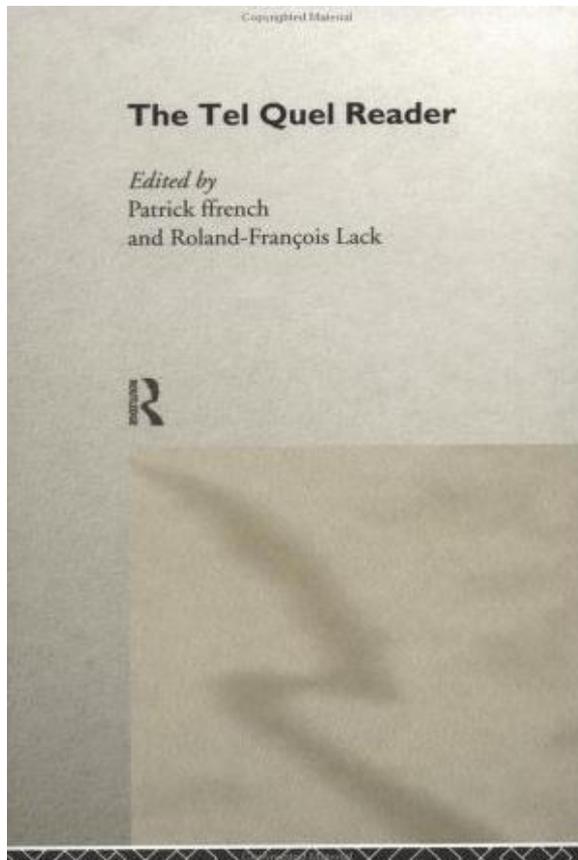


# The Tel Quel Reader

Patrick Ffrench and Roland-Francois Lack



**Editeur :** Routledge;

**Édition :** annotated edition (19 fév. 1998)

**Langue :** Anglais

**ISBN-10 :** 0415157137

**ISBN-13 :** 978-0415157131

288 pages

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## Sur le livre

### From Library Journal

Excerpted from the French journal *Tel Quel* (1960-82) and ably translated by two lecturers in French at University College, London, these articles demonstrate French poststructuralist radical literary theory as practiced in France during the 1960s and 1970s by some of its major proponents, e.g., Julia Kristeva, Michel Foucault, Philippe Sollers, Marc Devade, Marcelin Pleynet, and Roland Barthes. The articles explore literature and culture, gender, film, semiotics, and psychoanalysis. Critics have detected a progressive movement in the journal itself from literature *tel quel*, "such as it is," toward the avant-garde and toward a scientific analysis of literature. The translators group the articles under three major headings—Science, Literature, and Art—but several of the articles defy this classification. Marcel Pleynet's article, "Thetic `Madness,'" for example, deals primarily with religion as it relates to art. This reader will prove extremely valuable to structuralist and post-structuralist literature scholars but will have little appeal to broader audiences.—Robert T. Ivey, Univ. of Memphis  
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### Fredric Jameson, Duke University

"This collection includes the most important essays and gives an excellent picture of *Tel Quel's* work and evolution over time."

### Book Description

*The Tel Quel Reader* presents for the first time in English many of the key essays that played an instrumental role in shaping the contours of literary and cultural debate in the 1960s and 1970s. *Tel Quel* was a French journal and publishing team that printed some of the earliest work by Derrida, Bataille, Kristeva, Barthes, Foucault and Deleuze. The *Reader* includes essays available in English for the first time by Kristeva and Foucault, and a fascinating interview with Barthes. It provides a unique insight into the poststructuralist movement by presenting some of the pioneering essays on literature and culture, gender, film, semiotics and psychoanalysis.

### Ingram

The work of the French literary review, intellectual grouping, and publishing team *Tel Quel* had a profound impact on literary and cultural debate in the 1960s and '70s. THE

TEL QUEL READER presents, for the first time in English, many of the key essays written by the Tel Quel group. The collection filled a much-needed gap in the literature available on the postculturalist movement.

