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Reconstructing the Old New Criticism

HARRY BERGER, JR.

This essay is an attempt to chart certain transformations in critical theory and practice that have occurred over the last forty years since the advent of the New Criticism, and in reaction to it, since it represents what has happened to me as a practicing critic during that period, and is in effect the story of my continuing reeducation. But except for a few stray comments it will not be autobiographical in tone or procedure. It will be partly an analysis of and partly a meditation on the changes and their implications for interpretive practice. I shall begin with a critical description of certain features of New Criticism with the aim of abstracting from that diffuse body of work a set of clearly defined principles, or postulates, and showing how they compose into a model whose presuppositions regulate a wide range of practices.

As the use of upper case suggests, the New Criticism has itself become mythologized and essentialized since its emergence during and after the Second World War. It has also been reduced to a better wrought form than in fact it had in order to be comfortably inurned. Its *hic iacets* have not always (i. e. seldom) been eulogistic. This poses a certain embarrassment to the present writer, who finds himself still kicking about in the urn, still blowing on the ashes, still trying to emerge phoenixlike into the light of the New Day. I consider myself a Reconstructed Old New Critic, and I therefore feel compelled to defend my calling, though since I remain firmly tied to the illusion that "Reconstructed" is the most important term in the title, my defense is sure to add a few cracks to the already battered urn. There were of course more than one New Criticism in the period of emergence, some of them have not to my knowledge succeeded in expiring as perhaps they ought, and even the ashy mythical integer has been refracted into any number of competing posthumous representations. Yet although, as Frank Lentricchia has observed "The

New Criticism was --- no monolith but an inconsistent and sometimes confused movement" traversed by real differences, retrospective analysis has brought out certain common themes and impulses whose continuing influence suggests to Lentricchia that if New Criticism is officially dead "it is dead in the way that an imposing and repressive father-figure is dead."² Since my aim is partly to effect a restoration of the father, I do not have a heavy investment in Lentricchia's image.

I have no interest in sketching yet another official portrait or parody of New Criticism. Instead, I shall describe what New Criticism Means To Me. When I was reading *Understanding Poetry*, *Understanding Drama*, *Practical Criticism*, *The World's Body*; and *The Well-Wrought Urn*, I had already been corrupted by *Seven Types of Ambiguity*, *Some Versions of Pastoral*, and *The Philosophy of Literary Form*. In the long retrospect of thirty-five years of practice I can see that it was my reading of Empson and Burke, most of all my frustration with their unsystematic and electric brilliance, that most deeply affected me.³

Even as I embraced New Criticism, there was much in it that I found oppressive. At one extreme, I resisted what I thought were overspecific articulations of the interpretive act into such distinct categories as those of tone, imagery, diction, etc., because, although they were presented as heuristic, they ended up in practice as reified parts of a dismembered body one was supposed to reassemble according to instructions. At the other extreme, I was troubled by (what was then) a vague but sharply felt sense that I was being preached to, was being told what to value and dismiss, and that this was in some way being smuggled in under the surface of an earnest, disinterested, benign, indeed often condescending, pedagogy: moral instruction embedded in sugar coated technical instruction.

That impression became less vague when I came to learn more about some of the political and cultural agendas behind apparently diverse examples of critical practice—"agendas" is probably the wrong word, suggests something more conspiratorial than I mean. Before the McCarthy era, when I think agendas did come into play, what existed was a moralism born of a diffuse cultural nostalgia that provided the bond of the so-called "fugitives," and penetrated New Critical practice in some odd thematic insistences, such as the interpretation of *King Lear* as a critique of rationalism. But the most salient manifestation of that nostalgia is of course to be found in the central article of

New Critical belief, the isolation, autonomy, self-sufficiency, unity, and completeness of the literary work as a "world."⁴ For this was clearly the product of an attempt to shelter a paradisal activity of reading which could regreen a sense of value everywhere bleached out by the arid landscape of science and consumer capitalism.

I don't for a moment mean to imply that the garden wall circumscribed some oasis of pure poetry, some golden age of faith and community.⁵ The garden of literature was full of snakes, toads weeds, and rotten apples. The point is rather that the claims made for literature's inclusiveness and impurity, its tensions, paradoxes, complexities, and all that, tended to estheticize them by immuring them in a garden of *reading*. The moral and political implications of estheticism come out most clearly in moments when its latent didactic impulse is apologetically acknowledged, as it is by Wimsatt and Brooks in the epilogue to their *Literary Criticism: A Short History*:

Of course the reflective and responsible theorist will say that he doesn't call evil itself, or division, or conflict, desirable things. He is sure, however, that facing up to them, facing up to the human predicament, is a desirable and mature state of soul and the right model and source of a mature poetic art. But again, with a certain accent, that may sound somewhat like telling a boy at a baseball game that the *contest* is not really important but only his *noticing* that there *is* a contest.

That is the accent I remember, and its echo is not dimmed by a subsequent comment in which the interpretive elite reflectively and responsibly build the wall higher, and face up to the contest as if it were a game of croquet :

The great works and the fine works of literature seem to need evil—just as much as the cheap ones, the adventure or detective stories. Evil or the tension of strife with evil is welcomed and absorbed into the structure of the story, the rhythm of the song. The literary spirit flourishes in evil and couldn't get along without it.⁶

The canonizing gesture that makes inclusiveness a criterion of exclusion is inseparable from the properly "cognitive" function of criticism, as Wimsatt calls it, and over even the most innocent metapoetic descriptions it throws the shadow of an inward-turning self-manicuring concern :

Poetic symbols- largely through their iconicity various at levels - call attention to themselves as symbols and in themselves invite evaluation. What may seem stranger is that the verbal symbol in calling attention to itself must also call attention to the difference between itself and the reality which it resembles and symbolizes..... Iconicity enforces disparity. The symbol has more substance than a noniconic symbol and hence is more clearly realized as a thing separate from its referents and as one of the productions of our own spirit. Seeing a work of art, says Ortega y Gasset, is seeing the window pane with the garden pasted behind it, or the world inverted into the belvedere of our own concepts..... As a stone sculpture of a human head in a sense *means* a human head but in another sense *is* a carved mass of stone and a metaphor of a head (one would rather have one's head carved in stone than in cheese), so a poem in its various levels and relations of meaning has a kind of rounded being or substance and a metaphoric relation to reality.⁷

Wimsatt's critical dualism draws its energy from the heroic effort to harmonize yet sustain the disparity between the claims of two conflicting cognitive orientations, one hermeneutic and the other protreptic: one focused on the complexity and integrity of the work, its "truth of coherence," its "poetic value"; the other focused on its relation to "moral value" – on the need to "recognize the metaphoric capacities of language and the moral importance of valid linguistic expression without surrendering our conception of truth as a thing beyond language."⁸ His use of the metaphor of metaphor to characterize the tensional relation between poetry and reality which this dualistic perspective constitutes, testifies to a healthy distrust of any reconciling formula, an unwillingness to articulate the relation in more specific or analytic terms. As Christopher Ricks has remarked in a moving eulogy, Wimsatt's "particular forte" is "his ability to argue very strictly on behalf of 'loose' and limber concepts or principles," like the principle that the poem is metaphor.⁹

Yet the dangers of the position adhere to the images by which the argument of the above passage is given its iconic concreteness. For exactly what lies behind the garden pasted behind the window pane? I am perhaps unaccountably reminded of the precarious belvedere of Isabel Archer's mind in *Portrait of a Lady*, and of the green door in Albany beyond which she dares not look. And why the hilarious aside

about stone and cheese? Those symbols, however casually introduced, "invite evaluation"—between, say, "the great --- and the fine works of literature" carved in stone to endure our contemplation and "the cheap ones" we consume. Isn't cheese one of the productions of our own spirit? Isn't the engendered body another? And would one rather have one's head carved (and why would one?) by itself, apart from the gendered cheese-eating body? The "rounded being" of that contemplative member transfers its metaphoric substance to the text it circumscribes, and vanishes into the objectivity, the paradisal innocence, of *the work*. Thus the heroic pastoral of New Criticism consigns to extramural invisibility not only the intentions and affections of author and reader but also those that motivate the interpreter's cognitions.

Robert Scholes observes that for the New Critics "the ambiguity of the text is an objective correlative of a purely contemplative state in the reader, who recognizes that the text is not seeking to denote a reality but to connote an elegantly balanced esthetic structure."¹⁰ I think that, given its etymology, "contemplative": catches the implications of the attitude better than "cognitive": *contemplatio* is what one does in a *templum*, a space marked off for augury or visionary survey or sanctuary; its Greeks forebears are *temnein* (to cut) and *temenos*, not only a chief's stronghold but also "a piece of land cut off from common uses and dedicated to a god" (Liddell & Scott); in this case, the god Hermes.¹¹

The fact that our word *contempt* comes from the same root may suggest the slanderous turn this portrait of New Criticism seems to be taking. For if anything has come to appear obvious, it is that New Criticism democratized literary study, released it from a higher humanism which masters of taste and erudition sought to instill in select cadres of gentleman scholars and oligarchs. New Criticism enabled "even the meanest student who lacked the scholarly information of his betters" to make "valid comments on the language and structure of the text." This statement seems all the more credible in that is a concession with which Jonathan Culler prefaces his argument that "what is good for literary education is not necessarily good for the study of literature in general," and that the task for literary study is to move beyond the interpretation of "one work after another" toward inquiry into literature as an institution.

It is of course in a different manner that New Critical contemplation cuts off its piece of land from common uses. "In the name of

improved interpretation," Scholes writes, "reading was turned into a mystery and the literature classroom into a chapel where the priestly instructor (who knew the authors, dates, titles, biographies, and general provenance of the texts) astounded the faithful with miracles of interpretation." Instructors who used that parenthetically immured knowledge "officially asserted that such material was irrelevant to the interpretive process," and this was not a question of "conscious fraud" but a consequence of the commitment to "the notion of the bounded, self-sufficient work" (Semiotics, P. 15).

Though their projects differ considerably, Scholes and Culler agree about the need to destroy the hegemony of an interpretive method that invests its power in an aristocracy of canonized works. Where Culler is against the continued focus on interpretation, Scholes is for it. He not only advocates but also demonstrates an interpretive method based on an eclectic semiotic approach the literariness of *texts* considered as acts of communication ("literary" in his lexicon means dominated by "duplicitous" communicative features).¹³ He bases his move beyond New Criticism on the distinction between *work* and *text*:

A text, as opposed to a work, is open, incomplete, insufficient. This is not a quality inherent in any particular piece of writing --- but only a way of regarding such a piece of writing or any other combination of signs. The same set of words can be regarded as either a work or a text. As a text, however, a piece of writing must be understood as the product of a person or persons, at a given point in human history, in a given form of discourse, taking its meanings from the interpretive gestures of individual readers using the grammatical, semantic, and cultural codes available to them. (pp. 15-16)

From this standpoint, New Criticism is simply a set of closure techniques for blocking textuality and constructing works. These techniques were based on the selection of discriminative criteria (organic unity, tension, ambiguity, etc.) in which the descriptive and the evaluative were strategically confused. Therefore the criteria for producing *the work* were at the same time the criteria for producing *the canon* of works worthy of being Newly Criticized. New Criticism was seminary for oysters, not clams, and its divers not only extracted the pearls from textual shells but also assembled them in strings.¹⁴

Culler's countermove from work to text is similar to Scholes's in its objective, and responds to that double mode of production:

arguing that literary study should deemphasize the production of "interpretations of works, " he urges teachers to "think of literature not as a hallowed sequence of works defined by literary history but as a species of writing, a mode of representation, that occupies a very problematic role in the cultures in which our students live." As Scholes proposes to extend the hegemony of literary study by pursuing literariness throughout the entire domain of sign production and communication, so Culler wants us to appreciate "the importance and pervasiveness of structures that we traditionally regard as 'literary,'" to explore "textuality" in non literary as well as literary discourse, and above all to explore the theoretical problems that beset any inquiry into "the relationship between the literary and the non literary" (*Pursuit of Signs*, pp. 213, 217, 221, 218).

The most problematic register in which this relationship is formulated, and one that impinges directly on New Critical practice, is the theme of *fiction*. Meditating on that theme in the middle 1950's Frank Kermode finds it "surprising, given the range and minuteness of modern literary theory, that nobody, so far as I know, has ever tried to relate the theory of literary fictions to the theory of fictions in general."¹⁵ He takes the influence of Vaihinger's philosophy of "As It" on Wallace Stevens as his starting point, and goes on to discuss fictional emplotment in history-writing, in the organization of time and space, in theology, and in modern physics. Culler, referring to Kermode's discussion a decade or more later, still finds that "we ought to understand much more than we do about the effects of *fictional* discourse... What is the status and what is the role of fictions, or, to pose the same kind of problem in another way, what are the relations (the historical, the psychic, the social relationships) between the real and the fictive?" (*Pursuit of Signs*, p. 6). Our failure to understand these things is "in part due to the preeminent role recorded interpretation" which is "the legacy of the New Criticism" (pp. 6-7).

This kind of historical accounting, appropriate to Culler's polemical purpose, skims over the problem shrewdly if impressionistically formulated by Kermode. But the problem becomes discernible when we superimpose Culler's reference to relations between the fictive and the real on his reference to relations between the literary and the nonliterary. For the New Critical tendency to enclose fictiveness in works defined as literary diverted attention from the fictiveness of the nonliterary and the "real." It diverted attention from precisely the large questions explored

in Kermode's *The Sense of an Ending*. For example, the estheticized morality of New Criticism, welcoming evil into the work and proclaiming that the literary spirit can't get along without it, shows poorly when confronted with such events as the Holocaust :

How, in such a situation, can our paradigms of concord, our beginnings and ends, our humanly ordered picture of the world satisfied us, make sense? --- If *King Lear* is an image of the promised end, so is Buchenwald; and both stand under the accusation of being horrible, rootless fantasies, the one or more true or more false than the other, so that the best you can say is that *King Lear* does less harm.

Of course there are differences, since

anti-Semitism is a fiction of escape which tells you nothing about death but projects it onto others; whereas *King Lear* is a fiction that inescapably involves an encounter with oneself and the image of one's end. This is one difference; and there is another. We have to distinguish between myths and fictions. Fictions can degenerate into myths whenever they are not consciously held to be fictive. In this sense anti-Semitism is a degenerate fiction, a myth; and *Lear* is a fiction. (Kermode, pp. 38-39)

Kermode then itemizes the types of nonliterary fictions discussed by Vaihinger and concludes with 'what Vaihinger calls, in words remembered by Stevens, 'the last and greatest fiction,' 'the fiction of an Absolute'" (p. 41). Such explorations of the contrast between literary and nonliterary fictions, and between fiction and "myth," cannot be undertaken from within the premises of New Criticism.

A practice that leaves the Real standing immaculate outside the domain of fiction, and that refers the adequacy of literary representations to some reified and dehistoricized standard of absolute good and evil, cannot avoid being ideological, cannot avoid falling into myth, whether it means to or not. The New Critical *templum* or garden of work is situated like the Terrestrial Paradise in a domain of higher fiction: below the higher actuality of the Real; above the Weberian iron cage of a lower actuality where the degraded fictions of "adventure or detective stories" flourish like parasites hosted by the internal triad of bureaucracy, technology, science.¹⁶ The fictiveness of this paradise, as "one of

the productions of our own spirit," guarantees the priority and independence of the Real. But if iconicity produces this reality effect by enforcing disparity, that disparity nevertheless obtains between an *icon* and a "reality which it resembles and symbolizes." Thus although it is not as pure as Marvell's dewdrop, although it does not exclude the world, the "little Globes Extent" contemplated by New Criticism shares, like its template, some of that "Figure's" coyness: "Dark beneath, but bright above: / Here disdaining, there in Love."

This, then, is the substance of a brief against the New Criticism. It is a brief in which I largely concur, and I have given what I take to be a fairly harsh formulation of the critique which may indeed seem both unjust and facile. But I do so partly because I want to justify the unraveling of the New Critical enterprise, and partly because I want to argue, finally, that two or three decades of unraveling have made possible a way of restoring the most significant features of that enterprise in a new form. For I am convinced that the sum of New critical parts is greater than the whole, and that the insights inscribed in those parts had to be extricated from the blindness of the whole if their power was to be realized. Looking back through those decades, the diversity of American New Criticism does seem to compose into a kind of organic unity that tenuously integrates several interpretive tendencies and delutes their force. Those tendencies subsequently fell, like the fountain that watered Milton's Eden, "united...../Down the steep glade" of Critical Archetypology and Contextualism. There, meeting more than one "nether Flood," they divided into several streams, ran "diverse, wand'ring many famous Realm/And Country whereof" eventually needs some account (*Paradise Lost*, IV. 230-35). These streams remain recognizably New Critical, and my aim will be to show what has happened to them, how some of them may be reconvened, and how that reconvening can open up a new perspective on the way Shakespeare's fictions by their very textuality, represent the problematic at the heart of all discourse which is the object of semiotic and deconstructive inquiry.

Since my account of New Criticism has so far been impressionistic, I shall now articulate the "parts" I mentioned above, prefacing this analysis with two cautionary remarks:

- 1) The scheme or model that follows is not put forth as an objective or comprehensive description and takes no account of differences among the

always fluctuating number of practitioners admitted into what Cleanth Brooks wryly calls "the guild."¹⁷ It describes no more than my own sense of New Criticism -- what I have both used and struggled against in my own practice -- and since it is the product of retrospective reflection it probably represents my present interests more accurately than those I have in previous pages attributed to my New Critical salad days. 2) The model is retrospective in another way. It depicts New Criticism as being held together by a cluster of overlapping postulates. Several of them may seem redundant, and my reason for listing them separately is that they represent different facets or emphases that become more significant when the structure is decomposed. I have in effect constructed the model in terms of later critical developments.

There are six facets -- or *postulates*, as I shall call them from now on -- and I list them below in three pairs, each of which speaks to a recognizable set of interrelated concerns.

1) The *structural* postulate of organic unity that under-writes the integrity of the work and is challenged by theories of the text and intertextuality:

2) The *esthetic* postulate of self-sufficiency: construing the work as autonomous and autotelic made it the proper object of a "cognitive" and "disinterested" attention, protected it against the intentional and affective orientations of the older criticism, and subsequently, therefore, exposed the construal to the reconstructed forms of those orientations in semiotic theories of text production, reception theory, reader response theory, etc., all of which raised questions about any claims of disinterestedness.¹⁸

3) The *deictic* postulate of the dissociation of the text and its speaker or "point of view" from the author, which encourages the interpretive pursuit of "unbound" or "surplus" meaning (unbound by the author's intention and exceeding that of the speaker or narrator), and which has been not so much challenged as radicalized by expansion into theories of the text and the subject.

4) The *rhetorical* postulate of the complexity, irony, ambiguity, etc. of the work, subsequently radicalized in the intensification of "duplicity" to undecidability, and in its extension to all discourse, understood as the discourse of one or several kinds of Other.

5) The *cosmological* postulate of the work as "in some sense" (the evasion is useful) a fully meaningful *world*, that is, as embodying a coherent

world view; this adds to the structural and esthetic postulates the implication that the work as microcosm makes some kind of "statement" about the macrocosm, and it is vulnerable to ideological analysis.

6) The *epistemic* postulate of the fictiveness or imaginariness of the work, which is, so to speak, wrapped around the other five postulates; fictive circumscription detaches the second world of the work, and while it elicits "disinterested" interpretation, it also presents itself as a representation, an image of the first world; as such, it offers a kind of play or staging ground for the *serio ludere* rewarded by fuller knowledge of "the human predicament" than is possible in the hustle of the iron cage; this postulate is also vulnerable to ideological analysis, to the charges that there are interests in interpretation and that the fictiveness of the actual world has been neutralised.

I visualize these postulates clustered together in the form of a cube which - like one of those puzzle toys - can be disassembled. The cube consists of three pieces. Its skeleton or armature is a central axis at the ends of which are affixed the faces of the deictic and rhetorical postulates. By itself this piece adumbrates the principles of any kind of "close reading," and New Criticism is not reducible to that. Hooking into the axis a second piece that consists of the adjacent structural and esthetic faces molded at right angles to each other produces a model of formalist interpretation, and New criticism is not reducible to that either.¹⁹ Attaching to this pair a balancing piece that contains the cosmological and epistemic faces completes the cube and *almost* completes the New Critical model. But not quite. For, as I noted above, in a competing visualization, the epistemic mode of fictiveness encloses figure. And I think of *that* figure as a sphere. These incompatible visualizations continually oscillate, and keep the cube from declining into literalness. For the cube or sphere, like a poem, is an icon, a metaphor, which is intended to call attention to the disparity between itself and any New Critical reality it resembles or symbolizes. The cube or sphere represents an analysis that simultaneously *includes* fictiveness as one of its analyzed constituents and is *enclosed* in fictiveness. The cube or sphere is my New Critical model of New Criticism.

The six postulates provide the means of production by which works are manufactured from textual raw material and placed on the interpretive market presided over by Hermes. I noted earlier that New Criticism (or at least the practice I was first familiar with) was held together by this model, but it is better to say that the postulates were held, indeed squeezed, together by the interpretive, academic, and cultural interests of the

practitioners who contributed to its assemblage and often collaborated in its maintenance. From the fact that different if related critical forces press on each postulate, I deduce that even where the postulates seem virtually identical, as 1 and 2 do, and perhaps also 5 and 6, they have divergent theoretical implications; redundancy, mutual reinforcement, may provide the attractive counterforce that binds them together so that their interdependence lends each postulate more theoretical power than it actually has, and thus defers the working of the centrifugal logic discernible in the developments that decomposed the model. There is, for example, a significant contradiction between the requirement of autotelic organicity (1 and 2) and the referential skew of 5 and 6. The first pair of postulates encodes strategies of decontextualization that distinguish "art" from "life," confine the interpretive gaze within the boundaries of the "work," and privilege the self-rewarding acts of attention performed in the presence of so complex a unity. The third pair encodes strategies of contextualization that distinguish but interrelate the work and the world, fiction and "reality," art and morality, the forms of representation and the meaning they induce on the "experience" they represent. These four postulates provide defensive reinforcement against the older criticism and lend moral weight to the new enterprise. The two pairs run in seemingly opposed directions, the first inward and the third outward. This tension is mitigated by foregrounding the operations specified in the second pair, since 3 and 4 are the active kernel of New Criticism and remain its most significant legacy. But the opposition they mediate, when viewed as a sequence, is familiar: the ancient pattern of withdrawal-and-return. The estheticism of the inward flight is justified by the claim that unlike the structures of science, prose, and daily life in capitalism, the structures of art and poetry are deliberately organized to offer the devout interpreter a "redeemed vision" of "experience" in the world dominated by science, prose, and capitalistic reason—a "truer," more adequate, perspicuous, etc., image of itself than the world (from which the work has been subtracted) would proffer of its own accord.

