example are our consolation for living." In Les Enfants terribles, when Dargelos throws his snowball and hits Paul in the chest, Paul falls down as if he had been struck by lightning. It is almost literally a "coup de foudre". He has fallen victim to the
blow which has marked him forever. Neither did Cocteau get over Dargelos, whose image constantly haunts his writings, his films, his drawings and his paintings. In *Les Enfants terribles*, Paul's sister Elisabeth also partakes of this angelism. She is described as the "sacred virgin", as the guardian of the temple whose approach is forbidden. Anyone who would dare to possess her is doomed to die a violent death. She is also described as an automaton manoeuvred by a supernatural power which leads her to murder and to suicide. Similarly, the artist executes the will of the power which has taken control of him. In order to fulfill his mission, he turns himself into the passive receiver of a force which transcends him. What he writes, paints, or films is dictated to him. This is what Orphée does, in the play, when he copies down the letters tapped by the horse, and in the film, when he notes the phrases heard on the radio in the car of the Princess. The Surrealists hated Cocteau: this is quite understandable. It must have seemed to them that he was stealing everything from them, without, of course, acknowledging the theft. And yet, I have no doubt that Cocteau was telling the truth, that he was recounting his own experiences.

The murderous beauty of the Muse or the Angel might be defined, in another idiom, as the numinous power of the Uncanny, which is, as we know, linked to the return of the repressed. It is the overwhelming epiphany in which, as Sartre has said of Genet, the same archetypal event is replayed in the same ritualistic and symbolic form through the same ceremonies of transfiguration. This is the event described in *The Blood of a Poet*, in the poem "The classmate":"The blow from a marble fist was a snowball / And it made a star on his heart, / And it made a star on the victor's smock, / A star on the dark victor whom nothing protects. / He stood stupefied, standing, / In the sentry-box of solitude / His legs bare under the mistletoe, the gilt walnuts, the holly / Starred like the blackboard in the study hall. / Thus often they come from the college / These blows which cause one to spit blood / The hard blows of snowballs / Which beauty throws to the heart, quickly, going by." The same scene is replayed in *Les Enfants terribles*, where the numinous idol is Dargelos. Paul wants to becomes Dargelos' friend, and he takes advantage of the snowball fight to get near him:"The battle gave him courage. He would run, he would join Dargelos, he would fight, he would protect him, he would prove what he was able to do.

The snow flew about, flattened against the capes, made stars on the walls. Here and there, between two dark areas, one saw the detail of a red face with an open mouth, of a hand which designates a target.

A hand designates the pale student who staggers and who is about to call out once more. He has just recognized, standing on the steps, one of the acolytes of his idol. It is this acolyte who sentences him. He opens his mouth:"Darg..."; immediately the snowball hits him in the mouth, penetrates, paralyzes his teeth. He just has time to notice laughter, and, next to the laughter, in the middle of his staff, Dargelos who draws himself up, his cheeks on fire, his hair dishevelled, with an immense gesture.

A blow strikes him full in the chest. A dark blow. A blow from a marble fist. A blow from the fist of a statue. His head goes empty. He makes out Dargelos on a kind of stage, his arm down, stupid, in a supernatural light.

He was lying down. A flow of blood coming from his mouth smeared his chin and his neck, soaked into the snow." For Paul, for the child struck by the snowball in *The Blood of a Poet*, for the narrator of *Le Livre blanc*, there is no escape. They bear the imprint of the blow
which hit them when they felt their first pang of desire. A disciple of Lacan might well say that their body has been forever inscribed. The object into which they have projected the violent energy of the libido is surrounded with a demonic aura which endows it with a frightening fascination. Paul discovers that all the pictures which he has cut out from newspapers and magazines and pinned to the walls of his room, detectives, criminals, boxers, movie stars, look like Dargelos. So does the young girl who comes to share his and his sister's life: they all have the same type. So do the men and women to whom the narrator-protagonist of Le Livre blanc has been attracted: a sailor, a young actress, a prostitute and her lover, a bisexual, a boy who killed himself because he did not want to share the narrator's love with his sister. Even in the monastery where the narrator seeks refuge, he discovers a monk who shows him the obsessive profile of Dargelos. In Racine's Phèdre, Cocteau saw a perfect example of this kind of predestination. Phèdre loves Hippolytes because he is the picture of Theseus as he was when she first saw him and fell in love with him. As Cocteau puts in in La Difficulté d'être: "Legally, one must be faithful to a person, humanly, to one type... It is legal that Phèdre should respect Theseus and that Theseus should love his son. It is human that Phèdre should love Hippolytes and that Theseus should hate him."

The love which Cocteau's characters experience is far removed from the feelings or emotions which are commonly associated with this word. When the Angel lies down on the body of Dargelos' victim and absorbs it into his own substance, it accomplishes the victim's deepest wish: total fusion with the beloved. Some psychoanalysts might tell us that this reflects the most archaic stage in the development of the self. When Cocteau writes in Le Potomak that "my desire was, at the age when sex does not yet influence the choices of the flesh, not to reach for, not to touch, but to be the elect person," he is harking back to this stage. As I have shown in another paper, for Cocteau, Eros is identified with Thanatos. Desire aspires to self-immolation, to the total sacrifice of the self, to the complete absorption by the lover whose embrace means death. In this fusion, all differences are erased: the artist is both I and Other, the one who possesses and the one who is possessed, male and female, bride and bridegroom, lover and killer, bull and bullfighter, the armed Muse and the artist whom she kills. In the poem Requiem, the Muse is the praying mantis who devours the male during their mating. In the film Le Testament d'Orphée, she takes the shape of Pallas Athene. In addition to a black diving suit which looks like an armour, she wears a helmet and she carries a shield and a spear. The effect is that of a Greek warrior ready for battle. After what seems like an endless wait, the poet is admitted into her presence. He offers her a flower. She turns away. As he withdraw, mumbling abject apologies, she throws her spear which pierces his back and comes out of his chest. He dies as he stammers these words: "The horror... the the horror ... the horror." One recognizes the final words of Kurtz in Conrad's Heart of Darkness. They are also the words spoken by the renegade American colonel in the film on the Vietnam war inspired by Conrad's tale, Apocalypse now. The horror is what has been revealed to them in the depths of the dark continent of Africa, or in the jungles of Asia. This is where they have come face to face with the numinous fascination of the dark powers which reign in the depths of the human heart, the primitive forces which have led to the murderous rites described in such works as Frazer's The Golden Bough, Freud's Totem and Taboo, or Girard's La Violence et le sacré. These are also the rites rediscovered by the stranded children who appear in Golding's Lord of the Flies. In The Birth of Tragedy, Nietzsche opposed
the Apollinian and the Dionysian. Cocteau presents his Orphée as a priest of Apollo, the God of Light, who has abandoned his former cult. He has fallen prey to the fascination of the dark gods to whom, after centuries of so-called civilization, man still longs to surrender.

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