## Publisher comments

### **For release: March 1998**

Can You Resist the Seduction and Terror of Tel Quel Theory?

-- Available for the First Time in English --

"This reader will prove extremely valuable to structuralist and post-structuralist literature scholars..."

-- Library Journal

"This collection includes the most important essays and gives an excellent picture of Tel Quel's work and evolution over time."

-- Fredric Jameson, Duke University

### What is Tel Quel?

The explosion of a radical theory of literature which took place in France around 1968 had a vital enterprise. Tel Quel was an intellectual grouping, French literary journal, and publishing team that printed some of the earliest works by "theory legends" like Derrida, Bataille, Kristeva, Barthes, Foucault and Deleuze. THE TEL QUEL READER (Routledge; March 17, 1998; a trade paperback original), edited by Patrick ffrench and Roland-Francois Lack, presents -- for the first time in English -- some of the key texts of the radical theory and practice of literature which emerged in France in the 1960's and 1970's.

This reader provides a unique insight into the poststructuralist movement and presents some of the pioneering essays on literature and culture, gender, film, semiotics, and psychoanalysis -- works by theorists who no doubt continue to inspire many of the intellectuals of the next generation. THE TEL QUEL READER fills a crucial gap in literary and cultural theory and illuminates the enduring value of the journal's enterprise.

### ABOUT THE AUTHORS:

Both Patrick ffrench and Roland-Francois Lack are Lecturers of French at University College London. ffrench is the author of *The Time of Theory* (1996) and Lack is the author of *Poetics of the Pretext* (1997).

### THE TEL QUEL READER includes:

writings never before published in the English language by,

KRISTEVA

GOUX

BAUDRY

FOUCAULT

PLEYNET

SOLLERS

DEVADE

SCARPETTA

and an interview with BARTHES.

## About the author

Both Patrick French and Roland-Francois Lack are Lecturers of French at University College London. French is the author of *The Time of Theory* (1996) and Lack is the author of *Poetics of the Pretext* (1997).

## PREFACE

All of the material from *Tel Quel* included in this volume, except Pleyner's 'Heavenly Glory' and the excerpt from Sollers's *Paradis*, is being published here in English for the first time.

A defining, if somewhat vexing, characteristic of *Tel Quel* writing is a tendency to cite material in the text without indicating a source. In these cases, where we have used an existing translation we have indicated the source, and where the translation is our own, we have not. Where the authors *have* given bibliographical references, we have tried to give the English translation where it exists, although it has not always been possible to use an existing translation for material cited in the text. Problems have arisen particularly where an author uses a French translation from, say, German that foregrounds terms not rendered in the existing English version. This is often the case with Freud, Marx and Lenin. We have adopted the convention of inserting translator's notes or other note material of our own in square brackets. Where titles are referred to in the text we have followed the rule of giving English titles for texts which have been translated, and French titles only for those which have not. Translator's notes relative to the meaning of specific words are given in square brackets either as endnotes or, occasionally, as single explanatory words within the body of the text.

## CHRONOLOGICAL HISTORY OF *TEL QUEL*

1957-9

The first committee of the review, established around the principal figures Philippe Sollers, Jean-Edern Hallier and Jean-René Huguenin, is formed. In 1957 Sollers's first text, the short story 'Le défi', is published by the left-wing Catholic publisher Seuil, and praised by François Mauriac, the prestigious Catholic novelist and critic. In 1958 Sollers's first novel, *A Curious Solitude*, is published, and is praised by Mauriac and Louis Aragon, principal literary figure of the PCF (French Communist Party).