The cubic organization of the postulates thus has ideological implications which, as my language must suggest, I don't find very attractive, and which I shall discuss in a later chapter. And in spite of the surface inconsistency or tension between the tendencies of the first and third pairs, it has arguable theoretical coherence. Since I think this coherence constricts the range of interpretive possibilities latent in the individual postulates,

I welcome critiques of New Criticism even though I find many of them off target. It has been too easy for its critics to single out the ideological issue or harp on apparent logical inconsistencies and then to illustrate these flaws in the work of this or that practitioner. But critiques of this sort tend to be trivial because they do not take into account the structure of the cube and the work it does. For example, the kind of inconsistency Gerald Graff triumphantly exposes in *Poetic Statement and Critical Dogma* is the mere symptom of the ideological pattern that gives the cubic structure its equilibrium. It is by no means peculiar to the practices of New Critics.

My hypothetical abstraction of the cube from New Criticism is in fact intended to exhibit an "objective" structure that has a specific historical provenance which New Critics have themselves obscured, and that gives the cube positive value as an instrument of historical analysis. It remains true, however, that the generative power of the postulates is inhibited both by their cubic association and by the ideological skew of the model. Post-New-Critical theory and practice have shown how to realize this power, and in the next section I shall explore two paths out of the cube that have been, or can be, taken. The first puts pressure on the postulates of organic unity and esthetic autonomy; the second entails a new approach to the deictic and rhetorical postulates.

ii.

Recent developments have led, on the one hand, to the broadening of the scope of textual hermeneutics well beyond the domain of traditional literary criticism, and, on the other hand, to more "politicized" variants of the practice once associated with the New Criticism. Of course, "recent" is misleading, since much of what I shall describe has been going on for a long time, much antedates the heyday of New Criticism, and in many cases the "developments" may have occurred with no awareness of or debt to New Criticism. When I speak of the disassembling of the cube and the subsequent career of its postulates, I am concocting a narrative which is fictional in all respects but one: it corresponds to my own experience and practice over the years, and perhaps to those of others in my generation. Many of us who were inducted into the community of the cube and have followed the different filaments of our practice along paths leading to foreign shores find them rewoven in the volatile and interpenetrating fields of inquiry that produce the texture of the so-called "human science." For me that meander has been almost as problematical as it has been revelatory, and my purpose in this study is to some extent reactionary: it is to

resist the drift away from the cube without sacrificing the increase of interpretive power released by the drift; to inscribe the traces of a reconstructed old New Criticism on the postulates in flight from the cube.

I begin with a summary of the logical trajectory imposed on this flight by my fictional narrative. Its precondition is the breaking down of the barriers erected around the work by the structural and esthetic postulates. This leads to the universalized application of the deictic postulate and problematizes the intentional framework in terms of which the rhetorical postulate guides interpretive practice. The breakdown of the distinction between work and nonwork puts the cosmological and epistemic postulates in question by threatening the distinctions between (1) the esthetic microcosm and the macrocosm it represents, and (2) fiction and non fiction. Interpretive processes and categories which the cube confines to the language and "world of literature or art transgress their boundaries to participate in "the social construction of reality," "ways of worldmaking," "the discourse of the other," and the constitution of the subject by ideology, language, or "power/knowledge."

The material basis of esthetic autonomy is suggested in Catherine Belsey's remarks that the weakness of New Criticism "originates in the attempt to locate meaning in a single place, in the word of the text, 'on the page'" (*Critical Practice*, p. 19). Autonomy is secured by identifying "the words of the text" with their material signifiers "on the page." The New Critics, as Walter Ong puts it, "assimilated the verbal art work to the visual object-world" and "insisted that the poem or other literary work be regarded as an object, a 'verbal icon.'"²¹ It is significant, and hardly surprising, that much talk about organic unity is carried on in terms that subordinate temporal process to spatial form—the verbal artwork as icon, image, world, well-wrought urn. The dynamic implications of organic process are too easily transformed by the concept of organic unity into the static image of the parts and whole of a visualizable *one* protectively enclosed within imaginary outlines. The beginning, middle, and end are those of a finished product, like a page or a book. The structural unity and esthetic autonomy of the work are guaranteed by the reductive identification of the text with the words on the page in the book. Its material position underwrites the work's independent existence. So blatant an example of "the falacy of simple location" (Whitehead) is an obvious target and has often been criticized for screening out those systems of differences, or "discursive formations," within which and against which the work

participates in the logically more tenable kind of uniqueness conferred by its position in the system.

Such systems have been distinguished as *intertextual* and *extratextual*. Critic of New Criticism have exploited their possibilities to show how they can remove the barriers established by the structural and esthetic postulates, and open up two paths out of the cube. In the first, the concept of intertextuality is employed to dissociate the text from the page and the simply-located work. In the second, the intimate relation of text to page is emphasized in all its materiality to produce a very different orientation toward the interplay of work and text with their extratextual environment. I shall now discuss examples of each approach, noting by way of preface that the distinction between intertextual and extratextual is itself relative to specific interpretive projects: it is sometime useful to distinguish them as intersecting coordinates of the discursive field within which the work is located and which the work represents; for other purposes the extratextual may itself be subsumed under an expanded concept of intertextuality so that cultural and institutional contexts are approached on the model of the work or the text.

(I) Jonathan Culler's brief account of intertextuality in *The Pursuit of Signs* exemplifies the present state of the lore on the subject:

"Intertextuality" . . . has a double focus. On the one hand, it calls our attention to the importance of prior texts, insisting that the autonomy of texts is a misleading notion and that a work has the meaning it does only because certain things have previously been written. Yet in so far as it focuses on intelligibility, on meaning, "Intertextuality" leads us to consider prior texts as contributions to a code which makes possible the various effects of signification. Intertextuality thus becomes less a name for a work's relation to particular prior texts than a designation of its participation in the discursive space of a culture . . . The study of intertextuality is thus not the investigation of sources and influences as traditionally conceived; it casts its net wider to include anonymous discursive practices, codes whose origins are lost, that make possible the signifying practices of later texts. (p. 103)

The final sentence indicates how the traditional procedures suppressed by New Criticism have been recuperated on the entirely new basis of a structural or synchronic systematics in which the work is inscribed, which it

presupposes, and which makes its particular "effects of signification" possible.

Culler illustrates "the dangers that beset the notion of intertextuality" (p. 109) with sympathetic critiques of the way Riffaterre, Kristeva, and Bloom conceive and deploy it : on the one hand, its theoretical focus is on a general and anonymous discursive space; on the other hand, their intertextual practice puts the general theory in question by seeking out particular pretexts and precursors. Advocating a flexible and variable procedure with "multiple strategies" and "different focuses" (p. 111.) Culler nevertheless agrees with Kristeva's statement that "every text is from the outset under the jurisdiction of other discourses which impose a universe on it" (quoted on p. 105), and it is the implied emphasis on imposition and jurisdiction which I find telling in his insistence that the task of poetics is to relate

a literary work to a whole series of other works, treating them not as sources but as constituents of a genre, for example, whose conventions one attempts to infer. One is interested in *conventions which govern* the production and interpretation of character, of plot structure, of thematic synthesis, of symbolic condensation and displacement. In all these cases there are no moments of authority except those which are retrospectively designated as origins and which, therefore, can be shown to derive from the series for which they are constituted as origin. (p. 117, my italics)

As Culler describes it, the series, the code, the system of conventions, the genre, govern the construction of a particular text. And the passages cited make it clear that he conceives of the "discursive space" of intertextuality in diachronic as well as synchronic terms : earlier and later texts form the series through which the system of conventions, genre, etc., is elaborated and continuously modified. This raises a question about the sources of power and authority. Who or what retrospectively designates moments of authority, and what does it mean to say they "derive from the series"? Toward the end of his discussion, Culler momentarily wavers from his emphasis on the hegemony of "the series" or of general discursive space, and gestures toward an alternative approach, which is to look at the specific presuppositions of a given text, the way in which it produces a pretext, an intertextual space whose occupants may or may not correspond to other actual texts. The goal of this project would be an account of how

texts create presuppositions and hence pre-texts for themselves” (p. 118). This implies a different relationship between the given text and its intertextual environment, one in which the lines of force and “moments of authority” derive not from the series but from the text. But Culler does not develop this alternative. He merely states it as the first of two useful if “limited approaches to intertextuality,” and goes no to restore his major emphasis in describing the second : “a poetics which is less interested in the occupants of that intertextual space which makes a work intelligible than in the conventions which underlie that discursive activity or space” (p. 118) I think both the first alternative and the functional relation between the two deserve more attention and articulation than Culler gives them, and I shall briefly illustrate this contention with the genre of epic, in which the creation of generic presuppositions and pre-texts is especially salient.

Any intertextual series may be viewed in the complementary perspectives which Saussure called *prospective* and *retrospective*. When the series of epic poems inaugurated by Homer is viewed prospectively as if from the past forward, it may appear to be the continuous development of a formal paradigm which accommodates variations revisions, and is subject to few revolutionary violations of “paradigm-induced” expectations. From this standpoint, revisions sequentially effected by Virgil, Dante, Ariosto, Spenser, Milton and even Wordsworth, only confirm the durability of normal epic practice, the flexibility with which the paradigm “evolves” by adjusting to changes that “bring it up to date.” But when viewed retrospectively, from the latest work backward, every new epic poet appears to invent his own version of the genre he “inherits” (represents as inherited), and to do so in order to overthrow that paradigm. From this standpoint, every canonical epic is a revolutionary crisis, an anomaly, and a paradigm shift.

In this divided perspective, the “discursive space” of genre as a code or system of conventions assumes two conflicting aspects. On the one hand, it becomes the preexisting code that governs new practice, “impose[s] a universe on it,” and “makes possible the various effects of signification.” On the other hand, it becomes the revisionary representation or perhaps caricature of the first aspect : the new poem chooses the particular set of epic norms and precursors to be represented as its source, tradition, and target. Retrospectively, then the code that makes the new poem’s “effects of signification” possible is itself an effect of the new poem’s signifying strategies. Thus we return, though in qualified measure, to a focus on the

autonomy of the new poem and on the uniqueness not only of its bounded form as a verbal icon but also of the discursive space, the generic universe, it constitutes "outside itself" as the condition of its possibility.

Given this complementarity, it might be thought that the best way to establish both the evolving structure of the generic paradigm and the uniqueness of the new poem's retrospect would be to compare the two perspectives. The reason I don't think this a tenable procedure is that the generic paradigm along with its prospectively determined "evolution" is a fantasy produced either by an academic tradition of interpreters who abstract and reify the genre, or by the new poem's retrospect itself. The existence and character of the genre as an intertextual "space" or system can be established only by close interpretation of the poems that announce their membership in the genre, interpretations that attend to the way they characterize it, and attend also to poems that define themselves over against it in such parasitic anti-genres as mock epic and Alexandrian bucolics. The "epic tradition" then emerges as a series of representations of epic that poems set up as points of departure, and the resultant picture of repetitions and differences provides a profile which, ranging over the series becomes that reader's (or those readers') representation of the genre. Now at least in the case of epic, the new poem's retrospective characterization tends to identify the genre with one or more particular precursors. This confronts the reader with the task of comparing, for example, Homer's practice with his representation of epic conventions, Homer's practice and representation with Virgil's practice and *his* representation of Homer's practice and representation, and so forth. Such an intertextual approach to epic resolves into a series of close readings that situate intertextual space within each poem as a fictitious projection of its "external" generic context, and these readings may well conform to the principles of the cube even as they revise or ignore distinctions that the cube enjoins: distinctions between the autonomous text and its literary-historical context, between literary and nonliterary (in this case, historical) interpretation, between the bounded "interior" of the fictional microcosm and its nonfictional "exterior" in the intertextual macrocosm of the generic code. Thus in the retrospective view to which the cubic postulates give primacy, the poem circumscribed by the cube becomes the constitutive source both of itself and of the intertextual universe around it. Later, I shall generalize this proposition, arguing that a reconstructed version of the cube enables us both to extend the interpretive operations of the postulates to any aspect of the

world beyond the work and to introject that aspect into the still circumscribed interior of the work.

Conceived in this manner, what intertextual study opens up is not so much a way out of the New critical cube, a way that reduces the interpretation of texts to an ancilla of poetics (the program advocated by *The Pursuit of Signs*), as a way that takes the cube with it, by turns dilating and contracting the scope of its application : first expanding the reach of its postulates beyond the work into the discursive space of its literary or cultural or institutional contexts, then driving those contexts back into the interior of the work. A first approach to any poem in the Homeric-Virgilian series considers how it presents or displays the traces of its precursors and the conventions of its genre. Further interpretive elaboration transforms those traces and conventions from presented to represented features, and probes for the possibility of an ideological skew to the presentation of epic norms – that is, the possibility that the representation of precursors and norms is ambivalent or critical, and is directed outward toward a similarly toned representation of contemporary culture and institutions. Thus Alasdair MacIntyre's observation that "epic and saga... portray ...a society which already embodies the form of epic or saga"²² contains an implied proposal for expanding the cube to the ambience of heroic poetry in aristocratic society, but 'portray' begs an important question, namely, whether the portrayal merely reproduces aristocratic ideology or represents it in the more complex and distanced perspective that Althusser ascribes to "art" and the novel :

What art makes us *see*... is the ideology from which it is born, in which it bathes, from which it detaches itself as art, and to which it *alludes*..... Blazac and Solzhenitsyn give us a "view" of the ideology to which their work alludes and with which it is constantly fed, a view which presupposes a *retreat*, an *internal distanciation* from the very ideology from which their novels emerged. They make us "perceive" (but not know) in some sense *from the inside*, by an *internal distance*, the very ideology in which they are held... Neither... gives us any *knowledge* of the world they describe, they only make us "see," "perceive" or "feel" the reality of the ideology of that world.²³

To "see" the reality of the ideology"—as opposed to the conceptual or analytical knowledge that science gives of the same object—is to see that

it is imaginary, that it represents itself as reality, that it is enunciated as such from specific sites of power, and that it is deeply inscribed in the individuals whom it constitutes or “interpellates” as subjects.²⁴

Internal distance or detachment makes the epic poem a commentary on and not merely a reflection of the society and ideology it represents, the *Iliad* on early Hellenic ideology, the *Aeneid* on Augustan ideology, the *Divine Comedy* on the multiple clashing ideologies precariously equilibrated in the super-ideology of *Christianitas* (pagan and Christian, imperial and ecclesiastical and civic, Augustinian and Thomistic). But this commentary on what the poem represents, as its extratextual referent gains added force by being mapped onto its distanced intertextual commentary on precursors: the *Odyssey*’s commentary on the *Iliad* brings out contradictions in the heroic/aristocratic code; the *Aeneid* shows how Augustan ideology activates and cloaks its contradictions in an archaic Homeric vestment; the *Divine Comedy* ideologizes putative realities of the present by assimilating them to the literary fictions of the poem’s heroic and courtly predecessors. In each case the commentary is produced by distinguishing the extratextual from the intertextual environment and then making them intersect. The interpretive commentary on this commentary is in turn produced by expanding the operation of the cubic postulates into the different “spaces” of the two environments and contracting those interpreted “spaces” into the “space” of the work.

So far I have surveyed an intertextual path out of the cube, and given some very rough indication of the way this approach could be reincorporated in a revised application of the cube. The second or more strictly extratextual path may be anticipated by observing that it is one thing to explore a series of poems connected by intertextual allusion, the latest poem linking itself to precursors in the generic space it represents, and quite another thing to compare poems which are not so linked yet which still display generic similarities—*Beowulf* and the *Aeneid*, for example, or, more generally, any of the northern series of epics or sagas (Icelandic, Teutonic) with each other and with the classical/medieval/renaissance series rooted in Homeric epic. In such cases, poems that are not intertextually connected exhibit the common extratextual norms of structurally analogous social, political, and cultural institutions and their discourses. For example, the instituted discourse of honor has its own logic, dynamic, and contradictions, and these manifest themselves in the conflictive politics of gender, generation,

gift exchange, and competing social groups (family, kingroup, polity, warband, etc.). the fact that the manifestations display marked similarity in such unrelated poems as *Beowulf* and the Homeric epics testifies to the extratextual influence on the epic norms and forms suggested in MacIntyre's comment. What remains to be seen is how those extratextual discourses can be accommodated to intratextual and cubic interpretation. Some clues in Culler's discussion point toward a particular topic of extratextual research which in recent decades has become very important, and I shall begin there.

(II) Culler's proposal for two limited approaches to intertextuality, mentioned above (pp. 27-28), is modeled on a distinction linguists make between two kinds of presuppositions—*logical* and *pragmatic*—“at work in a natural language” (p. 111). A sentence implies or creates a logical presupposition when the proposition it expresses entails prior propositions: “Presuppositions are what must be true in order that a proposition be either true or false. Thus, *It surprised me that John bought a car* presupposes that *John bought a car*, as does *It didn't surprise me that John bought a car*” (Ibid.). This “modest intertextuality in relating sentences of a text to another set of sentences which they presuppose” takes on “considerable importance in literature,” in the form of what Barthes has called the *deja lu*, the intertext of “anonymous, undiscoverable, and nevertheless already read” bits of prior discourse that a text produces as its pre-text (pp. 112, 102, 114). But it is the other kind of presupposition to which I want to draw attention, and I mention the logical kind only to enforce the contrast with pragmatic presuppositions, which “are defined not on the relations between sentences but on the relations between utterance and situation of utterance—*Open the door* presupposes, pragmatically, the presence, in a room with a door that is not open, of another person who understands English and is in a relation to the speaker which enables him to interpret this as a request or command” (p. 116). Culler notes that here the “analogies with the case of literature are not very rich” except insofar as “we take the literary utterance as a special kind of speech act, detached from a particular temporal context and placed in a discursive series formed by other members of a literary genre, so that a sentence in a tragedy, for example, is appropriately read according to conventions which are different from those which would apply in comedy” (Ibid.) He goes on to argue that “the investigation of pragmatic presuppositions” in speech act theory “is similar to the task which confronts poetics” because in both cases “one is working on the conventions of a genre” (of speech act or of literature)

in a manner that relates the sentence or work in question to a series of presupposed sentences or works in a generically bounded "discursive or intertextual space" (pp. 116-17).

In this argument Culler shifts ground from the linguist's extratextual focus on "relations between utterance and situation of utterance" to an intertextual focus on the conventional presuppositions to which speech act theory and poetics attend. He thereby swerves away from what I think is a rich and promising field of investigation : the study not of speech acts *per se* but of the "situation of utterance" as a structure of presuppositions that profoundly influences the production, transmission, reception, interpretation, and exchange of messages and their meanings. This belongs to the more general study of the influence exerted on all aspects of life by the structural properties of communications media—speech, writing, print, electronic and cybernetic networks. For poetics and literary interpretation, it seems especially pertinent to explore the following areas of inquiry : (1) the functional interdependence between the structural properties of media and the institutions in which they are embedded; (2) the interdependence between those structures and the parameters of control over the production, dissemination, and appropriation of meaning; (3) the literary or graphic representation of (1) and (2), particularly in texts that present themselves in ironic rather than mimetic relation to the speech acts and contexts of utterance they represent. Of these three topics—communication, signification, and representation—the third is relatively uncharted territory, the first has been pretty well staked out, and while the second has often been partly colonized the area in which its boundaries overlap those of the first has not been much explored. Consequently, in what follows, I shall skim quickly over the first and go more slowly over the second. And since I don't have time to do justice to the third, I shall merely illustrate the bare bones of an interpretive approach to the topic.

(1) "The New Critics have assimilated the verbal art work to the visual object-world of texts rather than to the oral-aural event-world." This statement is significant not only because it recalls the theme of "the words on the page" but also because it was written by Walter Ong, with whom the study of communications media is chiefly associated. Following in the footsteps of Eric Havelock and Marshall McLuhan, Ong has shown how an institutional order founded on oral discourse implicates by virtue of that foundation—a specific set of interrelated, social, political, ethical, and cultural parameters. Havelock's account of the interplay between oral

and literate institutions in classical antiquity has been generalized by Ong's study of media shifts in terms of the global effects of the progressive overlays of typographic on chirographic culture, and of (what he unfortunately calls) the "secondary orality" of electronic media on print culture.

(2) Ong's explorations organize a historic-diachronic testing ground for such theories of the text as Paul Ricoeur's structural analysis of the differences between direct and indirect, or dialogical and textual discourse. Research into the history of media has increased awareness of the ways the structural constraints and opportunities specific to institutions based on writing/reading differ from those of institutions that feature the direct interaction of "senders" and receivers." Ricoeur's revision of hermeneutic theses borrowed from Heidegger and Gadamer makes it easier to correlate differences in media structure with differences in the relation between the meanings senders intend and those receivers appropriate. Distinguishing between *event* and *meaning* in discourse, and between *utterer's meaning* and *utterance meaning*, he argues that in spoken discourse the latter two coincide because the production and reception of meaning occur in the same speech event. The event is characterized by

immediacy because the speaker belongs to the situation of interlocution. He is their, in the genuine sense of being-there, of *Da-sein*. Consequently the subjective intention of the speaker and the discourse's meaning overlap each other in such a way that it is the same thing to understand what the speaker means and what his discourse means ... With written discourse, however, the author's intention and the meaning of the text cease to coincide. This dissociation.... gives to the concept of inscription its decisive significance, beyond the mere fixation of previous oral discourse. Inscription becomes synonymous with the semantic autonomy of the text, which results from the disconnection... of what the author meant what the text means. The text's career escapes the finite horizon lived by its author. What the text means now matters more than what the author meant when he wrote it.²⁵

Thus "liberated from the narrowness of the face-to-face situation" and "distanctiated" from its author, the text is

open to an indefinite number of readers, and, therefore, of interpretations. The opportunity for multiple readings is the dialectical counterpart of the semantic autonomy of the text.