1960

The review *Tel Quel* is officially formed, and the first issue published. It includes an opening 'Déclaration', affirming 'literary quality' and the determination to 'place poetry at the highest point of the mind'. The title 'Tel Quel' echoes that of a book by Paul Valéry, who is cited in the 'Déclaration', but an epigraph, from Nietzsche, asserts a will to 'affirm this world such as it is' ('tel quel'). In the same issue Sollers's 'Sept propositions sur Robbe-Grillet' appear, and the review allies itself with the *nouveau roman* at this early point, publishing work by Claude Simon and Robert Pinget. There are also publications by Francis Ponge and Antonin Artaud, marking a will to affirm poetic language. At the end of the year Jean-René Huguenin and his colleague Renaud Matignon leave the committee, after disagreements over the direction of the review. Sollers and Hallier meet Georges Bataille, who gives them a series of lectures from 1950 to publish. There are contacts with André Breton and Louis-Ferdinand Céline.

1961

The review begins to show a distinct orientation towards the avant-garde, in literature and criticism, at the expense of the initial affirmation of 'literary quality'. Publications in the review include texts by Ponge, Bataille, Artaud, Robbe-Grillet, Pound, Hölderlin and Borges. Barthes publishes his first text in the review, 'Littérature aujourd'hui', in which he criticizes the review's pretension to affirm 'literature such as it is'. Sollers's second novel, *The Park*, shows an orientation towards the *nouveau roman*, but with decisive differences. Marcelin Pleyne approaches *Tel Quel* after Sollers reviews his poetry favourably. The novelist and dramatist Jean Thibaudeau joins the committee.

1962

The review begins to publish new poetry of an experimental nature, by Marcelin Pleynet and Denis Roche, as well as work by Michaux and Ponge. Pleynet's first text, *Provisoires amants de nègres*, is published. The review continues its association with Georges Bataille, publishing an excerpt from *The Tears of Eros*. An interest in James Joyce is shown with a long text by Umberto Eco, later to form part of *The Open Work*. The poet and philosopher Michel Deguy and the *nouveau romancier* Jean Ricardou join the committee. At the end of the year Jean-Edern Hallier is excluded from the committee after attempting to gain complete control. The 'Collection *Tel Quel*' at Seuil is begun with Denis Roche's poetry collection *Récits complets*. There are contacts between Derrida and Sollers. Death of Bataille.

1963

Poetic language continues to be affirmed in the review with publications by Pleynet, and a translation of Charles Olson's 'Projective Verse'. The review's orientation towards the avant-garde across the arts is shown with a text by Pierre Boulez. Robbe-Grillet is interviewed in 'Littérature aujourd'hui', while criticism of the *nouveau roman* begins to emerge in Sollers's review of Foucault's book on Roussel, and Sollers's essay 'Logique de la fiction'. Foucault publishes 'Language to Infinity' in the review, which compares its textuality with the writing of Blanchot. The committee is substantially reformed when Pleynet, Denis Roche, Jean-Pierre Faye and Jean-Louis Baudry join, with Pleynet as editorial secretary. Michel Deguy leaves the review. Michel Foucault chairs a *Tel Quel* conference at Cérisy on 'Une littérature nouvelle?', with debates on the novel and poetry, and writes an article in *Critique* which analyses the novels of Sollers, Thibaudeau, Baudry and Faye, and the poetry of Pleynet, distinguishing them from the *nouveau roman* and identifying their radical difference. Sollers, Barthes and Foucault contribute articles to a special issue of *Critique* on Bataille, alongside Leiris, Klossowski and Blanchot.

1964

The review allies itself with the Italian neo-avant-garde with publications by the poet and novelist Eduardo Sanguineti. Barthes's text 'Literature and Signification' is published in the review. Pleynet writes two important articles on poetic language, 'La pensée contraire' and 'L'image du sens', which identify the need for an analytic approach to the notion of the avant-garde. Sollers writes a critical review of Robbe-Grillet's *Pour un Nouveau Roman*.

1965

A special issue on Artaud includes Derrida's first article in the review, 'La parole soufflée'; Sollers's essays on Artaud and on Dante begin to establish a form of criticism which identifies a canon of 'limit-texts' and begins to define a theory of literature specific to the review. Sollers's third novel, *Drame*, shows a definitive departure from the *nouveau roman* and the establishment of a textuality specific to the review. Barthes writes an important essay on *Drame* in the journal *Critique*. Pleynet's *Comme* also develops a specific practice of poetic language. Todorov's collection, *Théorie de la littérature*, of texts by the Russian Formalists associates the review with literary formalism and affirms its place at the forefront of critical innovation. Julia Kristeva arrives in Paris and attends Barthes's seminar. Sollers and Baudry attend Lacan's seminar. Sollers meets Lacan.

1966

In 'Problèmes de l'avant-garde' Pleynet refers to Barthes, Lacan and Derrida as allies in an analytic approach to the limits of literature and language, criticizing the notion of the avant-garde. Derrida publishes 'Freud and the Scene of Writing' in an issue devoted to psychoanalysis and linguistics. Sollers's essay 'Literature and Totality', given as a paper at Barthes's seminar at the *Ecole Pratique des Hautes Etudes*, identifies Mallarmé as a powerful precursor of a theory of radical textuality. The 'Collection *Tel Quel*' publishes formally innovative novels by Maurice Roche, and critical works by Barthes and Genette. Pleynet's book *Lautréamont* is critical of Bachelard and Blanchot's approach to this writer, and identifies Lautréamont/Ducasse's texts as a crucial destruction of the edifice of 'literature', via an 'underwriting' (*souscription*) of the laws of rhetoric. An important conference on Sade is organized by the review, with contributions by Barthes, Klossowski, Sollers, Hubert Damisch and psychoanalyst Michel Tort. The 'Lacano-Althusserian' review *Cahiers pour l'analyse* is launched, publishing Althusser, Lacan and Derrida and constituting a vital reference (for a time) for *Tel Quel*.

1967

Sollers's article 'The Roof', on Bataille, links a theory of textuality to a critique of society and culture of Marxist dimensions. Kristeva's first article, 'Towards a semiology of paragrams,' is published, crucial in outlining a theory of intertextuality and the notion of a paragrammatic text running underneath the surface of the text as phenomenon. Sollers writes 'Programme', a radical platform for textual, theoretical and ideological revolution. Derrida's *Writing and Difference* is published in the 'Collection *Tel Quel*'. Sollers's 'Lautréamont's Science' completes the series of essays on 'limit-texts' which will make up *Logiques* [*Writing and the Experience of Limits*]. The review engages in dialogues with the PCF review *La Nouvelle critique*. There are contacts with PCF writers Daix, Houdebine, Scarpetta, Henric. A split in the committee emerges at the end of the year: Jean-Pierre Faye leaves; Jacqueline Risset and Pierre Rottenberg join. The subtitle 'Science/Littérature' is permanently appended.

1968

Derrida's 'Plato's Pharmacy', published in the review, associates its radical textuality with an ideological critique of Western logocentrism. Baudry's 'Freud and "Literary Creation"' is critical of Freud's phantasmatic approach to literature. Kristeva's 'Distance et anti-représentation' identifies non-Western traditions as powerful references for a non-representative textuality. Sollers's 'critical machine' *Logiques* and the novel *Nombres* are published, the latter breaking new ground in the use of structural motifs of generation (the square) and the introduction of Chinese characters. The review, in the midst of dialogue with the PCF, supports its policy on May 1968, that it is a petty-bourgeois revolt. The Group for Theoretical Studies is created, a forum for the presentation of work; Sollers, Kristeva, Derrida, Jean-Joseph Goux and others contribute. A conference at Cluny with *La Nouvelle critique* links the review's theory and practice of the text to Marx's critique of the economy and the Marxist conception of ideology, with reference to the work of Althusser.