It follows that the problem of the appropriation of the meaning of the text becomes as paradoxical as that of the authorship. The right of the reader and the right of the text converge in an important struggle that generates the whole dynamic of interpretation. Hermeneutics begins where dialogue ends, (pp. 31-32)

Whatever its flaws, this simple model provides a working hypothesis for exploring the effects the different media might have on the expression, dissemination, and appropriation of meaning in the institutional settings adjusted to the powers and limits of those media. Thus from Ong's story of the shifts from oral to chirographic to print dominance, one can abstract a diachronic grid with the following polarized pattern : (a) increasingly amplified power of transmission of messages – greater distances, more receivers, more accurate inscription in a more permanent medium – provides more opportunities “for multiple readings,” which leads to (b) increasing loss of senders’ control over the received meanings. Superimposing Ricoeur’s story on Ong’s generates a model that would, for example, provide the structural coordinates of such paired phenomena of early print culture as the intensified attempts to control channels of communication (e. g., by censorship and propaganda) and the multiplying conflicts of interpretation to which growing sectarianism, more organized political and religious dissent, and the beginnings of cultural pluralism all testify. It is obvious that a model of this sort encourages the extension of the esthetic, deictic, and rhetorical postulates well beyond the boundaries of the cube into putatively extratextual domains.

The weak point in Ricoeur’s theory is his idealization of spoken discourse. This has been noted by Edward Said : “Ricoeur assumes circumstantial reality to be symmetrically and exclusively the property of speech,” which exists “in a state of presence,” and he treats oral discourse as “a type of conversation between equals,” whereas “the discursive situation is more usually like the unequal relation between colonizer and colonized, oppressor and oppressed.”²⁶ To soften Said’s characteristically tendentious way of putting things, it is more usually like the unequal relation between man and woman, parent and child, senior and junior – between positions or “sites of enunciation” (Foucault) that gives their incumbents the right to initiate speech and those that impose the obligation to listen and respond. Thus the word *obedience* derives from a Latin verb, *ob-audire*, whose literal meaning is “to listen from below.”²⁷ That the politics of oral discourse is hierarchic rather than egalitarian has more to do with

asymmetries in the reciprocity and authority relations of gender, genealogy, and generation *within* a speech community than with mere power relations *between* insider and outsider communities.

Ricoeur's model is based on Benveniste's analyses of the linguistic system of deictic relationship, a system organized radially around the cardinal discursive function of the first person. The system is egalitarian and symmetrical in that all actual speakers have theoretically equal access to the first person and in that interlocutors cooperatively alternate between first and second persons. But such a system is abstracted from the institutional role structure of any speech community that uses the system. To revert momentarily to Culler's distinction, the relations of deixis analyzed by Benveniste and other linguists comprise a set of logico-grammatical presuppositions internal to the pure discursive field of speech acts. But this set is intersected and—from an idealist's standpoint—systematically distorted by the pragmatic presuppositions that condition the context of utterance and derive from institutional role structure. Said's comment would have been more telling had he observed that Ricoeur in effect represses the pragmatic presuppositions to produce an idealized situation that Derrida would call *logocentric*.

The Derridean perspective allows a more fundamental criticism. Though Ricoeur does not valorize speech over writing, his view of the former is in other respects logocentric because it premises that since "the speaker and listener are both present to the utterance simultaneously," this immediacy seems to guarantee the notion that in the spoken word we know that we mean, mean what we say, say what we mean, and know what we have said." Against this view, Derrida "attempts to show that the very possibility of opposing the two terms on the basis of presence vs. absence or immediacy vs. representation is an illusion, since speech is *already* structured by difference and distance as much as writing is."²⁸ Speech no less than writing is hollowed out by the "discourse of the other," though the *other* need not be identified with the unconscious; it may be rooted in linguistic, social, political, cultural, etc., conventions and discourses; "this *difference* inhabits the very core of what appears to be immediate and present..... The illusion of the self-presence of meaning or of consciousness is thus produced by the repression of the differential structures from which they spring" (*Ibid.*).

These structures include the asymmetrical positional dyads—man and woman, parent and child, senior and junior—that constitute the discourses

of gender, genealogy, and generation. Each is quite literally a discourse in that it is a dialogical structure of complementary but unequal sites of enunciation, a specific "domain of language use, a particular way of talking ... and thinking..."²⁹ And each is an "ideological configuration" in Althusser's sense in that it transforms individuals into subjects inscribed with positional attributes: dominant male and obedient female, loving parent and grateful child, wise senior and docile junior, etc. But these ideal imaginary complementarities are traversed by contradictions. Each positional dyad is freighted with conflicting interests, ambivalent desires, and ambiguous motivations. What makes its discourse ideological is that the contradictions are either repressed or differentially valorized. In that respect, each discourse is a preferred interpretation that closes down on a more complex set of relational possibilities. Thus a positional discourse is, if not a script, at least a scenario. To change the metaphor, it frames the loom and spins the threads of the speaking subject's discourse even if it doesn't weave its patterns. To change it again, the crosshatching of different positional discourses—gender, generation, family, household, and kingdom—foregrounds the subject as a center of psycholinguistic play against the complex institutional field of "discourses of the other." Reconceiving the basic Ong/Ricoeur model of oral discourse in these "grammatocentric" terms enhances the applicability of Derrida's notion of logocentrism to speech-centered cultures.

Derrida's use of the term entails its opposition to the grammatocentric pole from which he criticizes the logocentric illusion ("presence vs. absence," etc.). In the ensuing discussion, my use of the term reflects and implies his but modifies it so that it may perform a more positive or descriptive service on behalf of the following anthropological hypothesis: The most important source of that illusion is not speech *per se* but the body as a medium of communication and a system of signs—the perceptual signs of human presence and the functional signs of gender, age, and consanguinity that both determine and express the basic positional order. In a pure nonliterate society this order structures all interactions through the medium of embodied human presences. Presence *in* the body is extended through oral/aural and visual channels of communication. The presence *of* the body is inscribed in the positional roles and networks that condition the discursive relations of communication. Thus a pure nonliterate society, organized wholly in terms of the body's perceptual and functional signs, may be postulated as the *ur-state* of pure logocentrism, a hypothetical

point of origin that can anchor any diachronic model constructed for the analysis of changes in the structural relationship between communication and signification.

In this model the ur-state must be given a Derridean interpretation. That is, it is not sufficient to say, with Ricoeur, that "hermeneutics begins where dialogue ends." Instead, we stipulate that in speech-centered culture dialogue tends to repress or inhibit "the opportunity for multiple readings" that provides the material of hermeneutics, i. e., multiple readings are theoretically possible because already embedded in the differential structures, the positional discourses, that constrain and enable speech. But given the structural character of a hypothesis that "explains" logocentrism as the consequence of a particular model of social organization—a body-centered positional order- rather than as "the underlying ideal of Western culture" (Johnson, p. ix), I think it would be well to suspend whatever pejorative implications adhere to Derrida's use of "logocentrism." If indeed we are going to stipulate that multiple meanings are inhibited by speech and encouraged by writing/reading, then it is not helpful to insist in absolute terms that the opposition "of presence vs. absence or immediacy vs. representation is an illusion." For it becomes important to hold fast at least to a relative distinction between them in order to explore the material differences imposed by media on the communication, control, and interpretation of meaning.

Derrida's critical impulse is radically opposed to the theogism latent or residual in the work of Ong and Ricoeur, but I think a revisionary middle way may be charted by imparting a Derridean spin to the combination of Ong's media theory and Ricoeur's text theory. If, as Johnson remarks, Derrida's critique of Western metaphysics focuses on its privileging of the spoken word over the written word" (*Dissemination*, p. viii), then a dialectical articulation of those two theories offers a way to convert the Derridean critique into a program of research: a historical hermeneutics grounded in the interdependence of changing modes of communication with changes in the production, reception, and control of signification. Such a hermeneutics, of whose dialectical profile I shall offer a fuller sketch later, would still rely on an interpretive practice oriented by the cubic postulates. But the postulates would have to be made more sensitive both to the textuality, the interpretability, of extratextual contexts (including media and their institutional parameters) and to the representation of those contexts within literary works. To illustrate this need,

especially as it concerns the deictic and rhetorical postulates, I turn now to the third of the topics mentioned above (p. 37).

(3) Writing that represents oral discourse is legion. But within that multitude we can pick out an important category of texts marked by this distinctive feature : what they represent is not oral discourse but "oral discourse." They do not so arrange conventions that the imitation of speech is mediated through a transparent or translucent screen of writing. They focus on the larger implications of speech-centered performance, on strategies and rituals of face-to-face interaction, and on the effects of oral culture and institutions on the production of meaning. But they do this from "outside" the imitated medium; they achieve distance by calling attention to themselves as writing—as works inscribed in a different medium, the medium of *difference*, that is, of graphic signs rather than bodily or vocal signs. They may even orient the reader's attention toward the dialogue or agon between the speech acts they represent and the complex interplay of textual codes accessible to the act of reading.

This general description needs to be more precisely articulated, a task I shall preface by noting that similar claims have been put forward specifically for Thomas Nashe's *The Unfortunate Traveller* by Jonathan Crewe. Calling that work "an informal phenomenology of the page," he discusses Nashe's thematic punning on "page" (the first person protagonist is a page), observes "that Nashe is credited in the *O. E. D.* as the first user of 'page' in its sense of a printed sheet (in the *Menaphon* preface)," and reaffirms the traditional view that the point of Nashe's work

lies in its exploitation of, and bondage to, the emergent technology of printing..... The self conscious emergence of the page in its own right implies a radical, perhaps irrevocable, alienation of language from its supposedly primordial character as speech (from its ideal character); a "purely technical" phenomenon threatens to make an essential difference..... The moment in which the page is foregrounded is one in which it ceases to be the invisible servant of a higher order of language and meaning, and assumes its own existence in a world in which it is no longer to be denied.³⁰

The historical observation seems reasonable because one can think of so many other examples in the dawn of the print era of works that anatomize the rhetoricity and theatricality of oral performance (and of literary performance that strives to be its ape) by mediating it through the

conspicuous textuality of their writing: Rabelais, Erasmus, Sidney (in the *Defense*), Marlowe, Shakespeare, Jonson, Donne, and Marvell, to name only a few.³⁴ The same can be said, however, for several writers active in literate cultures before that era. Chaucer comes to mind immediately; and perhaps Petronius, Ovid, and some of the Greek dramatists. I say "perhaps" because although we now distinguish between writing against another represented medium and writing against another represented genre (as did the early bucolic and pastoral poets), this distinction cannot easily be applied to literature that writes against the dominant ancient genres, since their characteristic features identify them with ritualized modes of oral performance.

Writing that conspicuously differentiates its medium and production of meaning from those centered in the oral discourse it represents may be called *heterological*, on the grounds that *logos* denotes patterns not only of meaning or thinking but also of *lexis* and *phone*; *logos* is the equivalent of *sermo* that subsumes *ratio*. Within this general category we can distinguish writing that may be called *counterlogical* because it more pointedly writes against *logos*-centered discourse. And within the later, another distinction can be made. Much counterlogical writing represents and targets *phenomena* of utterance; it explores the socio political implications of such specific aspects of oral discourse as levels of *sermo*—vernacular, courtly, learned, etc.—and rhetorical or theatrical strategies. But some counterlogical writing also targets the circumambient *context* of utterance, mounting a more systematic critique of the effects of logocentrism on the oral culture the writing represents. Some of the more interesting examples occur in ancient literature when traditions of writing have developed sufficiently to allow the play of reflexive awareness in works that confront pretypographic cultures alien to rather than grounded in the written word. I conclude the present section with a discussion of this theme in order to provide a very rough sketch—hardly more than a rumor—of the way interpretive practice can revise traditional approaches to ancient literature by opening up the cube and sending some of the postulates out to occupy extratextual territory.

Earlier I commented on the symbolic dominance of the body in what I referred to as the ur-state of pure logocentrism, and on its function as the basic organizing symbol social of and political order. To this I now add that—as Mary Douglas and others have argued—the body is not only an *organizing* symbol but also a *naturalizing* symbol. Even as it underlies

the social construction of a corporate institutional order, it assumes a countervailing ideological function : through its status as an *organism*, a natural entity, it legitimizes that order as given rather than socially constructed, transcendent reality rather than human fiction. In modern text-centered societies the politically, economically, and culturally important corporate groups tend to define themselves as products of human art; the concept of *corporation* is itself a legal fiction disembedded or differentiated from that of the natural corpus. But the important corporate groups of speech-centered societies tend continually to reembed themselves in the concept of *corpus* of which they are at least the terminological extensions.

In speech-centered societies there are several respects in which the individual body and person is less clearly self-contained, less sharply isolated, than the subject cut out by the ideological template of modern individualism. First, the body is not only the material, visible, and mortal locus of a personal presence but also the model of the spiritual, invisible, and immortal presence that people its ambient reality. Thus a reverberating and intercommunicating network of presences—including ancestral presences—binds together nature, humanity, cosmos, and *numen* or divinity; presences that speak to each other, represent each other, even permeate and penetrate each other. Second, embodied persons are icons of the institutional order and its roles because the past of a preliterate community—“its memory, its set of instructions, its sacred text—is literally embodied in every domicile, in every person or group marked by a kinship term or by a taboo, in every person or group who exemplifies a ritual or who recalls a myth ...the significant distinctions in such a society have to be maintained, reconstructed, represented, and, in essence, *re-invented* in the very flesh of each generation.”³² Third, “oral cultures must conceptualize and verbalize all their knowledge with more or less close reference to the human life-world, assimilating the alien, objective world to the more immediate, familiar interaction of human beings” (Ong, p. 42). Since such cultures tend “to cast up accounts of actuality in terms of contests between individuals,” these interactions replace more abstract models of explanation, and their participants assume allegorical dimensions. Ong questions “the abandon with which early nontechnological societies have tended to polarize in virtue-vice categories not merely moral matters as such but also a great deal of essentially nonmoral actuality, seeing, for example, the operation of what we know today to be economic or social or even purely political forces as essentially naked struggles between moral good and evil.”³³

Exactly the same perception lies behind Erich Auerbach's much earlier critique of the limited realism, the limited historical consciousness, of ancient writing : "it does not see forces, it sees vices and virtues, successes and mistakes."³⁴ Ong's analysis of the way chirographic culture was dominated by categories congenial to oral comprehension provides a material explanation lacking in Auerbach's otherwise brilliant observations :

In the realistic literature of antiquity, the existence of society poses no historical problem; it may at best pose a problem in ethics, but even then the ethical question is more concerned with the individual members of society than with the social whole. No matter how many persons may be branded as given to vice or as ridiculous, criticism of vices and excesses poses the problem as one for the individual; consequently, social criticism never leads to a definition of the motive sources within society...[Yet] it is precisely in the intellectual and economic conditions of everyday life that those forces are revealed which underlie historical movements; these, whether military, diplomatic, or related to the inner constitution of the state, are only the product the final result, of variations in depths of everyday life. (pp. 32-33)

A world view organized in these ethical and agonistic terms is dominated by the category of the visible, audible, embodied person. Its social, institutional, and cosmic orders are iconically condensed in that figure of presence; they share in and extend its reality, they reinforce the *meconnaissance* enabling the subjects inscribed in its ideological discourses to repress or ignore forces whose analysis and representation presuppose instruments other than those available to speech-centered media. Ong's analysis helps explain how these limits and occlusions are functional elements of logocentric cultures. But neither Ong nor Auerbach—nor Havelock, nor, for that matter, Derrida has appreciated the extent to which such "modern" insights were anticipated by ancient authors themselves; by Thucydides and Plato, for example, whose work I shall now glance at because both focus ironically rather than mimetically on the logocentric dramas of the oral culture they inhibit. They present their representations of oral discourse in an art and medium of writing whose *presence* as such is conspicuous and whose differences from the speech medium often conspicuously featured.

In Thucydides, the very difficulty of syntax and density of style seems calculated to discourage oral recitation and aural comprehension.

Furthermore, he explicitly thematizes the differences at the beginning of his history. When he contrasts traditional modes of transmission to his own superior method of testing evidence and making revisionary paraphrases, the flaws he picks out in the former are all those we associate with narratives based on the techniques and motives for producing oral history: the limits of memory, the unreliability of eye-witnesses, the prevalence of legend mystified by antiquity, the uncritical passivity of auditors, the temptation to seduce audiences with epideictic self-display and fanciful tales (I. 20-23).

Thucydides anticipates Plato in his critical analysis of the speech-centered institutions of Athens which he obviously cherishes and much prefers to the laconic *eunomia* of Spartan culture. He and Plato anticipate Walter Ong in portraying aspects of what Ong (after Marcel Jousse) calls "verbomotor lifestyle." Ong notes, for example, that the interaction of oral narrative "with living audiences can actively interfere with verbal stability; audience expectations can help fix themes and formulas" (*Orality and Literacy*, p. 67). The Socrates portrayed by Plato is much concerned with the deeper implications of this interaction, which I have elsewhere discussed in Weberian terms as the dynamics of charismatic bondage.³⁵ In the dialogues, Socrates confronts the tangle of social, political, and ethical discourses that respond to the logocentric structure of the dialogues' Athenian setting—the same tangle and the same structure as that depicted in Thucydides' "history." Like Thucydides' series of orators caught in the downward pull, the *lysis*, of the factional discourse of a democracy that gives preeminence to "speech over all other instruments of power,"³⁶ Plato's text represents a Socratic discourse trapped in the contradictions of that setting. Socrates' speech reveals but cannot penetrate the panoply of *logoi* that defend against self-criticism and exposure, preserve self-esteem, and rationalize self-interest. His own *logoi* are "stolen" and anamorphically subverted by anti-Socratic speakers who use them to camouflage the politics of reactionary depotism in "disinterested" discourses: when the weird logic/metaphysics/ontology of Parmenides and the Eleatic Stranger, Timaeus' equally weird cosmology and anthropology, and Critias' Egyptian legend are subjected to the pressure of deictic and rhetorical analysis; they are revealed to be complex and devious rhetorical persuasions of the same order as the sophistical performances of Protagoras and Gorgias. So understood, the Platonic scripture is no longer a direct transmission of the Word of Platonic philosophy. In presenting a representation of Socratic

discourse fettered by its conditions, it presents itself as the deferred *telos* of that discourse, the only medium capable of releasing it to new, fuller, and longer life.

The texts of Thucydides and Plato present themselves as representations of a densely specific historical situation that is at once their extratextual "referent" and their subject. I have been using this awkward formula, "present themselves as representations," advisedly. It would be misleading to say that texts simply *represent* their subject, and this especially true in the case of counterlogical writing, because it presents itself as a form of discourse which differs significantly and radically from the discourses it presents. It does not discreetly vanish into transparency with the modesty that befits a mere medium: prefers itself, commends itself, and stands in the way; it presents itself *over against* the subject it represents. For Thucydides and Plato, that subject consists of the collective or cultural discourses that circulate orally through a structured speech community. These are not merely the utterances of an aggregate of speakers, and they include but are not reducible to a culture's legacy of *logoi* and *topoi*. Rather they are the inherited stock of "language-games" understood in the crude lay-psychological sense of "the games people play." The discourses represented by Plato consist (a) of deep and patterned motivational structures of apprehension, misanthropy, and unappeasable desire, and (b) of the formulaic "moves" by which they may be expressed, or justified, or rationalized, or concealed, or repressed.

Some of Ong's comments on the doctrine of commonplaces illuminate the functions these "moves" serve, but throw too pale a light on them: The doctrine of the commonplaces picks up and codifies the drives in oral cultures to group knowledge of all sorts around human behavior and particularly around virtue and vice." The *locus communis* or *topos* "was thought of as some kind of 'place'... in which were stored arguments to prove one or another point." Such commonplaces enabled one "to analyze a subject or an accumulated store of readied material... to which one resorted for 'matter' for thinking and discoursing," and they were used "in true oral fashion not merely as formulas but as themes which were strung together in traditional, and even highly rationalized patterns to provide the oral equivalent of plot." Finally, "the oral performer, poet or orator, needed a stock of material to keep him going. The doctrine of the commonplaces is, from one point of view, the codification of ways of assuring and

managing this stock, a codification devised with the aid of writing in cultures which, despite writing, remained largely oral in outlook and performance patterns.”³⁷

We can make this account less bland and more applicable to the Platonic representation of discourse by giving it a reflexive emphasis. Speakers are represented directly or through Socrates’ mimicry as using these readymade *logoi* and *topoi* to prove a point not only to others but also to themselves. There is, for example, a discourse of piety and holiness that rationalizes impious actions or behaviour motivated by fear (*does*, apprehension, i.e., the fear of being taken which is the obverse of the desire to take). There is a discourse of *aidos*, or reverence, that allows one to reunderstand the *fear of public opinion* as the *respect for* public opinion. There are *logoi*, discourses, traditional stories that keep the oral performer going in the sense that they help him preserve self esteem in the face of motives or behavior he might deem shameful and unjust. Paolo Valesio’s brief synopsis of “the ontology of rhetoric” catches this sense of the discourses Socrates encounters with more pungency than Ong’s account: “The filtering of reality through the sieves of the common places, the conflicts among the functions of discourse (both internally and externally), and the eristic plant present in any discourse, at any level, on any topic—these are its main distinctive features.” Discourse is eristic because its “mechanisms... are simplified representations of reality, inevitably and intrinsically slanted in a partisan direction.”³⁸

In the Platonic text, Socrates’ famous *elenchos* machine, his discourse of refutation, is directed only superficially against individual interlocutors. Its main target is the individual’s essay access and submission to the supply of anonymous discourses circulating throughout the community and legitimized by aura of tradition. The *elenchos* operates on individuals who permit themselves to be the sites and embodiments of socially constructed discourses that fend off self-knowledge and, as a result, occlude the awareness that the speakers have permitted themselves to be mere embodiments. In that respect it may be said that what speaks through the speaker is “the discourse of the other.” But this also holds true in another respect: partly through its specifically textual resources and partly through the agency of Socrates’ duplicitous discourse, the text not only represents those discourses but analyzes their relationship to the motivational structures they conceal and, by concealing, enable. Socrates and the text together draw from interlocutors meanings they seem not to intend or want to express,

meanings they seem unaware of or unwilling to acknowledge, but meanings already inscribed in the anonymous discourses they give voice and power to.