1969

The review continues to affirm innovative writing, with publications by Pierre Guyotat, Jean Genet and William Burroughs. Sollers's 'Survols/rapports (blocs)/conflits' sketches out an ideological strategy and resumes the review's theory and practice of the text. Starobinski's 'The Text in the Text', in the review, analyses Saussure's 'Anagrams', which are a crucial reference for Kristeva. Kristeva publishes a long essay on Sollers's novel *Nombres*, 'L'engendrement de la formule', in which the notions of geno-text and pheno-text are introduced. Kristeva's *Séméiotiké* is published in the 'Collection *Tel Quel*', collecting her articles from 1967; it will become a permanent theoretical reference for the review. *Théorie d'ensemble*, a compendium of theoretical essays produced in and around the review, is published, featuring earlier essays by Foucault, Barthes and Derrida, and the Marxist-oriented work of 1967. The review is the site of a polemic with Jean-Pierre Faye over his letter in the PCF newspaper *L'Humanité* accusing Derrida of complicity with Heidegger's alleged complicity with Nazism. Sollers and Kristeva occupy the office of Robert Flacelière, Director of the *Ecole Normale Supérieure*, when Lacan's seminar at the ENS is suspended. The reviews *TXT* and *Cinéthique* are created, in the wake of *Tel Quel*. *Cahiers pour l'analyse* folds and some of its members join the militant *Gauche prolétarienne*.

1970

Translations of Mao Tse-tung in the review show a movement towards Maoism. Derrida's 'The Double Session', at the Group for Theoretical Studies, continues the critique of logocentric, idealist philosophy in the review. Sollers's 'Lénine et le matérialisme philosophique' establishes dialectical materialism as a crucial philosophical reference for the review, but again suggests a movement towards Maoism. Pleyner's *Painting and System* in the 'Collection' is a powerful critique of an idealist conception of painting, focusing on Cézanne and Matisse as proponents of a materialist practice. Kristeva joins the committee, as does the painter Marc Devade, associated with the materialist, 'Derridean' painting group 'Support/Surfaces'. The review *Peinture, cahiers théoriques* is created by artists of the Supports/Surfaces group, and is closely associated with *Tel Quel*. Polemics arise with Jean-Pierre Faye's new review *Change* over accusations of early right-wing tendencies in *Tel Quel*. Serge Leclaire's Department of Psychoanalysis at Vincennes is criticized in *Tel Quel*. The words 'Philosophie/Politique' are added to the subtitle. Guyotat's *Eden, Eden, Eden* is banned, resulting in a polemic over its censure and a petition circulated and published in *Tel Quel*. At the second Cluny colloquium, 'Littérature et idéologie', Kristeva and Derrida are criticized by members of *Change* and *Action poétique*, and the alliance with the PCF becomes strained. The review *Poétique* is founded by Todorov, Cixous, Richard and Genette, ostensibly as a review of formalist and structuralist criticism, a role long since abandoned by *Tel Quel*. The *Nouvelle revue de psychanalyse* is created.

1971

A special issue on Surrealism analyses and criticizes its psychoanalytic theories and condemns its reference to occultism. A special issue on Barthes, the first of its kind, links his work to *Tel Quel's* political and ideological radicality. Sollers's 'Sur la Contradiction', a reading of Mao's essay of the same name, solidifies the review's reference to Maoist Marxism. Pleyner's 'Lautréamont politique' engages in a debate about the political use-value of Lautréamont/Ducasse. Sollers's *Lois* shows a less structurally austere, more parodic and violent form of writing, closer to Rabelais, Joyce and Céline than to Blanchot. *Tel Quel* signs a manifesto with the film reviews *Cinéthique* and *Cahiers du cinéma* against the review *Positif*, but criticizes *Cinéthique* for its criticism of the PCF. The Maoist splinter group the 'The June 1971 Movement' is created and 'occupies' the offices of *Tel Quel*. *La Nouvelle critique* publishes a note criticizing the review for its addition of the 'Philosophie/Politique' subtitle and Pleyner's critique of Aragon. *Tel Quel* replies, defending its position. Sollers publishes a letter in *Le Monde* protesting against the interdiction of Maria-Antonietta Macciocchi's *De la Chine* at the Communist *L'Humanité* Festival. Sollers intervenes at the festival. The November issue announces the formal break with PCF, the review is declared in crisis and the Group for Theoretical Studies is suspended. The crisis is resolved when Thibaudeau and Ricardou leave the committee, leaving the Maoist core in control. Sollers and Cuban novelist Severo Sarduy translate the latter's novel *Cobra* into French, a parodic and heterogeneous novel which marks a different orientation in the review's textual practice.