This, then, is a glimpse of the complex interpretation of logocentric culture and institutions that the Platonic text performs, and sometimes ascribes to the speaker named Socrates. But it is not an analysis any of his interlocutors are shown to comprehend; it is neither what they want to hear nor what they will let his words mean. It is displaced, repressed, buried in the rhizomes branching silently through the text. Refused by the speech community represented in the dialogues, it abides the harvest of future readerships, commits itself with trusting openness to communities of the text who may or may not glean it, depending on whether or not they practice the hermeneutical or circular method of farming. And this interpretation contains a further range of irony : Socrates is represented as laboring under the same logocentric constraints as the traditional Homeric culture he deconstructs. He, no less than the poets and sophists, is forced to submit to the tyranny of his audience. The Platonic text presents its rhizomatic textuality as an alternative to the logocentrism that foils Socrates by enabling his auditors—and especially those who are his friend and admirers—to alienate his *logoi* and fill his words with their meanings.

In such writing, the very obviousness or conspicuousness of textual complexity is itself a major stylistic feature, whether in the register of syntax, or of lexical and figurative effects, or of intertextual play, or of metaliterary devices. Complexity in any or several of these registers demands the kinds of interpretive responses that characterise the more nonlinear aspects of reading : decelerating the tempo, violating sequence, and dislocating or conflating passages; tracing the threads of various patterns through the textual weave; analyzing formal or logico propositional structures like hypotaxis and parataxis and *epagoge* for their tonal, thematic, and motivational implications. These effects of conspicuous complexity are counterlogical : they defy the temporal and linear constraints of oral performance and audition; they inhibit the form of reading that simulates listening; they solicit a readership of textual or grammaticalocentric rather than oral or logocentric interpreters. And they are by no means gratuitous; they constitute the message of the medium, or the content of the form. For the kinds of communicative transactions they inhibit are precisely those they represent, and represent with varying degrees

of ambivalence as modes of performance they value or admire on the one hand, but modes whose limits they subject to parodic or ironic critique on the other.

In these remarks on Thucydides and Plato, I have tried to suggest how a Derridean version of the Ong/Ricoeur model might give the deictic and rhetorical postulates a new interpretive purchase on texts that present themselves as critiques of the logocentric dramas they represent. I could have made the same point with other counterlogical writers—Chaucer and Shakespeare, for example. But I chose Thucydides and Plato because the former's text has been classified as "history" and the latter's as "philosophy" whose fictive elements are thereby dismissed as mere heuristic devices. Such classifications are strategies for imposing discursive distance on the relation between text and reader—that is, for discouraging the kind of close interpretation reserved for texts classified as "literature." In the case of Plato, discursive distance produces what is essentially a logocentric relationship because it makes us read the dialogues as if we are listening, weighing, and actively responding to the arguments Plato places in Socrates' mouth : "Whoever the interlocutors and others present may be, we, the readers, are also listeners and must participate, as silent partners, in the discussion; we must weigh and then accept or reject the solutions offered and must comment, as well as we can, on what is at stake."³⁹ Under such an interpretive regime, "what is at stake" too often turns out to consist of essentialized "issues"—either the themes and problems canonized by the history of philosophy or those that remain of interest to contemporary "thinkers" or those that illuminate "the human predicament." The title of Paul Shorey's book is revealing, and still reflects the spirit of much current commentary : *What Plato Said*—about art, logic, justice, the state, the Forms, the soul, the cosmos, etc.—not what he *wrote*, not what he represented Socrates as saying, which often includes Socrates' representation of what his interlocutors want to hear rather than what he wants them to know.

To collapse discursive distance by shifting into the literary register and submitting the text to the play of the postulates is by no means to abandon such thematic analysis, nor is it to impose an estheticizing quarantine on "the words on the page." Rather it is to constitute within the text, and as a fictive representation, the historically specific structure of logocentric institution we associate with fifth-century Athens and, more generally, with the culture of the Hellenic polis. In the very cursory

overview I have given of this approach to the dialogues, my emphasis has been on those features of the text that respond to deictic and rhetorical analysis, and perhaps the overview, however cursory, will suffice to suggest that a refinement of the deictic postulate is necessary to bring it in line with the above sample of interpretive practice. The original New-Critical form of the postulate focuses on "the dissociation of the text and its speaker or 'point of view' from the author, which encourages the interpretive pursuit of 'unbound' or 'surplus' meaning (unbound by the author's intention and exceeding that of the narrator," I now want to place more emphasis on the dissociation of the text from the speaker in order to situate the pursuit of surplus meaning there rather than between text and author. But as we have seen, that intratextual space—the space of representation—is not a void or a neutral ground against which are posed individual speakers. The text presents itself over against the discourse(s) it represents.

Notes and References

1. I shall not discuss the already much-analyzed debate between "historicism" and "formalism." "Formalism" is a broader and simpler phenomenon than the particular picture of New Criticism I develop here. For a trenchant dialectically astute survey of the debate, see Michael McCanles, *Dialectical Criticism and Renaissance Literature* (Berkeley : University of California Press, 1975), pp. 1-13.
2. *After the New Criticism* (Chicago : University of Chicago Press, 1980), pp. vii-viii. See also Jonathan Culler's account, in *The Pursuit of Signs : Semiotics, Literature, Deconstruction* (Ithaca : Cornell University Press, 1981), of the persistence in post-New-Critical practice of the "insidious legacy of the New Criticism," the "notion that the critic's job is to interpret literary works" (p. 5). For one of the more interesting paternal resurrections—or post-mortems—see René Wellek's "The New Criticism: Pro and Contra," *Critical Inquiry*, 4 (1978), 611-24, and the critical interchange in response to this essay between Wellek and Gerald Graff, *Critical Inquiry*, 5 (1979), 569-79.
3. With one exception: W. K. Wimsatt. But I was and remain

Wimsatt's student in spite of (because of ?) the differences of perspective documented in the following pages.

4. Loose talk about worlds abounds in the critical literature. Its provenance is traced by Meyer Abrams in *The Mirror and the Lamp* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1953), esp. pp. 3-13, 42-46, 238-40, 272-85. Abrams quotes two exemplary statements on p. 284. From Austin Warren: "The poet's 'final creation' is 'a kind of world or cosmos; a concretely languaged, synoptically felt world; an ikon or image of the 'real world.''" From Elder Olson: "In a sense, every poem is a microcosmos, a discrete and independent universe with its laws provided by the poet...."
5. Nor that New Criticism was a historical : see p. 64 below. On the marginalizing effects of New Criticism, see Terry Eagleton, *Literary Theory : An Introduction* (Minneapolis : University of Minnesota Press, 1983), pp. 46-51, and William E. Cain, *The Crisis in Criticism* (Baltimore : The Johns Hopkins Univ. Press, 1984), pp. 4-7.
6. New York : Alfred A. Knopf, 1959, pp. 743-44. Elsewhere, Wimsatt admits that "the New Critics, with their repeated major premises of 'interest', 'drama', and 'metaphor' advancing often enough to an emphasis on 'inclusiveness' and 'maturity', have tended at moments unhappily toward the didactic" ("Horses of wrath : Recent Critical Lessons," in *Hateful Contraries : Studies in Criticism and Literature* (Lexington : University of Kentucky Press, 1955), p. 24.
7. Wimsatt, "Verbal Style : Logical and Counterlogical," in *The Verbal Icon : Studies in the Meaning of Poetry* (Lexington : University of Kentucky Press, 1954), p. 217.
8. From "Poetry and Morals : A Relation Reargued" and "Poetry and Christian thinking," in *The Verbal Icon*, pp. 98-100 and 279.
9. Review of *Day of the Leopards*, Wimsatt's last book, in *New York Times Book Review*, June 13, 1976, 21.
10. *Semiotics and Interpretation* (New Haven : Yale University Press, 1982), p. 11.
11. In *Critical Practice* (London : Methuen, 1980), Catherine Belsey comments on the New-Critical emphasis on contemplation, "performed in isolation," involving "only the individual reader and the text. The poem, self-contained and closed, constitutes a pattern of knowledge which leads to a philosophy of detachment" (p. 20).
12. *The Pursuit of Signs*, pp. 3-4, 16, and *Passim*.
13. See *Semiotics and Interpretation*, pp. 20ff.

14. This is partly why my sense of New Criticism differs from Michael McCalnes' sense of formalism. He shows ingeniously how the formalist is a historicist in spite of himself, becoming his dialectical opposite because he "implicitly views literary works as functions of historically conditioned perspectives, namely his own" (*Didactic Criticism*, p. 5). But the view is hardly implicit. If the New Critics are in part formalists, they are quite explicit in establishing a canonical literary history according to criteria supplied by modern literature and interpretation. The qualities assigned to the work of Joyce, Faulkner, Eliot, etc., provided criteria of inclusion (of Cleanth Brooks, *Modern Poetry and the Tradition* [Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1939]). McCalnes remarks that the formalist's a historical standpoint violates itself to the exact degree that he uses methods of analyzing literary structure that are the products of literary developments in the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries. The very notions of 'organic form', 'structure of meaning', 'ambiguity', and the rest derive from conceptions of literary structure for which such writers as Flaubert, James, Conrad, Joyce, and Eliot were primarily responsible" (p. 9). But if there is a violation of logic it is conscious, and consistent with the establishment of criteria for organizing the canon. In any event, as I noted earlier and will note later, New Criticism is not reducible to formalism.

15. *The Sense of an Ending: Studies in the Theory of Fiction* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1968), p. 36.

16. Cf. Wellek, "The New Criticism: Pro and Contra" (note 2 above), pp. 615-16, on the 'historical scheme' of the New Critics, and Gerald Graff's response ("New Criticism Once More," *Critical Inquiry*, 5 [1979], 570-71). The historical and referential aspects of New Criticism are too often ignored. For a representative instance, see Terence Hawkes' summary in *Structuralism and Semiotics* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1977), pp. 151-56. A more perspicuous comment on the ways in which New Criticism is and is not historical may be found in Belsey *Critical Practice*, pp. 18-20.

17. Assuming, of course, the "C. B." responsible for the short entry on New Criticism in the Enlarged Edition of the *Princeton Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetics* (ed. A. Premlinger, et al. [Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1974], pp. 567-68) is Brooks. The entry is interestingly spare, and notable chiefly for the following remark: "The... charge that the n. c. represents a revival of the doctrine of art for

art's sake runs into complications when one notices how many of this group have a definite religious position," a position that leads them "to distinguish art from religion and morality rather than to make art a substitute for religion and morality" (p. 568). Here again, one might argue, iconicity enforces disparity.

18. As Wellek ("The New Criticism," p. 616) and others have noted the structural postulate goes back to Aristotle and the esthetic postulate to Kant.
19. See Wellek's objections to the characterization of New Criticism as formalist in "The New Criticism," p. 618. Wellek also insists that although the "method of close reading became the pedagogical weapon of the New Criticism, it differed from *explication de texte* in offering critical standards, leading to discrimination between good and bad poems" (p. 620). He approves of this, while I consider it one of the serious flaws that made the cube easier to disassemble (the "standards," which informed canonization, were based on latent ideological commitments which have subsequently been criticized).
20. My doctoral thesis on book II of Spenser's *Faerie Queene*, subsequently published as *The Allegorical Temper*, was a first attempt to engage on these two fronts.
21. *Orality and Literacy: The Technologizing of the word* (New York: Methuen, 1982), p. 160.
22. *After Virtue* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1981), p. 118.
23. Louis Althusser, *Lenin and Philosophy and Other Essays*, trans. Ben Brewster (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1971), pp. 222-23.
24. See Althusser, "Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses (Notes toward an Investigation)," in *Lenin and Philosophy*, pp. 170ff.
25. *Interpretation theory: Discourse and the Surplus of Meaning* (Fort Worth: The Texas Christian University Press, 1976), pp. 29-30.
26. *The World, the Text, and the Critic* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1983), pp. 34, 48.
27. I am grateful to my colleague, Professor John p. Lynch, for this etymology.
28. Barbara Johnson, introduction to Jacques Derrida, *Dissemination*, trans. Johnson (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981), pp. viii-ix.
29. Belsey, *Critical Practice*, p. 5.
30. *Unredeemed Rhetoric: Thomas Nashe and the Scandal of Authorship* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1982), pp. 69-70.
31. See Margaret Ferguson, *Trials of Desire: Renaissance Defenses of Poetry* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1983), pp. 151-62.

32. Anthony Wilden, *System and Structure: Essays in Communication and Exchange*, second ed. (New York: Tavistock Publications, 1980), p. 407.

33. *The Presence of the Word: Some Prolegomena for Cultural and Religious History* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1967), p. 201.

34. *Mimesis: The Representation of Reality in Western Literature*, trans. Willard R. Trask (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1953), pp. 38-39.

35. "Facing Sophists: Socrates' Charismatic Bondage in *Protagoras*," *Representations*, 5 (1984), 66-91.

36. Jean-Pierre Vernant, *The Origins of Greek Thought*, translator unnamed (Ithaca; Cornell University Press, 1982), p. 49.

37. *Presence of the Word*, pp. 80, 82, 84.

38. *Novantiqua: Rhetorics as a Contemporary Theory* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1980), pp. 24, 21.

39. Jacob Klein, *Plato's Trilogy: "Thætetus," the "Sophist," and the "Statesman"* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1977), p. 1.

The Anomalies of Literary (Post) Modernism

JOSEPH RIDDEL

No one is a poet unless he has felt the temptation to destroy language or create another one, unless he has experienced the fascination of non-meaning and the no less terrifying fascination of a meaning that is inexpressible.

(Octavio Paz)

Criticism must attack the form, never the content of your language.

(Lautreamont)

I

Modernism is a word of great currency, almost literally a figure of exchange. But the word itself is hardly definite for being so in vogue, so significant. So obviously figural and in circulation. It is not, quite clearly, quite clear or transparent; nor is it a proper name for either some historical period or some identifiable or unique style. At the same time an historical and an ahistorical category, it *refers* (a term of equal indeterminacy) to the equivocal and irreducible relation between the two--that is, to what is often today called "desire" or the lack that ties any mediation to a dreamed--of immediacy, the temporal or sensuous to the transcendental or supersensuous, act to idea, and perhaps even literature to philosophy. Modernism is another name for some moment of transition, or for the unnameable and uncanny, an apparently stable term for an instability, which is the reason we are always affixing premonitory signs to it, posting it, as it were, or bracketing it is an historical deviation, at once discontinuous with and supplementary to the "tradition," in a way that makes the exception prove the rule. It is not a "word," category, or designation which stands alone, nor outside of some historical moment, but it does

designate a practice rather than a lapidary or complete form or style. Whatever the modern is, it is an inscription which erases itself, or signifies its own undoing or overcoming. It must, therefore, inscribe the "postmodern" as surely as it displaces, by reinscription, the tradition. Modernism, in brief, and this includes any excess named postmodern which necessarily inhabits it, belongs to criticism, even when it is the name of art or literature. It has become a kind of "basic word" or concept, in Heidegger's sense of a name that repeatedly undergoes changes of meaning.¹ Strangely, one of its functions is to name that which produces such changes, hence undoes old categories. Modernism names its own anomaly.²

Modernism thus "understood," as a critical term for criticism, therefore harbors, to repeat, the very crisis it is presumed to reflect and represent, yet repress or overcome. I need not rehearse at this point the familiar debates about it which center upon Mallarme's essay, "Crisis in Poetry," or the recent attempts to rewrite this as our "Crisis in Criticism." I will, however, note provisionally Julia Kristeva's observation that a modern scholar of language once claimed that the two most eminent linguists in France were Mallarme and Artaud, that is, modern poets whose practice detached and highlighted the problematics of the very language they employed self-critically. The implication, that the poets were there before us, before scholarship and criticism, also suggests that the poetic is originally critical, and that is addresses primarily itself. But never directly. And that is the problem, or problematic; for in this address of itself, the language of modernism does not so much achieve self-reflexivity as expose the idealization of self reflexivity. It submits itself to critical practice. We hear, today, the inflated and hyperbolic claims that the critical is creative or that criticism is poetic, and the equally self righteous counterclaims of an academic establishment which regales against "theoretical" critics for writing badly while claiming that criticism is poetic. The debate, however, turns on the acceptance of a division and hierarchy of categories, the privileging of the poetic over the critical, creative immediacy over reflective circumspection, even the imaginative over the discursive; in short, the production and maintenance of an old binarism that modernism, in whatever form it takes, has tended at the same time to perpetuate and undermine.³ Modernism, as the epigraphs from Paz and Lautreamont indicate, has never ceased questioning its own privilege, perhaps by way of validating its antithetical practice. Even "Creation requires analysis," Paul Valery remarked in his marginalia to Poe's *Marginalia*, thus setting the one mode within the other like an angle, two inseparable yet equivocal texts which refuses symbiotic reduction. Modernism is at best a double-

writing, "Literature is now critical," Emerson wrote; "Well, analysis may be poetic." Whether Emerson, Nietzsche, or Valery, Stevens or Derrida, poetry or philosophy—we have aphorism and anecdote, a double writing, or theory inscribed in practice, wherever modernism appears. We have, that is, apocalypse in the form of catechresis.

Is it possible, then, to define modernism without submitting to its own revisionary force, a force that is just as often conservative as it is radical, but nonetheless irreducible to a monological or ideological discourse? Modernism inscribes its own problematics, but it cannot describe itself. How ironic, then, that modernism as we have come to understand it has always been defined on the model of self-reflexivity when it can be nothing more than a criticism of its modality? In literary history, for example, it has always been the name for some break with or periodic culmination of tradition, and thus some horizon which can be read, but only in two incompatible senses: as end and new beginning. As the later, it would be at once a return to origins and originary. That paradox marks a good deal of what we recognize as the primitivism or neo-primitivism of modernism, the ahistoricity and "immediacy" it claims, just as it supports the sense of a continuum or historical totality. Modernism thus belongs, and does not belong, to the "eternal return" and the hermeneutical circle. That is, it gestures some exception to and of the rule, a certain unruliness; yet it cannot be said to be out side the law. That is why it can only be defined by some other character—by its excess, by the "postmodern," or as well as see, by the *figural*, by style, but style now thought of as that which presents itself to the eye and at the same time resists perception or reading. Not style in the singular, then, but "styles," as Derrida writes: irreducible heterogeneity.

Both Paul de Man and Jean-Francois Lyotard, two recent critics not easily reconciled to one another, seem to agree that the problematics of the "modern" (Lyotard, for example, says that the modern is an "aesthetics of the sublime") is located in figurality. Each rejects the term "modern" as a designation of "period," such as its use by historians to set the modern Renaissance against antiquity, though, even here the notion of Enlightenment implies a certain priority of self reflection and thus humanist privilege. As a comprehensive term, however, modernism signifies not only something close to us in time, the *neu* and the *new*, but something that re-marks itself in two senses: that comments on itself, and underscores its technical and abstract properties or those devices which it uses to produce meaning and structure. Simply, modernism seems to be inseparable from

self-reflection and self-reflexivity. Even when it is employed in a neo-Marxist fashion by critics like Frederic Jameson to suggest both an historical and structural map of recent history—as a dialectic of tradition—highmodernism—postmodern superimposed upon an economic history it represents, as commodity—the term—concept is troubled by its appeal to the question of style(s) and hence by a doubleness, in that style indicates not only a formal, abstract, and visible mark but also that which conceals the very thing that produces it. Style(s) presents itself to perception and interferes with perception. Its figurality is visible and corporeal, and irreducible to a narrative account of things, as Lyotard notes. The modern at once shows itself, and withholds itself from (re)presentation; it is commodified and employed speculatively, as a capitalised value, but it also tends to escape its appropriation and to skew those same values for which it apparently stands.

This is why it is difficult to discuss the modern and the postmodern without reference to the visual arts, or even architecture, as organizations or constructions of space. Yet this construction is no less a critique or deconstruction of spatiality; it inevitably disrupts representation or perspectivism (hence illusion) and offers up an irreducible “image” or figure that parodies its own status. It tends to open the space, or mark the artifice of its closure. If one wishes to maintain the question within the field of verbal arts, then figure, as in Millarne, involves that organisation of marks on the page which are not indicators of meaning, not even signs, yet call attention to themselves as the *abgrund* of any possible meaning. The modern demands to be “tead” in some literal sense, because it inscribes marks which suggest an organization of signs that can be decoded. What if the signs it organizes are themselves signs referring to a twofold nature of signs? That is, signs occupy and organize “space” yet prevent our reading that space (conceptualizing or narrating it). In one important sense, as deconstructive (postmodern) critics have argued, the organizational or creative force would be located in the equivocal relation of marks that bear no semantic load, but appear to the eye as figures which unfocus and fracture the scene, provoking interpretation or reading by resisting meaning. They indicate, these indicators, that something cannot be presented. They present, as Lyotard claims, the unrepresentable, or indicate a “meaning that is inexpressible,” according to Paz. Thus, they undermine their own role as fetish by highlighting the relation between form and fetishism.

Certainly, since French Symbolism we have had to consider modernity in terms of a heterogeneity that at once summons us to understanding,

luring us to read things in terms of what the old words meant while reminding us that some aberration appears there, that something is not reducible to conceptualization. De Man formulates this as the rhetoricity of literary language, the *aporia* that joins the cognitive or meaningful stance of figure (trope) to a performative or persuasive function that subverts meaning. Generalizing this beyond literary figuration, Lyotard employs the equivocal opposition of *discourse* (narrative or story, *recit*) and *figure* (or that which resists induction into the flow of discursive meanings). Figurality appears and marks itself not as the appearance of a withheld meaning, but as a phantasm or unaccountable image.

By way of talking about criticism or a certain *praxis*, we have “drifted” from reflection on the idea of the “modern” to some postmodernist or deconstructive inflections of it. In other words, according to Lyotard, this literature-art, as well as being self-critical, itself performs a critical or disruptive function. As we have seen (note the epigraphs), it is the artists themselves who insist that their art is critical, even apocalyptic, in that its performance affects itself at the most basic levels of form or medium. What does it mean, then, to say that literature is critical, or modern literature self-critical, and yet to assert that modernism (and postmodernism) are not or cannot be purely self-reflexive, as they have traditionally been defined : that, to the contrary, they are disturbances of speculation and thus of the illusion of presence, of representation ? Modernism tends to offer itself as “illustration,” but only to illustrate its own mechanics, thus presenting or exposing the *techne* of representation. You will recognize, no doubt, in the notion of “illustration” Kant’s primary figure of “hypotyposis” (from section 59 of the *Critique of Judgment*), that figure which is supposed to reconcile the real and the transcendental, or sensuous and supersensuous. It is for Kant the figure of figure *par excellence*, in that it would govern the play of reflections necessary to allow art to order the world, reflect it, and yet stand beyond cognition while being inferior to it, thereby regulating beauty and the sensuous to the order of truth, certifying what Heidegger calls Kant’s Platonism ⁴ Modernism, I will argue, and with it anything we can designate as postmodern, is complicated and problematized by this question of illustrative figurality. If a “modern” work of literature is that which reflects or comments on itself, this metapoem can only be understood in a critical way, as a cata-critical etc. But in what sense can poems, or literary works in general, be said to act or perform ? In what sense does the term “speech acts” depend on an idea of metaphoricity, and

thus mark itself as a trope of trope ? What is involved when we begin to tell a story of literary history as the “influence” of an earlier work on a later, or as the “anxiety of influence” which produces a later work’s revision of the first, producing a catachresis that seems without end or beginning ? I am echoing Harold Bloom here, because he is rightly celebrated for offering us a new and certainly extravagant sense of literary history as an open and endless criticism, a criticism of criticism by literature. But Bloom tells his story in terms of Romanticism, to which the modern is no more than an “ephebe’s” twist. Yet, Bloom has to have recourse to a “new” model of language, of rhetoricity and tropology, the inescapable model for any modernism. It is just this inescapable model, I will suggest, that puts in question the dream of modality and method, that disrupts the model of self reflection, which we have to consider in reflecting on the “critical function of the modern.” In his sense, modernism is just another name--and an historically deviant one—for this topological economy of Romanticism; while the Romantic is a generic name for poetry itself, for its Nietzschean capacities of self-overcoming, of displacing the truth with “lie.”⁵

II

Any definition of the modern—self-consciousness, self-reflexivity, experimental—must acknowledge its claims of difference, its posture of uniqueness, of the “new” which nevertheless can only be defined against convention and received styles. In Eliot’s terms, “tradition” seems always to regulate “individual talent.” Formalism, but a “new” form; spatiality, but a “new” organization of space—these signs of a material or sensuous “construction” accentuate the modern as the ultimate technical refinement, as *techne*, as “work” and “object” rather than living “organism.” Thus the modern is always less and more than what it putatively completes. One is reminded of the American New Critics’ efforts to reconcile the ideal of “organic form,” derived from Kant through Coleridge, with the technical abstractions of an industrial and even post-industrial age ; to preserve, let us say, in the pure crystal of aesthetic and verbal space a self-reflexive operation which could be described on the order of a perpetual motion machine that mirrored the purity of a transcendental consciousness or divine imagination, the “work” became not only complete but in John Crowe Ransom’s words, a “sacred object.” This contradiction of sensuous and supersensuous, which as Heidegger shows, haunts aesthetics from Plato or Platonism to Kant and Coleridge, and even Hegel, and is reversed but not overcome by Nietzsche (nor for that matter, finally, by Heidegger),

is the reigning problematic of the modern. It is everywhere reflected in the "ethic of nostalgia" that haunts modern criticism, the simultaneous protest against the "dehumanization of art" (Ortega) and praise for its technical expertise, its crystalline abstraction. Modernism's preoccupation with "space" or the potentiality of closed space—whether in the self-reflexive poem or "functional" architecture or non representational painting or non-serial music—inevitably mixes the metaphors of the organic and the technical, life and death.

In the effort to resolve the form-content and space-time dichotomies that perplex western aesthetics, modernism can only overcome the crisis by exacerbating it. One could demonstrate this thematically in poems as "conventionally" modern as Hart Crane's *The Bridge* or Ezra Pound's *Cantos* as well as in the self-consciousness nativism of Wright's architecture, works which incorporate what Heidegger calls the "discordance" or contradiction of western aesthetics as surely as does any so-called "dehumanized" art, for example, analytic Cubism, surrealism, or any of the arts now reigned under the generic term "postmodern." This is what allows a postmodern criticism in general, particularly a critic like Lyotard, to argue that every modernism is already inhabited by a postmodern discordance, or by certain configurations or marks which signify at the same time the work's double claims, to closure and development, thus to a unity that is not at the same time abstract and dead. Strangely enough, it is this apparently non-living technical force, signified by "functions" within the work which accentuate their artifice, that marks the productive potential of the modern; that is, it breaks up or "opens" the modern, or signifies the modern's "will to power" or will toward closure. In Nietzsche's terms, art "lies," but in accentuating its allusion, it displaces "truth"; in remarking its "lie," it is more truth than that which perpetuates illusion. Lyotard thus employs the periodic term "postmodern" to name this function of differential production, this disrupting intervention of a *figure* which cannot be reduced to the conceptual understanding of *discourse* or narrative representation. This *differend*, as he names it, signifies the play of the postmodern within the modern and allows him to claim, as we will see, that the postmodern is necessary for the modern to come into its own, or appear.⁶ This is the "critical" function or force which the work bears within itself, a sign of its double-ness or heterogeneity, its "oscillations" or in Derrida's terms, the "double writing" that pervades all discourse and disallows our generic distinctions between the creative and the critical.

Gilles Deleuze denominates "modernism" in literature, in this case narrative literature, as the working of a "divergent series" against the

rule of narrative, which he calls the “rule of convergence.” Whereas narrative pushes themes toward resolution, the modern mode disperses and reweaves or imbricates irreconcilables. Montage is not quite the name for this *imbricolage*. Thus Joyce’s “continually decentered chaos” in *Finnegan’s Wake* becomes a “power of affirmation” in keeping a series open, and like a “literary machine” (recall *Proust and Signs*) produces an “internal reverberation” or resonance of oppositions that resists any closure of the narrative line.⁷

We find in these “descriptions” of a postmodern activity disturbing the representational or descriptive a strange kind of practices that make the critical discourse in effect repeat, as if by parody, the creative. Criticism can only speak theoretically from the (dis)advantage point of its own practice, since what it must do is produce a new “descriptive” language for that which resists description. Deleuze calls this the “constitutive inequality” of every work. Equivocality, heterogeneity, heterology, and in the more extreme sense, the non-concepts (not exactly neologisms or solecisms) of Derrida, like *différance*, *supplement*, *hymin*, *dissemination*, emerge as an aberrant lexicon from beneath what has seemed a normative if not natural aesthetic language.⁸ In one way or another, these effects disturb the “eye” and “ear,” and touch the senses, recalling a certain non-sense at the constitutive center, which is no longer a center at all. We have learned to accept this figural irrationality in what we recognize as the “work of art,” but when it appears in the critical domain to comment on the “impossibility” of theory or to disrupt the logic of mastery or totalization, it must be marginalized. When criticism threatens to preempt art’s access to the “other,” criticism must be exempted. But if “criticism” as such is already inscribed in the art-work, or literary, then it can only be exempted by ignoring its function and returning criticism to its ordinary and subordinate role of thematic elaboration. This is the claim made for meta-literature : that it sufficiently accounts for or thematizes itself.

To accentuate the discordant “function” of criticism in modern (or postmodern) art, on the other hand, calls attention to certain limits within our old sense of “reading,” as Paul de Man does; “reading” precedes and suspends “interpretation” or the recovery of meaning. It is also to call attention to a certain *mise en abyme* structure that inhabits modernism, and to suggest that this critical modernism in some way affects all literary discourse and is simultaneously effaced by literary history. This is obviously too broad a generalization : that literature is never original but originary, that it begins in the moment when it is forced to reflect on itself, when

it, in effect, signifies its departure from myth (Bakhtin) or the direct interpretation of "truth" and signifies its own figurality and modality. In this sense, the appearance of Achilles' shield in the *Iliad* and Penelope's tapestry in the *Odyssey* would be "allegories" of the advent of literature itself. Penelope's nightly unwrapping, like Scheherazade's interrupted narratives, is a story of narrative's delaying mechanism, or productive deferral, a "story of story" which recent postmodern literature like that of Nabokov, Pynchon, John Barth, and others, repeats *in extremis* by following out a "logic" parody. Borges' story of Pierre Menard's rewriting of *Don Quixote* brackets the entire history of the novel within this novelty of repetition, and like Nabokov's *Pale Fire* stages the novel as the most critical of genres because it most effectively and forcefully has advanced by putting genre in peril. Criticism and death are the necessary conditions for literature to come into being or for the idea of being, to appear as representation. One finds it difficult to understand a "history of the novel" that does not also subvert itself, though the intertextual relations between narrative forms are not without some rule. But it is the writing of this rule that poses so many questions, a scene Henry James staged in his "Prefaces" as the problem of rereading, revising, and reseeing. Could one say that James marks and re-marks his own invention of a certain "realism" as a critical act directed against both the "Romance" and the Flaubertian displacement of the old representational illusion? The "Prefaces" restore to our awareness the technical operations of a figurality we may call "critical" in that the themselves call attention away from the meaning of the representations to operations themselves, and show us the re-visionary mode of the technical operations.

In describing the works of modernism, then, we will have to confront the question Derrida posed in *La Carte postale* (1980), at a point where he is talking about the discourse of philosophy, or, more specifically, of the post-philosophical claims of a social science like psychoanalysis to overcome the theory-praxis problematics. His example is Freud's use of the example, or the crux introduced into any "system" when the so-called "method" of analysis is also that, or part of that, which is to be analyzed—where the "family romance" or Oedipal complex becomes the general pattern for understanding, analyzing, and correcting a condition which it also names :

What occurs when acts or performances (discourse or writing, analysis or description, etc.) become part of the objects which they

designate. There is certainly no advance (gain) in self-reflexive transparency, on the contrary. The account is no longer possible, nor can the account be rendered, and the borders of the whole (*ensemble*) are neither closed nor open.⁹

The ideal of “self-reflexive transparency” has always been the dream of western metaphysics or the philosophy of (self-) presence, according to Derrida, evident in its arguments for systematization and closure, totalization and mastery. But the dream of “truth,” and desire for “theory” that at once inaugurates and governs a practice which completes it, have only been sustained by a strategic effacement and seamless reconstruction of the narrative and figural modes this discourse had to employ. To expose this self-referential and self-justifying discourse, then, to deconstruct it or submit it to something like a “postmodern” analytic, cannot be done from the outside, but only from a certain “margin” that characterizes the discourse itself. This “new” critical discourse, however, can no more inhabit, parody, and overcome the old work, by exploiting its own parasite, than it can escape its own limits. That is, the analytic of exposure, of ex-position, is implicated in the game (*jeu*). This limitation (of *l'imité*, as Derrida plays upon the illusion of exemplary mimesis) affects every inscription, and is indeed the source of the productive power of all discourse.

If there is a post-philosophical discourse of (social) science methodology at all, its authority derives from these limits and not from its capacity for overcoming them. According to Derrida, this applies as well to the “pure” language of mathematics as the “pure” word of poetry, a problematics inscribed in Gobel’s theorem which, ironically, has enhanced as much as it has threatened “progress” in quest for a *principia mathematica*. The questioning of referentiality and self-referentiality, which has seemed to belong to a certain (marginal) philosophy of language, is something inscribed in discourse itself, and not something that has emerged with the nihilism and skepticism of a post Cartesian modern age or, more recently with the “revolution of the word” in the nineteenth century. Criticism cannot begin outside what it criticizes, hence can never account for the present or future condition of that which it is a part. It cannot, therefore, provide the trajectory of a destination—what the “thing” it studies/analyzes will be—any more than it can account fully for a “present” condition in which it participates. True enough, the ideal of self-reflexivity achieves its essential expression in the Hegelian formulation, as subsequently underscored in such “reversals” as Nietzsche, Marx, Freud, and Heidegger. But these “reversals,” as Derrida reveals, could never be simple reversals, but only

indelible re-markings the heterogeneous field of the "ensemble." The power of post-Hegelian discursive practices resides in the limits of the very metaphysics they expose, and thus in their own limits. In its self-exposure; its *posture* as pure science.

We have seen, in recent years, the attempt to write a "history" of literary modernism in terms of a post-Romantic poetics, or as the achievement of a "purity" (from *Symbolisme* to post-symbolist reversal) of the "word," that is, as a "turn toward language" through which literature realizes "self-reflexive transparency," the systematic closure that metaphysics could only dissimulate, or, to recall Nietzsche's figure, turn into an *edifice*. Thus we have a history which runs dialectically from Romanticism to Modernism to Postmodernism, through what one current journal (*Boundary 2*) celebrates as a negative or open dialectic of overcoming: a progressive history of demystification which recounts literature's withdrawal from history, and the sickness of the Romantic "self," into itself, into an hermetic purity that orders the play of the sign within the "restricted" or closed economy of the symbol. The postmodern, then, becomes that moment not only of reversal but re-turn, a venting of this closure or fracturing of the mirror and its illusion of "transparency." Focussing on this "taint" of the mirror, or on the impenetrability of its reflecting surface, which is something like the irreducible corporeal figure that resists understanding, the postmodern would in this account open a closed field and return to reality and history, not as representation or mirror but as productive or resistant performance. This particular literary "history," of literature's closure of history and its return to history, has been variously applied: to the broad movement beyond Romanticism, or to the Continental developments from Flaubert and Mallarme through Lautreamont and surrealism to Borges and the parodic deconstruction of "literature." *Boundary 2* recounts it in the economy of two modernist moves--boundary 1 referring to either Virginia Woolf's or Ezra Pound's date of 1910 as the beginning of the modern; boundary 2 naming Charles Olson's proclamation of 1950 as the beginning again of the "new" or postmodern. It is not surprising that this kind of "history" comports with the "economic" history described by Fredric Jameson and other neo-Marxist critics, even though Marxism does not confer the same privilege upon postmodernism as does a theory that celebrates literature's self-overcoming, its going "beyond" aesthetics, as it were.¹⁰

Strangely enough, postmodern writers tend to discount this privilege, even as they acknowledge that they work self-referentially to parody,

disturb, and generally open the hermetic enclosure of "literature," without, as Heidegger evidences, indulging in a nostalgia to get back to some pure essence of the poetic being. If as Charles Olson wrote, the modern/postmodern poet must "go back" behind the self-consciousness of western literature, s/he must go back "to come forward." Or as John Barth has argued, if postmodern literature must "exhaust" literature, or parody it to the point of showing its exhausted resources (its becoming modern, in the sense of becoming at the same time purely formal and thematically nihilistic), the logic of parody, or what I will call genre-cide, is necessary as a surgical maneuver and not an end in itself.¹¹ But the undoing of the "modern" cannot be simply another version of nostalgia, the quest for some kind of primitivistic power, Dionysiac ground of life, or even pre-Socratic wisdom of Being, as in Heidegger. Any more than it can, as avant-garde, lead the advance, or in the utopian sense, achieve the "advance" of a literature that would put literature on some new "ground" or "topos," some position that included both "life" and "history." In sum, such privileging of the postmodern simply tends to repeat the metaphysics of the humanist literary tradition, whether in the triumphs of rebellion or nihilistic despair.

Rather, what we now call postmodern can no more be decisively separated out from or placed in advance of the modern than can the modern be seen to complete or sublate the tradition. The crisis rests in the 'history,' or in the inescapable need of the modern/postmodern to account for itself: to place itself in and beyond history, to give itself a history, to account for history but also for a "literature" which is at the same time in/beyond history. This is what is implied by such projects as Paul de man's effort to rewrite the "history" of Romanticism, and, oppositely, by Harold Bloom's attempt to rewrite all literary history as a version of Romanticism or "quest romance." Literary history, then, is inseparable from criticism, but not simply in the sense that criticism is a discursive practice that accounts for the ontological or cognitive status of literature, its representational role in a history of ideas. Deconstruction's undoing of the cognitive and generic borders between literature (poetry) and criticism (thought) can no more escape the problematics of self-reflexive acts or performances in literary criticism than it can escape the double-bind of philosophical discourse in general. In *general*: that is, to use the Derridean figures, which "refer" to Bataille's readings of Hegel, both literary criticism and literature (named separately here for a certain convenience which their difference belies) can write only "general economies," never

a restricted one. In Harold Rosenberg's oxymoronic title, *The Tradition of the New*, we may find inscribed the entire problematics of accounting for the "new" and "original," especially as it highlights the dilemma of belatedness and even entropy (signified in the changing sense of energy and more recently communication theory over the last century) which perplexes yet animates the (post)modern revolution and its counter-practices. The "new" can only proclaim its futur-ology figuratively (prophetically and apocalyptically) from the position of its death.

III

If literary history is in a sense nothing other than a history of criticism, written by and as criticism, and if literature contains an inextricable critical element or an element of self-accountability, it follows that literary history will be composed of a set of readings' (not necessarily interpretations) which resist narrative closure and even full accountability. Such histories tend to resolve into "themes" or thematic stories, threads whose counterpoint is never fully resolved, despite the efforts to reconcile themes around one or more dominant motif; that is, to recount the whole in the part. This effort to overcome what we might call the Godelian indeterminant, to make an element in the "set" account for the entire set, is clearly exemplified in the problematics of writing the history of a national literature : say, American literature. Of course, we have risked here the irrational example of the example, of the exemplary case. Nevertheless, one might argue that "American literature," as well as the various attempts to write a history of American literature as at once a unique literature yet a part of the history of western literature, is a case in point. An instance of the inherent contradiction. From Emerson to the present, the American writer's effort to pronounce the possibility of an "American literature," to clear a space for it, has tended not so much to produce that "new" literature as to make it possible for criticism to write a history of that "desire." Thus Emerson joins with Bloom in that enterprise, while traditional literary history proceeds as if its task of description addressed a unique history and an authentically different literature which, nevertheless, it could recount in terms applicable to any national literature : that is, as a literature at the same time "new" yet a chapter, perhaps the last and latest chapter of the West, characterized by its own nativist elements by a "continuity" of themes and forms, for example, the need to produce its own epic, an ancient genre, within a

modern idiom.¹² In sum, these histories tend to efface the very contradictions, the very "discordance," as Heidegger calls it, which is essential to the "new" or to art in general—its own critical force or capacity to deconstruct received structures. Ironically, American literary histories tend to tell a normative story about an exceptional case, or at least about a literature that repeatedly insists on its need to be exceptional, and a metaliterature rather than a representative form.

American literature, that is, problematizes any "history" that might be written about it, but it continues to provoke efforts to write that history. The provocation, interestingly enough, seems often enough to reside not in the work's account of its failure and frustration, but in its ironic inability to account for its failure to account for itself. Sometimes it seems to write a history of its own future: visionary, prophetic, exceptional, and different, therefore instigating its own interpretation by a clearing of the ground of past references. In this regard, one might argue that American literature in general seems to conform only to Bakhtin's broad definition of the "novel," which differs from epic in the sense that it is a strictly historical and ceaselessly self-revising or open genre, in contrast to the epic's preoccupation with a completed, unchanging, and even mythic past. Whatever the genre' "American literature"—and by this I now designate that literature which in effect reflects upon itself, and on its own limits or failure to realize itself, rather than a literature written in America or that literature which seems to represent, or even invent, "American" themes like Adamism, in which American and mythos are apparently synonymous concepts—is like Bakhtin's novel, self-revisionary, rather than visionary, and prophetic only in the sense that it is "prospective" rather than "retrospective," as writers from Emerson to Olson have proposed.

The familiar attempts to write in American literary history according to its distinct themes—Adamism, Paleface and Redskin, the frontier—have never failed, even in the arguments for a fundamental nativism, or primitivism to suggest that this return to origins had to be made through the self-conscious methods characteristic of modernism. There is no more classic example of this than Charlie's Feidelson's ground-breaking *Symbolism and American Literature*¹³ which concludes with a "Postscript" announcing: "...the affinity between large areas of American literature and of modern literature brings to light unsuspected aspects of both," that affinity being particularly evident in what they share with a broadly defined "symbolist" movement in modern thought. Feidelson's is a striking piece of critical reading, but a curious history, which argues that "symbolism" has supplanted

“romanticism and realism” or “idealism and materialism” in the sense that it is a “humanism,” but a “critical humanism.” Thus, he begins one step beyond Matthiessen whose own canonical text had placed the American “tradition” at the end or in the aftermath of the Renaissance, itself a repetition and fulfilment of that theory of language Emerson found in Coleridge as filtered through Kant. Both Feidelson and Matthiessen locate this humanistic rebirth in Eliot’s particular notion of the modern as an escape from the abysses of Romantic dualism (though Eliot had found humanism only another version of the Romantic).