1972

A special issue on 'La pensée chinoise' annexes *Tel Quel's* materialist, anti-representative textual practice to Chinese philosophy and the Chinese language. Denis Roche publishes his 'destruction of poetry' *Le mécrit*. Derrida's *Dissemination* is published in the 'Collection *Tel Quel*', but Derrida marks out his will to distance himself from the review, after interviews with *Tel Quel* associates Houdebine and Scarpetta, who press him on the question of Marxism. The Althusserian notion of ideology is criticized in a polemical interchange in the review between Bernard Sichère and Marie-Claire Boons (of the group 'Yenan'). A conference on Artaud and Bataille, organized by the review, links these writers to the Maoist politics of the review, but also constitutes a powerful analysis of their work. The review *Art Press* is launched, which will be closely associated with *Tel Quel*. *Tel Quel* is critical, in editorials, of the alliance between the PCF and the PS (Parti socialiste).

1973

Special issues on Artaud and Bataille publish the papers of the 1972 conference. In her article on Artaud, Kristeva develops the notion of the 'subject in process', and shows a decisive orientation towards psychoanalysis. A special issue on Joyce brings him out as a proponent of a plural and heterogeneous, materialist textuality. Sollers's unpunctuated novel *H* is essentially a forerunner of *Paradis*. Barthes's *The Pleasure of the Text*, in the 'Collection', enlarges the scope of *Tel Quel* textuality to a more 'corporeal' register. Denis Roche leaves the committee. Kristeva lectures in the USA. The review condemns the fascist coup in Chile and PCF-PS alliance in France. Sollers, Kristeva and Pleyne participate in a conference on 'Psychoanalysis and Politics' in Milan, organized by psychoanalyst-entrepreneur Armando Verdiglione.

1974

The first instalment of *Paradis* marks the beginning of the serial publication in the review of Sollers's unpunctuated epic, parodically treating society, politics, ideology, sexuality, literature and theology. A special issue on China focuses on its political status. Sollers's *Sur le matérialisme* and Kristeva's *Revolution of Poetic Language* are published, two extensive texts which represent the review's theory or philosophy in the early seventies. Marxism is investigated further in Macciocchi's *Pour Gramsci*, and an initial link to the feminist movement (particularly to the group 'Psych et Po' and the Editions des Femmes) is made with Kristeva's *About Chinese Women*. The alliance will not last long. Editorials criticize Derrida and Althusser for proposing philosophies of idealism. In April and May, Sollers, Kristeva, Pleyne, Barthes and François Wahl visit China, invited there by the Embassy. On their return letters in *Le Monde* by Barthes and Wahl criticize or remain silent on the political situation in China. Sollers affirms the philosophical 'Criticize Confucius' campaign in China.

1975

Marxism is criticized for its overly systematic, economic basis, and the review focuses more and more on forces of excess and violence, articulated in the review as a 'radical evil' which entails a consideration of theology, of sexuality and of obscenity, for example in the writings of Sade or Guyotat.