No matter the question of precursors and influence, it is the role given to “individual talent” and to the problems visited upon the American writer both by his lack of a past and isolation that Feidelson, like de Tocqueville, discovers to be at the heart of an American literary tradition which has had to invent itself anew by a kind of auto-reflection. American literature was virtually born in crisis, its legacy the self-consciousness that haunted western thought in its latter-day moments, in Romanticism and Hegelianism. Symbolist theory, from that Eliot had found in the French literary scene of the nineteenth century, to the philosophical “symbolism” of Bergson and Cassirer, signified the overcoming of Cartesian dualism; it was not, however, a philosophical resolution so much as a displacement of philosophy by aesthetics and theology. Symbolism, as Feidelson argued, was a “theory of knowledge” reconciling history and ideas, and thus an aesthetic figure which verified the old theology by bringing its “form” once more before our eyes. The “autotelic” poem of Eliot signified and made manifest the resolution of that “double consciousness” or Cartesian dilemma inherited from the Renaissance and exacerbated by every argument which attempted to master it, the latest being Romantic pathos and existentialist despair. Indeed, all of that history of renaissance as self-consciousness could be resolved in a post-Hegelian reification of the Symbol over the Sign, a belief in the presentness of the Symbol which could harbor two-in-one, a displacement of Romantic irony by humanism.

But whereas the New Criticism had followed Eliot in discovering this symbolist resolution in poetry or lyric form, albeit a lyric like Donne’s structured according to drama or dramatic oppositions extended in time but resolved in form and figure, Feidelson discovers his symbolist model to be a narrative. In this he owes a considerable debt not only to the Warburg philosophers but to Joseph Frank’s formulation of the modern novel as “spatial form” modeled upon Worringer’s aesthetics. Feidelson’s metatext is Gide’s *The Counterfeiters* which he reads in the spirit of the *mise en abyme*

only to discover that the artist himself has, following Mallarme, effected a way of closing the text's self-references upon themselves, thus effacing the question of just where the original and unreflected moment might stand (whether outside or inside, in history or in experience, in action or consciousness). The aesthetic unity of the symbol realized in the meta-narrative sufficiently accounts for itself. Self criticism brings itself to completion, or stops all drifting towards the abyss of non-meaning opened up by narratives about narrative. Melville's *Pierre*, on the other hand, is at once an earlier and weaker version of this aesthetic sublation, a much more awkward work of art but nevertheless an exemplary form of modernism in its anguished self-reference and self-questioning. This self-questioning is the sign of "critical humanism," or at least the sceptical stage of it, the other position being reflected in the extravagant optimism of Emerson's organic theory of language. Feidelson, in sum, passes through the uncanny moment of any self-reflexive text—in *Pierre* thematized as the impossibility of resolution and hence as *sui-cide* that culminates any mad pursuit of self-identity—to accept the triumph of the "modern" in the aesthetic detachment dramatized at the meta-level. Calling our attention to the form of the novel itself rather than the pathos of its characters, caused by *Pierre*'s inability to reconcile action and reflection, the work itself achieves a unity it cannot allot its individual characters, or to the individual of democracy in general, particularly the democratic writer condemned to be a representative man.

Now, recent readings of both Gide and Melville have turned this narrative of self-reflexive closure into another story. This newer criticism goes by the name of postmodernism, and sometimes, deconstruction, and in its thrust constitutes a massive attack on nostalgic formalism, theories of closure, and totalized criticism. There is no time or point here to rehearse those readings, nor to defend their strategies, except to claim that what goes under the name of post-structural criticism appears itself in the disturbing forms of that modern literature it would take as model.¹⁴ Or in other words, by taking modern self-reflexive literature as a model, the New Criticism produced an effect similar to that which Derrida examines when he asks what occurs when "acts or performances" become a part of that which they designate. Recent criticism has only to recite the anomaly of the case as it works within the double language of the self-reflexive discourse, no matter what the form, poetic or narrative. It concludes that self-reflexivity, far from being the figure which might account for the unity of the text, is itself the figurative place where "constitutive

inequality" must be located. In brief, it has only to accentuate the "critical" force of the text, whether one wants to (mis-)name it postmodern or modern. I will therefore turn to some examples, keeping always in mind Derrida's Heisenbergian (or Godelian?) warning of the inseparability of the act of analysis and what is analyzed. Like Wallace Stevens's "Connoisseur of Chaos," which begins with a contradictory formulation and then offers "Pages of Illustrations," illustration does not define but becomes a part of the critical act itself, that "act of the mind" which elsewhere serves for Stevens as the figure of "modern."

IV

Modernism simply cannot conceive of itself, or be defined in opposition to its other, either tradition or the postmodern. It is the very name of an anomaly, and of what links theory and practice in a double discourse. Charles Olson is by his own proclamation a postmodern, in revolt against the "high modernism" of Eliot and Pound. In his criticism as in his poetry, he defines the second "boundary" of a still-newer or post-Imagist, post-Objectivist poetry, which he calls "projective" (one might hear, at this point, in the *pro* a sign of a recurrent American project, as in the Emersonian "Prospects" that ends *Nature* and the rejection of "retrospective" thought which opens it). I have elsewhere had occasion to examine the problematics of Olson's self defined "field theory" as it amends Pound's and Williams'; so I will only repeat here Olson's charge, itself repeated in deconstructive criticism, that it is necessary to ventilate a stagnated modernist tradition, which is humanist and logocentric, by exposing its reactionary presuppositions. Thus, Olson's inaugural gesture is to reject the immediate past and to repeat, albeit with a difference, the modernist gesture.

Olson calls the western tradition "Mediterranean," and finds that it oscillates between the values of a mimetic (objective) and an expressive (subjective) literature without recognizing the impasse of either. In contrast, what he names "projective" (also Objectivist) poetics defines literature as "action," manifest in a deliberately non-representational practice that would expose the powerful dissimulative and repressive techniques of a classical humanist tradition. Like Heidegger and Derrida, Olson calls the logocentric tradition totalitarian and ideological, and he finds its representational operations lurking everywhere, even in the attempts of Pound and Williams to "make it new." Like Pound, he argues that literature must return to "history," but this cannot be a simple turn,

since history is not the history of a becoming or a *telos*, nor a reflection on and representation of events, but is the event of a culture organizing itself as “space,” or organizing “space.” He would ultimately define poetry as “Document,” meaning that poetry is an assimilation and articulation of the “fragments” or records, the “signs,” by which any culture realized its structural coherence, particularly its systems of communication and exchange, and thus became a “culture.” In this sense, a culture begins (though it always begins a “second” time) with its invention of writing, with its marking out of differences and its production of value through exchange. A poetics of “Document” is irreducibly historical, but not metaphysical,

Beginning, as beginning again, always occurs in the space between two cultures, or a place of crossing, the borders between cultures : for example, ports of call or agoras of exchange. The heroes of a culture would be those who effected these transitional exchanges, who in “going back” to “come forward,” as he put it, would not simply import old values into a new scene but would enact a transvaluation of values. These are the figures who invent the means of communication and the modalities of distributing knowledge to others. They function as performatives, not bearers of a fixed cognitive value. In a sense, every culture’s history was a repetition, not of the substance or even pattern of the past, but of its struggle to define itself. The invention of writing was the first mark of difference, and of disjunction, but also of the possibility of communication and exchange, measurement and transformation. In the repetitions and discontinuities of history, every culture is initiated by marks or signs that, whatever their resemblance to the marks and signs of other or previous cultures, mean differently from what they might in another context. Compare, but also contrast, he would say, Mayan glyphs with Egyptian hieroglyphs, but do not assume they are the return of the same, a kind of arche-writing. Though the religious space of both may be signified by pyramidal structures, their practices are not necessarily identical. What remains in the artifacts, the styles, of a culture is the evidence of a will to order, and this is grounded in communication and exchange of signs. But meaning-value does not reside in the signs (cargo) themselves; on the contrary, value is altered and produced in their “use.” Similarly, relations between present and past cultures could exist only in this transformational repetition. History does not advance, but one still must think of some point of tension between early and late. What is needed is a new model or language of transformation like that Riemann provided for mathematics in the nineteenth century in order to account for the relations between two otherwise discontinuous planes, what Riemann called “multiplicities.”

Poetry, for Olson, would enact something like this new mathematic, or even a new geo-metrics, in which old signs are carried over into new uses. The poem must think this point of transformation and exchange in both temporal and spatial terms. One reflects on the past not to appropriate its fixed values, but to understand the laws of its dynamic, its capacity to produce and distribute variety. Decoding and translating a lost language would not so much retrieve the meanings of the culture as reveal the laws of exchange: just as signs carried over from one culture to another change value in the new culture, like or similar signifiers (cognates) transported across space and time produce or instigate meanings not immanent in the sign. Cultures always have some medium of exchange, but neither signified nor signifier is continuous or stable.

If poetry is a kind of linguistic document, a mapping of transactions, its project is revisionary and not representational. Now, I have indulged myself here in a kind of transaction between Olson's terms and those of deconstruction, but have not radically distorted his formulations of a counterpoetics. For Olson, a poem is a transaction between people or, as he says, between two differences separated yet related by that permeable but differentiating surface of the skin. Olson does not think of the self as a subjectivity, an inside, connected to the outside or the other by a net work of receptors and transformers (nerve ends) translating sensation into proper concepts. The skin is dividing yet interrelating surface, a medium where senses in both senses is exchanged, transformed—a point in the communicative transaction which is much like Deleuze's *topos* of constitutive inequality." The skin is not properly between, a demarcation, yet in a strange way it is the indefinable and equivocal place of all crossing, the place of language."

Language is thus the "medium" of exchange and ground of culture, a ground that is not a ground but an *abgrund*. Like the post-structuralists, Olson finds language inextricable from writing or the graphic, and despite the repeated celebrations of voice in his criticism, voice names the temporality of measure or line, hence spacing and/or a certain figural modality. Voice for Olson is producible like a voice imprint or musical score. Writing, then, is not for Olson phonetic, any more than the glyph is a natural representation. A glyph is a mark or sign of a transaction; it is a heterogeneity of signs. Like Derrida's (non) concepts of the *mark* and *trait*, or Lyotard's and de Man's stress on a figurality that will not be reduced to

meaning, Olson's glyph at once signifies and withholds signification; it can be perceived but not fully appropriated as meaning. It provokes one to read, to interpret, to act, like the sign. of Charles Sanders Peirce which is defined by its interpretant, but never completed or closed.¹⁵ A glyph is the spatial inscription of an action, just as an act was necessary for it to be cut literally into stone. As in Stevens' supreme fiction, it is both abstract and changing. Strangely, uncannily, the signifying mark signifies nothing, yet is the *abgrund* of signification. The measure or mediating mark becomes the decentered center of a productive activity :

I figure this swims up, now, this business of noun as graphic 1st, allowing for narration afterwards, the double function, man makes noun then makes verb, because, such activity, such transposition, is, at root, I figure, as process, to what constitutes glyphs.¹⁶

For Olson, the glyph is a metonym for poem, a means of communication and not a closed work reflecting (upon) itself. And it is not, we need to add, as radically different from Pound's Image or Ideographic radical as Olson thought. It is a spatial configuration, a "mappemund," he calls it, both a formula and formulation of the transactional. It communicates, then, not by bearing a message from sender to receiver or past to present, but as a provocation to the reader-receiver; that is, it provokes an interpretative performance, like that which Lyotard names "agonistics." A poem composes a "field" but an "open field," and may function like a musical text to direct but not quite determine a performance. Thus, every poem is a kind of communicative unit Olson calls a "letter," which like Derrida's post-card bears its message on two disjunct sides, in a double figurality of image and script, each in turn doubled within itself. Olson's glyph-poem organizes space and illustrates, yet does not depict or represent. It cannot be reduced to theme, for its play of marks disrupts rather than orders a grammar. It is a language game indicating that the place of "constitutive inequality" is language itself, and this is why he says the noun as "graphic 1st" precedes narrative. It motivates narrative, the story we tell of it, which is also the story of its change of value.

The poem as communication unit is, therefore, not a message but a prop and prompt, a performative. It is impromptu. One might call these "interpretations" if we suspend the notion of interpretation as decodage. For while Olson sought to break the Mayan code, what he really wanted was to find the secret of codification itself. And he seemed to know that it depended on decodification, a critical breaking that would throw the question forward rather than leave one gazing nostalgically upon

some long buried and concealed sign of some lost and dead truth. Take the following passage, a "letter" or fragment of correspondence with Robert Creeley which appears in a form no different from Olson's usual line. It is not a letter prompting a response, nor does it necessarily bear a message upon which one can mount a theory. It is a "record" of a break in thinking, and thus of that very disjunction it names as language :

CONJUNCTION & DISPLACEMENT, the sense of, C & D, D & C,
etc. etc. Is verse.

Is quite another thing than time,

Is buildings, Is

des ign.

Is—for our trade—

THE DISJUNCT, language

in order to occupy space, *be* object (it being so hugely as intervals TIME) has to be thrown around, reassembled, in order that it speak, the man whose interstices it is the re-make of

((Is the other side : of Kukulkan
perhaps ?:

VIOLENCE

Kukulkan is the name of a Mayan god who engendered maize, but who, like the Egyptian Thoth, is most celebrated for inventing language; or more precisely, he was a "WRITER" and thus the deity of "language and astronomy" or the culture's measuring systems. Whether or not one sees in the "The K," a poem Olson wrote in the name of Kukulkan, the very mark or figure of chiasmus, a differential Mayan notion of "crossing" as violent disjunction, that is what "K's" invention signifies and why he and his culture stand for Olson in opposition to Humanism. The role of this figure is not to compose a center, but to be the one who legislates at some crossing point where invention is "made available to *others*," a point at which there is both Conjunction and Displacement, as between Riemann's multiplicities" or discontinuous surfaces.

"The Kingfishers" another poem inscribing the "K" in its title, is one of Olson's earlier experiments in articulating this notion of deflected crossing, a displacement, as it were, of the Oedipal crossing out of which was composed the dream of western history as "family romance." Despite his debt to Pound, and the fact that his own notion of "glyph" owes considerably to Pound's sense of the Image as "Interpretive metaphor," Olson thought Poundian theory and practice to be the modernist culmination of western Humanism. Modernism was a Humanism, he seemed to

conclude with Feidelson, though he viewed its significance differently. Pound's Orientalism seemed designed to close the historical circle by reinstating in western language what it had momentarily forgotton, its scriptive force, but it excluded what stood outside the circle of historism or, quite simply, outside the circle itself. Thus Olson's desire to "go back" in order to "come forward" evidences once more a postmodern and *avant-garde* attack upon Man or the "subject." We will have to see, on the one hand, whether Olson's is not a move necessary to his redefining the sense of the modern itself, and, on the other, whether Pound does not manifest in theory and practice a certain postmodernism to which Olson is necessarily blind.

Are modernism and postmodernism separate and distinct, or merely useful distinctions? Can they be defined in terms of Humanism and, what should one say, the Humanitarian or post-Humanistic? Lyotard, we might recall, named postmodern that activity which was necessary for the "advent" of the modern: "Postmodernisms . . . is not modernism at its end but in its nascent state, and this state is constant"; "The postmodern would be that which, in the modern, put forward the unrepresentable in presentation itself, that which denies itself the solace of good forms, the consensus of taste which would make it possible to share collectively the nostalgia for the attainable." the postmodern signfies "desire" and is manifest in what Lyotard calls the figurality of art, or that which cannot be reduced to conceptuality and therefore to discursive practices. Strangely enough, while he finds postmodernism most forcefully manifest in art and its "critical function," Lyotard says that this critical function characterizes the work of philosophy: A postmodern artist or writer is in the position of a philosopher: the text he writes, the work he produces are not in principle governed by preestablished rules, and they cannot be judged according to a determining judgement, by applying familiar categories to the text or to the work. The artist and the writer, then, are working without rules in order to formulate the rules of *what will have been done.*" Rather than anarchical, he says, the postmodern discordance is a language game which produces the agenda of the new. But because it tends to disturb old categories of understanding (representations) by marking off their purely arbitrary operations, that is by deconstructing them, it appears nihilistic and adversarial, and certainly dehumanizing, if not altogether chaotic.

Lyotard cites Joyce as an example of a modernist experiment which "alludes to something which does not allow itself to be made present,"

thus allowing the “unpresentable to become perceptible” in writing itself. Style asserts its own operations, in excess of any signification, meaning, or theme it might eventually be reduced to. Figure is that which resists our reading the work in terms of old expectancies, as if it were governed by the old rules and categories. But in its reading and exposure of the old conventions, it is fashioning at the same time the possibilities for new representations; not, however, representations or, as Lyotard calls them, “phantasms” of our desire, but displacements of our desire, figures which resist cathexis or our submission to the illusion they are “realities” which satisfy our desire. Art produces figurations which free us, and the artist, from the illusion that they are representations, as dreams, of our subjective identities, hence “realities.” They dispossess us of the illusion of humanist depth, and indicate what is beyond either presentation or representation. Hence, he says, “modernism is an aesthetics of the sublime,” a limit marked by the postmodern.

Can this be “read” in a poem like Olson’s “The Kingfishers”? A piece of moderate length, it opens with what is evidently a translation of fragment 23 of Heraclitus, as if filtered through Nietzsche: “What does not change/is the will to change.” (The slash, note, does not designate a line end but is a part of the line.) The sense of change changes, Olson’s says, even though the old word remains. How are we to read Heraclitus today, in an age of information theory, without changing him, translating him? That is, submitting to the imperatives of his utterance? Is it possible, as Heidegger thought, to “destructure” ontotheological metaphysics so as to grasp once again the “thinking” of the pre-Socratics, or is our reading a transcribing, as if through a cybernetic machine, of all the “basic words” of and for Being? “The Kingfishers” seems to suggest that we do both at the same time, that a poem is always a kind of “double function” described in Olson’s letter quoted above. At the poem’s conclusion, the poet announces his own effort as archeological rather than philological, an effort to peel away the layers of conceptual thought in order to arrive at something firm (“I hunt among stones”) that is not Eliot’s church or ontotheological institution, not *logos* but nevertheless is language, glyph. Yet, archeological reappropriation, which restores the sign as fragment, does not recover a primal sense or scene.

Indeed, the third and concluding section of the poem is an elaborate set of allusions to Eliot’s and Pound’s logocentric modernism, emphasizing the way Eliot’s co-operation of fragments from both pre-history and history, or myth and literature, so as to verify some informing archetype,

produces the same paralysis with which he indicts the modern in, say, "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock." Where Eliot conjoins the Fisher King and Shakespeare, as in *The Waste Land*, he arraigns them both within a "white mythology" (Derrida). Rimbaud, in contrast, by abandoning poetry for action (performance) signifies the resistance in his own writing to the old economic rules. Rimbaud's poetry and his *agon* are not, like Eliot's nostalgic. But the major allusion, actually a near quotation, in the last stanza is to/from Pound's first Pisan Canto, number LXXIV :

I pose you your question
shall you uncover honey/where maggots are ?

The reference is to Pound's figure to the rotting bodies of "Ben and la Clara" suspended "by the heels at Milano," out of which Pound had drawn some minimal hope that history would survive its heroes because their action, in bringing it to crisis, had in some way engendered a productive activity even if it could not determine efficient ends. Pound had set his own hope for "process" against Eliot's paralyzing nostalgia : "say this to Possum : a bang, not a whimper—" But Olson's question reads Pound's effort to survive his prison-house of western history as a reaffirmation of the old humanism, a faith in a process that works through man the adventure, recalling Carlyle's and Emerson's heroes. "The Kingfishers" as a whole parodies the Poundian attempt to contain all of western history in the memory bank of one individual hero, or one canon of texts, one ideology, reassembled in a poem that is both recollection and anthology, process and icon.

But the concluding lines of the poem, like the opening one inscribes something else. While Pound's historicism is rejected, his own permanent and indelible contribution to poetry is acknowledged in the silent mark or slash, like the one Pound had inserted in Canto LXXIV: "That maggots shd/eat the dead bullock." As Guy Davenport has noted, Olson literally brackets his own poem with a graphism that Pound had restored to the phonetic tradition of western verse in the form of Imagist and Ideogrammic writing. It is as if Pound were acknowledging the return of the repressed of that heterogeneity which the western tradition tried to exclude in its privileging of phonetic writing, even if for Pound this meant recovering a natural language (nature being a system of differential forces). Pound's mark is reinscribed in the first line to separate Heraclitus from the Socratics, and in the last line to bracket a western literary tradition which culminates in "high modernism." It is precisely upon these of rupture and transition that Olson locates the "turn" of his own new poetics, the

advent of postmodernism which will "trope" the tradition. Reinscription, by quotation, allusion, citation—thus Olson "repeats" the modernist strategy of reappropriation, by revealing the performative power of such language games. As Emerson suggested, quotation and allusion become original and originary acts.

"The Kingfishers" opens in what Harold Bloom would call a Scene of Instruction, evoking of conversation at Black Mountain. It is not however, the historical or autobiographical reference which is important, but the marking of a performative activity of social exchange, set against Pound's poetic scene of isolation. Moreover, the poet's memory is not narratized or grammatical, but, both relaxed and animated by alcohol, he is able to make sense of the previous night's drunken conversations by a different and yet unformulated set of rules, a new kind of rhyming: Olson might have thought of it as paratactic rather than hypotactic, metonymic rather than metaphoric. But it is best understood as a dialogic discordance, and undoing of the notion of a continuous or seamless history of meanings. Rambling association "rhymes," and underscores the accident of rhyme, so that the rhyme which finds similarities in differences is revealed to be the illusory ground of western (humanist) value. Undoubtedly, there had been talk of ancient cultures, and probably of what modern anthropology had done in making them understandable. The poet recalls some talk of a culture where "kingfishers" were at once real and sacred birds, and their feathers valued as a medium of exchange, as against those mythic cultures uncovered by Frazer or interpreted by Frazer as pre-historical analogues of modern Judeo-Christian cultures. Eliot's appropriation of this model, through Frazer, is just one more example of the western totalitarianism, which reduces everything to a representation of its own cyclic myths. Olson's poem wants to break this hermeneutic circle.