1976

Editorials and texts identify a 'crisis of rationalism', as feminism, movements of youth revolt, random violence and fascism proliferate. The review adopts a strategy of 'analysis' of this excess, which links it to Lacan's ideas. A critique of Marxism as repressing the forces of violent excess which constitute the social link is suggested and developed. In discussions with Maurice Clavel, Sollers shows his disillusionment with Marxism and with the 'tragedy' in China. Sollers makes his first trip to USA, and meets de Kooning. By now Kristeva has begun practising psychoanalysis.

1977

A special issue on the USA affirms the heterogeneous and plural forms of artistic practice in the States, and recognizes the less institutional, but also less radical, situation of intellectuals and artists. Barthes's *A Lover's Discourse: Fragments*, in the 'Collection', shows an apparent shift on Barthes's part to less ideological concerns. Macciocchi's *Après Marx, Avril* analyses the revolt of the Italian Movement.

1978

A special issue on 'Recherches féminines' interrupts the serial publication of Sollers's *Paradis* and, with articles by Kristeva and others, affirms woman's position as dissident. A special issue on dissidence, collecting papers from a conference organized by Armando Verdiglione, establishes dissidence as a key term for the review: dissidence with regard to theory, ideology, institution. Literature is seen as essentially dissident with regard to any system.

1979

Publications by René Girard, Philippe Muray, Shoshana Felman and Sollers show *Tel Quel's* intention to analyse religion, sexuality and psychoanalysis in relation to literature. The subtitle 'Art' is added to the list.

1980

Barthes's last text, 'Deliberation', on diary writing, is published in the review. Sollers's 'Socrate en passant', 'Le Pape' and 'On n'a encore rien vu' offer playful, vocal deliberations on a number of different subjects. Another special issue on Joyce establishes that writer as the principal focus of this period. Kristeva's *Powers of Horror* establishes a psychoanalytic reading of

abjection, particularly focused on Céline, which is closely articulated with the work of Sollers and others, and identifies Céline as a principal area of interest. Pleyner's *Voyage en Chine*, a long awaited account of the 1974 trip, recounts it on a personal level, showing how the subjectivity of the writer has now become more important than ideological considerations. Death of Roland Barthes. Sollers welcomes Lacan's dissolution of the *Ecole Freudienne de Paris*. Sollers, Jean-Marie Benoist and Bernard Henri-Lévy, in *Tel Quel*, criticize the 'hegemony of philosophy' centred on *Critique*. Louis Althusser strangles his wife at the *Ecole Normale Supérieure* and is committed without a trial. Papal visit to France.

1981

In 'Le GSI', 'Pourquoi j'ai été chinois' and 'Histoire de femme' Sollers continues his critique of the intellectual 'spectacle', affirming the importance of theology and focusing specifically on the issue of sexuality. Sollers's novel *Paradis* is published by Seuil, collecting the numerous excerpts published in the review. Sollers will give virtuoso readings from the text. Pleyner's collection of poems *Rime*, is published, abandoning the structure of *Stanze* and adopting an aggressive, fragmented style. Philippe Muray's *Céline* is published in the 'Collection *Tel Quel*'. Death of Jacques Lacan.

1982

Sollers's articles 'Je sais pourquoi je viens' and 'L'Assomption' continue to develop the vision of previous texts, arguing for a view of sexuality as determined by language and a reading of theological texts as materialist critiques of the phenomenal world. Special issues on Picasso, psychoanalysis. Publication of a text by Malraux. Barthes's posthumous *The Responsibility of Forms* is the last text to be published in the 'Collection *Tel Quel*'. Final issue of the review. Sollers's novel *Women*, which shifts to a heterogeneous, conversational narrative style and contains thinly veiled parodic portraits of Barthes, Lacan and Althusser, is published by Gallimard. *Tel Quel* shifts publisher to Denoë and changes name to *L'Infini*. In 1983 the first issue of *L'Infini* begins with an affirmation of the continuity with *Tel Quel*, but not with its myth, and states the intention to 'rewrite the history of the twentieth century'.

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