The poet's memory is not recollection in tranquillity. He recalls fragment as "factors" (the term comes from cybernetics, and may suggest, like Pound's "luminous detail," active fact or "interpretative" signs) whose common denominator is that they are signs or marks the meaning of which is neither self-evident or stable, though they are necessary for meaning to occur. Where they are inscribed, or reinscribed, they function to produce a significance that is not immanent to them or legislated by any context they may have formerly inhabited. For Example, he recalls in association with the "feathers" of the kingfishers, the "E on the stone" at Delphi, and a speech made by Mao (in French) at a Communist Rally in 1948, each in its way signifying a scene of transition and translation, exchange.

Mao is like the oracle of a new culture, though he speaks here the language of the West. The “E” at Delphi was the legendary mark of the place of prophecy, whose meaning for modern culture has been translated according to the authority western culture allotted to Petrarch’s writing (that is, the philological or learned tradition), though modern scholars had come to challenge the Petrarchean interpretation. (One, in fact, had speculated that it was nothing more than the sign for “Gas,” since that is what that mysterious voice oozing from the earth at Delphi was, an undifferentiated noise of compressed air demanding the oracle’s translation.¹⁸) The point is that all these signs are “factors” which do not contain a stable meaning but function tropically to provoke readings, or when reinscribed in later contexts, function performatively. They are tropes of change, and wherever reinscribed they in turn produce change and exchange. They are interpretations that return like feedback in a cybernetic machine, as part of its necessary noise or entropy, to make possible new information, though “information” now deprived of the cognitive authority of logocentrism. (This reading is verified in section 4 of Part I, which deals explicitly with information theory, and makes direct allusion not only to Norbert Weiner’s *Cybernetics and Society* but also indirectly recalls Riemannian mathematics.)

Just as the “E” at Delphi is a sign which cannot be understood in terms of Petrarch’s learned interpretation of it, as the Omphalos, since that reading only transforms it into an archetypal model for western thought, its assumption of a “world navel” or central “word” in which all thought is grounded, Frazer’s and Eliot’s reading of the Fisher King silently tries confirm what they already know. Even the scientific description of the bird (Olson takes it from the *Encyclopedie Britannica*) can do no more than confirm a certain taxonomical explanation and thus repeat the humanist tradition of ruling by understanding, that is, logocentrism. And this is what the poem is about - a remarking of the limits of all systematics, of hermeneutic recuperation, even as it indicates that nothing lives outside system and that no system is exclusive. The law of tropology (of entropy), however, can only be formulated within an economics of limit, a statistics of calculated loss. What Olson wants to track, to map, is the apparently violent moment of displacement necessary to move from one system to another, as in Riemann’s “multiplicities,” or from one mode of thought to another :

When the attentions change/the jungle
leaps in
even the stones are split
they rive

Or,
enter
that other conqueror we more naturally recognize
he so resembles ourselves

But the E
cut so rudely on that oldest stone
sounded otherwise,
was differently heard

It is the use and abuse (the usury) of "factors" that Olson wants to highlight, especially the deadly habit of reducing everything to a singular interpretation, which Olson associates with the "conqueror" or the humanist.¹⁹

In section 3 of Part I, Olson inserts a series of quotations from Prescott's *History of the Conquest of Mexico*, putative details or objective observations describing a nativist ceremony which the historian had disinterestedly recorded as evidence of a superstitious and hence inferior culture, but which in Olson's arrangement turn out to be the signs of a sophisticated kind of grounding, since all grounding must factor death as a non-representational sign into the system. Ruoting Prescott, Olson extracts the details from the context of a narratized history and reinscribes them as "factors" or as that which resists the narrative modality of the historian. At the beginning of Part II, he returns to Prescott's texts, in order to emphasize the difference between poetic and narrative discourse, between "documentary" and totalitarian interpretation. Prescott's reading of "history," he suggests, has in its way repeated the story of conquest it tells, by featuring the conquistador Cortez as an instrument of western enlightenment: the same Cortez who, as Williams had argued in *In the American Grain*, destroyed by expropriation and by imposing alien religious practices on a culture whose forms were otherwise grounded. In contrast, Olson recalls another conquistador, Cabeza de Vaca, who came to conquer but remained to be assimilated like a "factor" recycled or fed back into a living history.²⁰ De Vaca plays for Olson the same role as Pere Sebastian Rasles for Williams; he becomes a metonymic figure for re-writing America's history. That is, history cannot simply be re-written from an opposite point of view until one has exposed the totalitarian mechanisms of hitoricism, thus writing against the grain, diverting the old narrative

and its conventions. Cabeza's inscriptions in the American ground makes it necessary to write a new history of its history, which is as different from Europe's as Heisenberg's physics is from Newton's. In sum, Olson's quotations function to disconstruct Prescott's historicism.

V

Olson's poem, then, does more than thematically refute "high modernism" and humanism. His poem critically intervenes by bracketing and highlighting the operations of the modernist text, by presenting its modes of presentation as something not modern at all, unless the whole history of the West is modern. In Olson's view this has the effect of "opening" the text, so that the question becomes, how does one keep it open: how to resist the same blind collapse back into formalism that modernism seemed to make just as it announced its break with the past? For despite Olson's argument with Pound, it is possible to read in the older poet's attempts to *write in new* those same postmodern gestures Olson found it necessary to invent in order to pass beyond modernism. We could point to the early criticism, or more specifically to his lifelong revisions of Eliot's notion of tradition, because Pound's critical practice, like Olson's, reduplicates the poetic performance in the very sense that it inscribes what in early essays he called "luminous detail" and "interpretative metaphor," or a kind of figural economy of writing that served to dismantle the very tradition it claimed to reappropriate.²¹ But it is in his advance beyond Imagist practice, in the strategy or performative force of quotation, that is, within his own manner of orcheo-semeo-logical assembly, that we can witness the critical or "interpretative" thrust of Pound's invention, that form of phono-logopoeia, to combine two of his terms, which serves not to recover some lost word but to release the potential of the fragment. What Roland Barthes called "semioclasm" is not unrelated to Pound's notion of "interpretative" writing, his turning of tradition.

We might recall Canto I, which as is well known re-writes or translates a section of the *Odyssey* (from Book 11) in an "Amurikun" idiom filtered through Anglo-Saxon conventions. More importantly, the Canto is a translation of a Latin translation, published in Renaissance Paris (1538), and includes in itself a citation of its own itinerary—the itinerary of a translation, a graphic history of its own voyage, a "periplum," as Pound would call it, of literary metamorphosis that cannot be thought on the order of eternal repetition or genealogical history. Though Pound often argued that all great poetry was contemporaneous, this did not mean universal in the idealist sense, but that every great and enduring work

would reveal at once its way of being different, of opening up the possibilities of the "new." Thus, a beginning *in medias res*, by translating text which itself thematizes transformation, indicates that all poems (as voyages, games, re-turns) have always already begun. Translation does not recover meaning but transports it, metamorphosizes in the sense altering its structure, and transposes it in the sense of producing a new place or *topos* for the trope.

The Odyssean theme of return, to bury the forgotten Elpenor, after a visit to the underworld, is, of course, a kind of literary paradigm of literature, as Pound underscores throughout the unfolding *Cantos*, and not simply an epic convention repeated in the *Aeneid* or *Divine Comedy*, among others. That is, the theme is not simply an archetype, governing repetition of the same, but a model of repetition with a difference, of beginning again. Every return refactors or feeds back into the form certain elements which in turn are projected into a different form, necessitating another journey (not necessarily quest romances), just as Virgil's and Dante's versions mark transitional passages between cultures and in a sense are revisions rather than replicas of the genre. To cite these works, is to cite not only the theme of going back to come forward, but to emphasize the supplementary effects of this repetition. Each retelling advances the voyage, or adds by a kind of accident, that which was not inscribed in the destiny of the original. Original "force" is already belated, and belongs to feedback. Pound does not stress an entropic history of language and culture, like Eliot's decline of the West through falling Towers, from the purity of classical Greek through Latin to the modern (though Pound does find an exhaustion or softening in Latinity). On the contrary, he celebrates those points where the vulgate or idiomatic feeds back into the learned and formal to reinvigorate a stagnating system, the onto-theo-logical orthodoxy. Homer and Ovid and Dante and Chaucer and Whitman are respectively modern writers who supervise the ideomatic reinsemination of literature; they are metonyms of interpretive translation itself, since what they name is the discordance of invention or the double writing evident in every "new" or inventive text. A "new" genre is nothing more than an anthology of earlier genre, a heterogenous collection of old rules or factors.

Therefore, when Pound transcribes the story of Elpenor, he marks the originary moment of art as language or figure, as that which bears old meanings and forms on its back and points forward to new uses, transcribing paleonymic words into new functions. The "And" which inauguates

the poem translates the place of origin as a margin, "Conjunction and Displacement," to recall Olson. In Canto II, the poem leaps forward from Homer, and the Homeric Hymns (not authored by Homer but which Pound discovered to be arbitrarily appended to the Latin text he had bought in Paris, and out of which he took the Elpenor section) to Browning's poetic retelling of the history of a minor Italian poet-figure, a name who also appears in Dante's underworld as someone the poet consulted in his own version of the "eternal return." The reference to Sordello carries back to Homer and her who preceded and motivated Odysseus' voyage, Helen, and comes forward through Aeschylus' inscription of Helen's name in a pun for "destruction" (could we say, deconstruction?). Quoting Aeschylus, Pound in his turn inscribes the historical and Anglicized name of Eleanor of Aquitain into the game, thus rhyming myth and history in a curious plot or transaction that disturbs our distinction between the two. Thus "*helandros, helenaus, and helepolis*" (to transcribe the Greek of Aeschylus into phonetic equivalences) bears the very force of displacement it ascribes to the proper name. If the historical Eleanor was in fact a "destroyer" of cities, men, and ships, as Aeschylus played upon the character inscribed in Helen's name, she was also the seminal force behind a history which included not only a promotion of the arts (she was both a matron and patron of Provencal poetry) and a crucial factor of history (a mother of a line of English kings). She not only completes the odyssey of history from Greece to Rome to France to England, but also from classical to medieval to Renaissance, from epic to tragic to comic to that modern verge to be fulfilled in Shakespeare's invention of the history play out of the generic fragments that were to be the Renaissance's inheritance. Pound's Eleanor, therefore, functions like Nietzsche's woman, in Derrida's reading, as a spurring or disseminating figure, as the heterogeneous force of "styles"²² She is the metonym of genesis, of figuration, of the performative force of quotation—of appropriation itself. Unlike the hermaphroditic Tiresias of Eliot she is not a passive voyeur but an active, destructive-creative force. Like Helen in H. D.'s *Helen in Egypt*, "she is the writing." We should recall here also that Helen is inscribed in Canto I not only as the motivating force of the Odyssey, but also as the marginal figure of the Latin text which compels Pound's own translation; for Divus' learned displacement of the Greek has been produced in Paris, as part of the Gutenberg galaxy, and was itself a kind of anthology Canto I cites the place of production as a kind of transposition, and at the same time notes that the Renaissance text had as appendix certain so-called hymns in praise of Helen's beauty, that sensuous figurality that compels all writing. And so *The Cantos* is

launched on what Stevens called a "sea of ex," or metaphysics of displacement.

In Canto III, Pound makes a transition which leads to reflections on "Myo Cid," that is, to the question of the status of a belated epic like *El Cid*, pointing up not only the problematic relation between epic and history, literature and reality, as Bakhtin would later note, but making it evident that no genre remains in itself stable and canonical. Just as "the" Cid becomes "My" Cid, the Sordello of Canto II had become "my Sordello," a factor reappropriated from both history and literature, via the underground allegory of Dante and the "modern" psychologism of Browning, to become once more the object of interpretation and the name of interpretative force. Canto VII repeats this history of displacements, by and of the letter, in terms of the "Si pulvis nullus/Erit, nullum tamen excute" of Ovid (whose metamorphic deconstruction of the epic and dramatic had dominated the larger part of Canto II), and the "e li mestiers ecoutes" of Bertrand de Born. Both Ovidian and Provencal writing are celebrated for their uncovering, not of some past and forgotten meaning, but of the power of writing to move or transform or bring to light: for their displacement of tradition, their tradition of displacement. Thus every "new" writer invents by unlayering, or touching again the living, fertile body—of figurality itself. Canto VII, therefore, provides an index of metonyms for this dis-figuration and displacement of styles. Homer, Ovid, Bertrand, Dante, Flubert, and Henry James are arraigned not as a history of texts but as an intertextual adventure, each turning or troping the other, like Dante confronting Sordello or Pound the "voice" of James weaving an "endless sentence." *The Cantos* is a condensed anthology, a *peripus* of misprison; an allegory of reading.

Are we ready now to say just where Pound has marked, or re-marked, the false genetic moment of his song, the transitional or transactional, that is, the translatable, moment he had as early as *The Spirit of Romance* named "interpretative translation"? It would not be a moment at all—or, to put it otherwise, it would be originary and not original, like Emerson's "quotation." It is there, already inscribed, in the menonyms which allow him to move easily from myth to history, or from Dante's Sordello to "My Sordello"; from the inhumed Elpenor of Homer to the Helen whose name and mythic role, whose legend, had endangered the epic recounting of a "history" and adventure in which Elpenor is a more turning point or from mythic Helen to the historical Eleanor. That is, everything turns upon the "constitutive equivocality" of the phoneme or morpheme "el," which

functions like Olson's "factor" feeding back into Pound's repeated beginnings and leaps, his conjunctions and displacements. *Elpenor*, *Helen*, *Eleanor*, *Sordello*, *Myo* (*El*) *Cid*, even the *Possum*, *Eliot*, indirectly invoked in Canto VIII and directly misquoted in Canto LXXIV. The "el" which can variously recall the force of the ancient Hebrew deity, the pluralized god *Elohim*, or as Canto VII reminds us, the reappearance of the *Elysian* field on a Parisian bus, a "date for peg" as Pound calls such fragments. Can the *Elusinian* mysteries be irrelevant to *The Cantos*, not as source or reference but only as another name for language? Is the "el" not a morphemic signature of the "constitutive equivocality" of a writing that has always already begun, the postmodern mark of an origin which like Derrida's "difference" can bear no proper name and is older than Being? Or as Wallace Stevens would say: "The the"? Certainly, Pound's translations of these notes from underground are without reference, and they produce an infinite possibility of text which he would finally call a "palimpsest."

But one cannot possibly go on reading these diverging yet crossing lines, except to remark them in another language. Pound's poem reminds us again of Derrida's admonition to the translator, that there are always "two languages in language" and that living on" in language always requires a passage through the unrepresentable place of "death." The task of the poet-translator and that of deconstruction predicates such an unmappable itinerary. Why do I hear at this moment the Valeryean exclamation, "tel quel," "just as it is," or just as it was appropriated for the name of the poststructural revolution? And within that echo, another, "Qual Quelle," Derrida's title for his essay on Valery's "sources" *Qual Quelle*, is it a reference to or quotation from *Hegel*, out of Boehme? It is certainly Hegel's translation of Boehme, the Hegelian formulation that negativity does not issue from a failing away from origin but strangely enough constitutes the source. Negativity is consciousness, is origin, a source produced in the moment it is cut off from being and is reappropriated, as it were, on the rebound. Derrida's word for this strange constitutive source, which is not an origin, is *relever*, which indicates constitution by de-constitution, by negation and sublation, restoring by raising up again a "source" that is originally discontinuous, heterogeneous, and marked by alterity, a source (*Quelle*) already marked by torment or pain (*Qual*), originally negated like a Deity who is the Devil or a poem speaking from Hell. It is no wonder that Pound, who began his poem by quoting Homer, concludes it by nominating its author as a "Disney against the metaphysicals," a parodist of the imagination.

Notes and References

1. In his lectures on Nietzsche's aesthetics Heidegger explores the manner in which Nietzsche transvalues such notions as the "classical", along with other "basic" concept "*Basic words are historical,*" he argues and are modified from discipline and according to the force of each inquiry. Therefore, common concepts do not remain the same or stable from time to time or culture. See *The Will to Power as Art*, Vol. One of *Nietzsche*, trans. by David Krell (New York: Harper & Rowe, 1979), p. 144. Derrida has extended and radicalized the historicity of "basic word" in his own deconstruction of metaphysics, a "strategy" which he variously calls paleonymic or 'anametic' (a borrowed from Nicholas Abraham and Maria Torok which designates the movement of a word both away from and toward meaning, a "theory of errata" in Derrida's terms), opening up a play of significations of the kind we find working through Derridean non-concepts like *dissemination*. Certainly, "modernism" is one of those "basic words" which today means differently in different areas of inquiry, say, in politics, aesthetics, historicism. One further point, Derrida would argue that this "change" of "sense" is not simply the choice of a writer, subject, or user of the term, but that reinscription and recontextualization belong to language, and is perhaps its "law," though a law that it cannot formulate. In one sense, modernism, if not postmodernism, is a name, though not a proper name, for such "changes."
2. For historians, and even literary critics in general, modernism may mean the whole field of cultural formations named the "Renaissance and after," just as Cartesianism open modern thought and philosophy. Thus modernism has always in one way or another been identified with self-consciousness, dualism, and even technology. In regard to literature, modernism in France, say, would certainly precede Anglo-American modernism by a half-century or more. And I would further note, for example, the difference today when "modernism" is discussed in the context of aesthetics or even literary history, especially in terms of the philosophical problematics uncovered by Paul de Man (see the essays in *Blindness and Insight*) or in the context of politico-critical discourse, as in the explorations of a "political unconscious" carried out by Frederic

Jameson in his studies of writer/thinkers like Wyndham Lewis, or in his explorations of the complicity between modern (and even postmodern) art and architecture and post-industrial capitalism.

3. Heidegger, especially after his famous turn (*Kehre*), in exploring the intricate difference between and interrelations of *Dichtung* and *Wahrheit* (poetry and Truth), radically and decisively separated Poetry from Literature, the former being implicated with the movement of Being, the latter designating everything from the material and commercial (that is consummable) text to any "representation" of Being that may deceive us with its "presence" or conceptual authority.
4. See *The Will to Power as Art*, Chaps. 22 through 25, pp. 171-220, for Heidegger's discussion of Kant's Platonism and Nietzsche's overturning of that Platonism, his uncovering of what Heidegger calls the 'Raging Discordance between Art and Truth.'
5. Again, see Heidegger on Nietzsche's inversion and reinscription of Truth within the "discord" of Beauty (*Ibid.*). Although Heidegger persists in finding such "inversions" of metaphysics a return to metaphysics on Nietzsche's part, his own emphasis on "discord" stresses the historical "function" of art in keeping

structures "open" as well as its more reified and idealized, if not Platonized, function in the "unconcealment" of Being. Deconstruction, one might say, exploits and radicalizes the "discord" while pointing up Heidegger's problem in separating from *atetheia*. But it is Nietzsche's emphasis on the inescapable "sensuousness" of "life," on the precedence of Beauty to Truth or the supersensuous, that Heidegger stresses here, a notion radically extended by de Man, Jean-François Lyotard, and even Derrida, in their emphases on the rhetoricity and figurality of literature and art, into a "theory" of art's "critical" or interventionist role. Harold Bloom, whose opposition to "deconstruction" is as vigorous as his renunciation of philosophical criticism in general, would seem closer to Heidegger than his late colleague de Man on this point, though the relation between his privileging of "psyche" and "pneuma" and Heidegger's of "Dasein" would be difficult to establish except by broad analogy. 6. See Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge*, trans. by Geoff Bennington and Brian Massumi (Minneapolis: Univ. of Minn. Press 1984; first pub. in 1979); as well as *Driftworks*, ed. by Roger McKeon (New York: Semiotexte, 1984) and *Discours, Figure* (Paris: Klincksieck, 1971).

In a sense, all of Lyotard's work since *Discours, Figure* may be said to contribute to a "theory" of the postmodern.

7. *Logique du sens* (Paris : Minuet, 1969), esp. the section of an Appendix entitled, "Platon et le simulacre," pp. 292-307.
8. Post-structuralist "theory" in general has been identified with nihilism because of its general attack upon all systematics or methodologies, and not simply for its rejection of metaphysics of presence. Of course, the argument that all post-philosophical "sciences" remained metaphysical, and thus were self-deceived in their claims to pass "beyond" metaphysics, is most obviously identified with "deconstruction," the most unregenerately nihilistic of modern philosophies in the view of even those who profess a "pragmatist" attitude toward the philosophy of "presence." Derrida has persistently refuted these charges of nihilism, and argued instead that, in the wake of Nietzsche's "nihilism," itself a transvaluation of the negative that haunts metaphysics from Plato to Hegel, deconstruction is "affirmative." But to its critics, any affirmation of "dissemination," whether of heterogeneity or what Bakhtin called "heterology," flirted with chaos. Heidegger's recognition of the "discord" between Beauty and Truth mark-

ed what systematic philosophy had to repress. But deconstruction, far from revelling (as Bakhtin says of the comic or carnivalistic) in increasing rulelessness, or privileging chaos over cosmos, reveals the impossibility of thinking outside the "law" (outside metaphysics) or structure. Instead in accord with such marginal thought as Gödel's in mathematics or Heisenberg's in physics, it attempts to find some new "rule" of the "rule," or as Derrida says, some "theory of errata" that will inscribe the "limit" without overcoming it and returning to totalization and the totalitarian. One recalls that in the wake of "cybernetics" and the early developments of "information theory" certain areas of the critical arts tried to develop a theory of "pataphysics" (borrowing Alfred Jarry's term) which could write a theory of "chaosmos" (Joyce's). But there persists the kind of thinking that argue either/or, either cosmos or chaos. Thus, when deconstruction begins to question the dream of the social sciences to pass "beyond" metaphysics, the questioning is perceived as a pure scepticism and a dangerously non-serious (or anti-philosophical) mode of thought. Heidegger can point out that any "humanism" must remain metaphysical, or that Nietzsche's inversion of Platonism produces the last metaphysician,

Nietzsche himself. Still, Heidegger's own affirmation of Being seems to redeem him for philosophy, that is, for that which must think "beyond" itself.

9. *La Carte postale de Socrate à Freud et au-delà* (Paris: Aubier-Flammarion: 1980), p. 417 (my trans.). Derrida's entire corpus may be read as a questioning of the example or exemplary, of the relation of part to whole, and thus of representation to some full presence. Thus, the problematics of the literary, image, and figurality, extends to the larger question that philosophy had always posed to itself, how to become self-justifying or self-reflexive and thus to rid itself of the contaminant or limit of self-illustration, that is, of the literary. Derrida finds Gobel's theorem, its questioning of self-reference, an "exemplary" case of a language that, far from suffocating in its own hermetic limits, opens up the possibility of linguistic dissemination.
10. See especially Jameson's recent essay, "Postmodernism, or the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism," *New Left Review*, 146 (July/Aug. 1984), 53-92, for a neo-Marxist reading of the modernist-postmodernist "economics." Derrida's use of the metaphor of "economy", of the relation of economy and language, of the "law of the oikos (house, room, tomb, crypt)," here in the footnote "Border Lines," to the essay "Living On," *Deconstruction & Criticism*, ed. Harold Bloom, *et al.* (New York: Seabury, 1979), p. 76, differs sharply from Jameson's and may well be said to mark the difference between two kinds of "pragmatic" reading, or two notions of *praxis*. Derrida exploits the metaphor as it resides in metaphysics from Plato to Hegel and Marx, and as it was appropriated by Heidegger to explore language as the "house of Being." Jameson privileges the metaphor to the degree that he privileges the Marxian critique, thus making both the practice and its object "real."
11. In a provocative essay first published in *The Atlantic* (1967), John Barth called the parodic metafiction of Borges "The literature of Exhaustion," a term that critics chose to exploit for its purely negative connotations. A decade later, he sought to correct this reading in another *Atlantic* piece, "The Literature of Replenishment." These essays are now collected in *The Friday Book* (New York: Putnam, 1984), a text in which Barth stages a scene of reading that virtually dissolves the margins between literature and criticism, or indicates the postmodern imbrication of the one with the other. But for Barth, the postmodern was always already inscribed in the beginning of "story," which always had to include a "story of story." Thus,

the literature of "exhaustion" sought to exploit the performative resources of "telling," of originary repetition, one might say. Though one is tempted to define the postmodern as a kind of ironic self-consciousness or self-referentiality, as against the modernist dream of "self-reflexive transparency," the difference between a Barthian highlighting of technical reflexivity, on the one hand, and something like Stevens' rhetorical ploys in a metapoem such as "Of Modern Poetry" (which calls the poet a 'metaphysician' playing his instrument "in the dark," producing the "poem of the act of the mind") is a question of degree and not of kind. Stevens' "accent of deviation" serves to suspend and defer the ideal of crystalline "transparency," of the moment they will get it "straight ...at the Sorbonne," as certainly as Barth's weaving of instructions for reading his texts into the story they tell not only parodies the impurity of genre (like stage directions in the script of a play, which serve different functions if the play is read or performed) but double the story. Cf. the end of the novel, *Letters* (New York : Putnam, 198), pp. 767-69, where, after a lengthy deconstruction of the sub-genre of epistolary fiction, as it in turn had been metamorphosed by the Joycean "scribbled-

hobble," Barth's narrator remarks on its own purloining of "theory." Story, it suggests, is composed of "alphabetics + calendrics + serial scansion"; that is, narrative is prolonged by self-interferences or by figural elements which, rather than exhausting it, replenish: "Dramaturgy = the incremental perturbation of an unstable homeostatic system and its catastrophic restoration to a complexified equilibrium." the law of story, of the narrative line, is not circular, but is, as Derrida might say *more metaphorico*, and like a Moebius strip or an Escher drawing proliferates by repetition. The typewriter extended even as it exploited the revolution of printing, just as the word processor parodies and alters the production of "type," producing, one might say, an *at·pos.*

12. I am referring here to the tendency to define the uniqueness of "American literature" and "American themes" in titular metaphors that in effect disguise, or try to disguise, their metaphoricity : not only such classic titles as F. O. Matthiessen's *American Renaissance*, Alfred Kazin's *On Native Grounds*, R. W. B. Lewis' *The American Adam*, Roy Harvey Pearce's *The Continuity of American Poetry*, or Henry Nash Smith's *Virgin Land*, but also all those works which attempt to produce an American "cannon" that is at the same time exclusive of the

English and western "tradition" and a culmination of it, titles which presume to "describe" the "cycle" or the "cavalcade" of a canon that would itself be self-referential and self-reflexive as well as representative of a unique history. In this regard, one, might set Harold Bloom's argument for an American canon which uniquely fulfills the great Romantic tradition of western literature against Matthiessen's quite different version of an American renaissance which derives from another Romanticism, the philosophical poetics of Kant and Coleridge; or against Pearce's privileging of a liberal, democratic individualism which repeats some ideal of Adamism threatened by what Leo Marx called *The Machine in the Garden*. American literary history gives good story.

13. Feidelson, *Symbolism and American Literature* (Chicago : Univ. of Chicago Press, 1954). See also the influential essay or series of essays by Joseph Frank, entitled "Spatial Form in Modern Literature," which first appeared in *The Sewanee Review* (1945), one of the major journals of the New Criticism, and later collected in Frank's *The Widening Gyre* (New Brunswick : Rutgers Univ. Press, 1963).

14. For a reading of the radical self-reflexivity in *Pierre*, see Edgar Dryden, "The Entangled Text : Melville's *Pierre* and the Problem of Reading," *boundary 2*, VII : 3 (Spring 1979), 145-73.

15. See my essay, "Coup de Man, or the Uses and Abuses of Semiotics," *Culture Critique* (forthcoming, 1986) for a commentary on Peirce's notion of "unlimited semiosis." Also, Riddel, "The Hermeneutical Self—Notes toward an 'American' Practice," *boundary 2*, XII:3, XLIII:1 (Spring/Fall 1984), 71-98.

16. A short version of the correspondence between Olson and Creeley, called "Mayan Letters," appears in Olson's *Selected Writings* (New York : New Directions, 1966), as does the poem examined at length here, "The Kingfishers." For an extended version of the correspondence, see *Charles Olson & Robert Creeley, The Complete Correspondence*, ed. by George Butterick, 6 Vols. (Santa Barbara : Black Sparrow Press, 1980). For Pound's poetry, see *The Cantos of Ezra Pound* (New York : New Directions, 1970).

17. Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition*, pp. 79, 81.

18. For a commentary on this allusion in Olson's poem, see Guy Davenport, "In Gloom on Watch-House Point," *Parnassus*, 4:2 (Spring/Summer 1976), 251-259. Davenport's attribution of Olson's use of the slash to Pound's influence was mentioned earlier in this

essay. I am claiming here, in effect, that Olson is "quoting" Pound in the process of repeating Pound's strategy of allusion. For commentary on the figure of the oracle of Delphi as a "scene of translation," see my essay, "H. D.'s Scene of Writing—Poetry as (and) Analysis," *American Critics at Work: Examinations of Contemporary Literary Theories*, ed. by Victor Kramer (Troy, N. Y. : Whitson, 1984), pp. 143-75.

19. Here Olson seems to make a kind of Derridean play upon the double sense of "usury" which Pound tended to employ in the more singular, negative sense of "contra naturum" or unnatural speculation, though even Pound's text can be read as including the possibility of excess or dissemination. In any event, Olson recognizes that western metaphysics assumes the possibility of a "restricted economy" or totalized system that can only be maintained by covering up what Pound recognized as the "spermatic economy" or Derrida calls the "general economy" of linguistic value.

20. For an account of Cabeza de Vaca's incorporation into the "American" scene, Tzvetan Todorov, *The Conquest of America*, trans. by Richard Howard (New York : Harper & Row, 1984).

21. For a critical reading of Pound's own critical discourse, see Kathrynne Lindberg, *Reading Pound Reading, Modernism after Nietzsche*, forthcoming from Oxford Univ. Press in late 1986 or early 1987.

22. See Derrida, *Spurs/Eponyms*, trans. by Barbara Harlow (Chicago : Univ. of Chicago Press, 1978), a French/English text, subtitled "Nietzsche's Styles" and "Les Styles de Nietzsche."

23. See Derrida, "Border Lines" or "Journal de bord," footnote to "Leaving On" (Fr title, "Survivre"), in *Deconstruction & Criticism*, ed. Harold Bloom, *et al.* (New York : Seabury, 1979), pp. 75 ff. The English translation appeared before the French version which may now be found in Derrida's *Parages* (Paris : Galilee, 1986), pp. 117-218.

Deconstruction, Sophistic and Hermeneutics: Derrida, Gorgias, Plato, and Gadamer

DONALD G. MARSHALL

My intention in this essay is to set into an intricate round dance Gorgias and Plato, Jacques Derrida and Hans-Georg Gadamer, proper names which might be translated into doxographic terms like sophistic and deconstruction, dialectic and hermeneutic. In the criss-cross figures of doctrinal assertion and critical reply, it will be difficult to distinguish interpretation from invention, argument from language (style, rhetoric), and even earlier from later. What is at stake in this choreography are the relations among being, thought, and language.

1. Gorgias

I want to make it clear at the outset that I use the words "sophistry," "sophistic," "sophist," in a descriptive, not projective sense. Obviously, pure neutrality is impossible for us who come in the wake of Plato's relentless hatchet job on the sophists, despite attempts to recover a more positive estimate of their achievement — attempts which begin with Hegel and Grote and continue to this day. A neutrality sought with deliberate effort is very different from the response which follows on open minded ignorance. The platonic disapproval of sophistry infects even Jacques Derrida. Arguing in the "Pharmacie de Platon" that Plato does not simply reject or oppose the sophists, but steadily expropriates their arguments, setting up a ceaseless exchange, imitation, interchange between platonic "philosophy" and its most intimate and inimical neighbor, a relation of *simulacrum* regulated by a systematic indecision.¹ Yet Derrida concludes that it is necessary "bien entendre que cette lecture de Platon n'est aucun moment anime par quelque slogan ou mot d' ordre du genre 'retour-aux-sophistes.'" (D, 823) This is a striking moment in Derrida's text, one that

would surely attract his attention in any other writer. The author here steps out of the line of his thought to address the reader directly and to exercise his authority to pre-empt what it is permitted to say about his text. Between his dicta on Plato, Derrida writes this interdiction, this attempt to control the reader's reading by exercising a power from a place logically *hors-texte*. This intimate space of opposition is occupied by an "Il faudra (bien entendre)"—it *must* be thoroughly understood that...One is reminded of Wittgenstein's remark, whenever anybody says, "You must not do this," one thinks immediately, "Why not? what if I do?" What is the necessity announced here? It cannot belong to a material, physical, causal realm—one does not enforce for one's reader the necessity, say to breathe. This "must" must belong to the moral realm, the realm of human freedom and vagary. It asserts one has no right to say such a thing about my text, that if one dares do so, one will be punished—by *misunderstanding*. To avoid such a banishment, the reader will have to knuckle under, put himself under Derrida's thumb, lest he be accused of having merely thumbed through Derrida, of having hitchhiked or strayed in and out crossed the border here firmly drawn. But alas, such interdictions come always too late—they forbid what has always already happened. Having been sent off to read Freud on negation, we, can scarcely return empty-handed. This negation in Derrida's text—so emphatic ("is not at any moment moved by *any* slogan or password"), so, one would say, overdetermined—attempts to erase or efface the trace of the very thought denied within Derrida himself. For he could scarcely deny a thought which had never occurred to him at all. As author Derrida wishes to deny to his reader the very thought that as reader he himself thought. This splitting and projection of part of oneself onto an indeterminate addressee repeats, of course, precisely that process Derrida outlines by which platonian philosophy defines itself against its "other," sophistry. For readers who have imbibed the pharmaceutical spirit (or should it be letter—what he actually *does* in his writing) of Derrida, there will be no hesitation to follow the scapegoat, the pharmakos, thus banished by the letter (or should it be by the *spirit*—the author's attempt to lay a ghostly hand on his reader's shoulder) into the wilderness of misinterpretation. Let us then ignore this "no trespassing" sign, breach this border, and boldly "return to the sophists."

To be sure, it is a nearly featureless plain. Or we might better say, an Atlantis, pressed down beneath the sea of platonian and post-platonian thought, with only a few islands poking above the surface and uncertainly connected below. Among these islands, I have chosen to concentrate on the archipelago called Gorgias, of whom a few scattered remarks survive along

with three substantial masses : an outline of the argument of *On Not-Being* or *On Nature*, preserved by Sextus Empiricus and in another version by Aristotle or pseudo-Aristotle; the *Encomium of Helen*; and the *Apologia for Palamades*.²

According to Sextus' summary, the treatise *On Not Being or On Nature* undertakes to prove three theses : "first, that nothing exists; secondly, that even if anything exists it is inapprehensible by man; thirdly, that even if anything is apprehensible, yet of a surety it is inexpressible and incommutable to one's neighbour," I will not rehearse Gorgias' arguments, but only note that we must certainly see what he says against the background of Eleatic philosophy. Fragment II of Parmenides asserts :

Come then, I shall tell you, and do you pay attention to the account when you have heard it, which are the only ways of inquiry that can be conceived; the one (says) : "exists" and "it is not possible not to exist," it is the way of persuasion (for persuasion follows upon truth); the other (says): "exists-not" and "not to exist is necessary," this I point out to you is a path wholly unknowable. For you could not know that which does not exist (because it is impossible) nor could you express it.³

Gorgias uses Parmenides' own rigorous dialectic tools, particularly the law of the excluded middle, to subvert Parmenides doctrine, but not simply to invert it. Instructive is the difficulty scholars have had formulating this relation to Parmenides (as to Gorgias' other predecessors) and their consequent difficulty in describing the tone of Gorgias' work. It has been called parody, farce, rhetorical display, a "toy" (paignion), a serious critique of dogmatic absolutism on behalf of common sense, even a "monument to the anarchy of thought between Parmenides and Plato." (U, 164) A Clue to this puzzle is the fragment (DK 82B12) preserved by Aristotle (Rhet. III. 18.7.1419b.3): "Gorgias spoke rightly when he said one ought to lead the serious in one's opponent to its ruin in jest. and his jest to its ruin seriousness." Jest and earnest here are not merely opposed, but as with the jiu-jitsu wrestler, the opponent is made to trip himself up by having his own weight and force turned against him. Gorgias does not simply oppose another dogma to Parmenides': his treatise neither asserts nor presupposes any univocal dogmatical standpoint. Rather he works like a parasite inside Parmenides, leading him along his own path to ruin by drawing his logical demonstrations into "neutralizing antinomies" (U, 143) which cancel each other. He thus shows that "the ambivalence of logos" (U, 150) simultaneously undermines everything it establishes, leaving it undecidable by any

rigorous or unequivocal proof. The opening ontological section of his treatise concludes, "thus, if nothing is, I declare that the proofs deceive."⁴ This appears to mean that rigorous demonstration does not achieve This appears to mean unshakable certainty, but masters irreducible and unsynthesizable ambiguity by blinding us to the antithesis which reasoning itself generates in the very process of proof. There results a dizzying and ceaseless interchange between what logos at once institutes and ruins, a perpetual displacement whose movement carries us beyond tears and laughters, earnest and jest, into an exhilarating and energizing disillusionment whose contemporary name is "deconstruction."

Having shown the ambivalence of any logos directed toward what exists merely as such, Gorgias proceeds to argue that no possibility of knowing or speaking escapes this ambivalence: even if something exists, it is unknowable; and even if knowable, it is incommunicable. The demonstration of both theses centers on the principle of heterogeneity—on the one hand, between thought and its contents, and on the other, between thought and language. We can see that Gorgias thus achieves a general critique of representation, or as Jacqueline de Romilly says 'shows that existence is irreducible to thought or speech.'⁵ Drawing on the stock poetic examples of Scylla and Chimaera, Gorgias argues that since we can think what does not exist, thought has no criterion within itself to distinguish existent from non-existent thought contents. What is true of poetry applies equally to philosophical speculation and to sense perception. We may know what we think, but thinking does not make it so. Nor can experience intervene from outside, thought to make good a thought-content's claim to exist. For, in order to "correct" or "existentialize" a thought, an experience would have to pass over into the heterogeneous domain of thought, and in doing so, it would lose precisely that autonomy which had promised to provide the criterion of existence. In contemporary terms, we can recognize here the argument that there are no "brute" facts against which to check our representations—which does not mean, as is sometimes said, that nothing exists or "there are no facts," but only that between what exists and what is thought and said there is a difference, a gap unbridgeable by mere thinking or mere existing.

Similarly, speech and thought are irreducibly heterogeneous. In speaking, we do not reveal to each other "things" (*ta onta*), whether sensations or any other experience (*pragma*); but rather, we reveal only speech (*logon*). And once again, if the meaning of speech were determined

by what it named (whether a sense object, a thought-content, or “experience” in general), then it is not speech which would make present what it names, but rather what is external to speech, named in it, which would betray what the speech meant. And Gorgias goes further. If speech is not itself a thing among other things, if it effaces itself, is the transparent medium through which I make present to my neighbor the things I experience, then there is an unbridgeable gap between things and speech. Once things have given up their thingness in order to be conveyed by speech, there will be no way for them to recover that thingness. But on the other hand, if speech itself is a thing, if it asserts itself as a presence, then it can assert only its own presence, not the presence of something else, just as we do not learn from our ears what we see or from our eyes what we hear.

That this difference is *différance* become clear from Gorgias' final arguments. The gap between my representation and my neighbor's receipt of that representation is at once spatial and temporal. If what is represented appears to me now and to my neighbor later, then what is represented differs. But if it appears simultaneously, then it appears in two places, and hence differs. But if speaker and hearer are in every respect alike, then they are one, not two, and I have not communicated. And the same is true of the separate subject. He is dispersed among the experience of difference perceptions at the same time, disseminated across the bodily organs of sensation—for example, seeing, hearing, and so on; and among perceptions he experiences differently in the present from in the past. But this theme, this temporal difference, to which he gave the name *kairos*, permeates Gorgias' entire thought. *Kairos* is a strange concept, a concept which undermines the concept of logos, undermines the concept of concept. A recognition of the contradictory multiplicity of the world obliges us to see that man does not have at his disposal a logos through which he can dominate the world, imposing on it unity and harmony, but rather the world is dispersed, disseminated into moments and circumstances, *kairoi*, whose very dispersal blocks any resolution or synthesis. And indeed human being itself is dispersed in its corporeality and temporality. Once liberated from the fixity of one sided dogmatism, logos is recovered as a mobile power within varying circumstances.

Lest such an observation call up the ancient fear that the rhetorician is an unprincipled casuist, I would wish to remind us that when we experience the contradictory clash of rights, a decision cannot be merely

deduced from principle, but we must seek "the right moment" (to deon en toi deonti, DK82B6.18, and see U, 177). What Gorgias wishes us to surrender is the rigidity which supposes there will be nothing problematic in the interpretation and application of the law or in the relation of any speculative system to the "veriegated plendor" (U, 190) of life. Neither the variety of occasion nor the means of responding to them can be anticipated by formal principles or rules, Gorgias thinks, but rather they must be met by a power of improvisation, which it was claimed he was the first to teach. (DK 82A1a) Undoubtedly, the unmooring or dissolving of any dogmatism is experienced subjectively as the threat of chaos, but if we measure the distance between the most rigid demands of justice (dike), and an equity (epieikes) responsive to circumstances, we may see a general model of the disseminating effects of temporality, of *difference*, within any system instituted to efface precisely those effects.

From the view of Gorgias sketched thus far, it may be possible to understand one of his most suggestive and cryptic fragments. Tragedy, he says, "with its myths and its emotions has created a deception (apate), such that its successful practitioner is nearer to reality than the unsuccessful, and the man who lets himself be deceived is wiser than he who does not. For the successful deceiver conforms more justly to reality because, having promised this result, he has brought it to fulfilment; whoever has allowed himself to be deceived is wiser, for anyone not lacking in sensibility allows himself to be overcome by the pleasure of the words." (U, 113-14, 189) Once again, the tone of this remark is elusive: does Gorgias mean to dismiss poetry with this witty paradox? I agree with Untersteiner that he does not. Gorgias understands the unquenchable human need to resolve or reduce the uncontrollable variety of existence, even at the price of a one-sided self-deception. It is tragedy which seizes both this human need and the irremediable contradictoriness of reality on which it founders. This is not, to be sure, a generic distinction. As an orator, Gorgias sought in prose the same power of "irrational judgment of kairos" (U, 199) without surrendering the tensions of thought and existence to a utilitarian expediency. Commenting on Gorgias prose, particularly his use of rhetorical figures rooted in religious formula and incantation, Untersteiner remarks, "The sacred and magic character of style is interwoven with the rigidity of logic in such a way that the tragic consequences of the latter are nullified by the persuasive and deceptive force of particular formal expressions" (U 201) We are certainly not speaking here of the mere appeal to audience passion of which Gorgias has been accused. The hearer

who yields to this deception is not a passive victim, but reaps a particular "pleasure." Again I quote Untersteiner: "The joy which art can arouse owes its existence to the satisfaction afforded by the overwhelming realization of the irrationality of the universe and of its variegated splendour full of charm; to a serene awareness of the tragic nature of the irrational in its irreducible antitheses; to the wise capability of the intelligence which can adapt particular creations to the variety of 'occasions.'" (U, 190)

These remarks lead to a final and more important question which I make no claim to solve here. If the strict parallel between the thought of Gorgias and the deconstruction of Jacques Derrida I have implied here is just—and I believe it is—then we may ask: what is the historical significance of the emergence at a specific time of this particular variety of "edifying philosophy" (to use Richard Rorty's term)? Eric Voegelin has this to say: "The abstract of the essay *On Being* is a priceless document because it has preserved ~~one~~ of the earliest, if not the very first, instance of the perennial type of enlightened philosophizing. The thinker operates on symbols that have been developed by mystic-philosophers for the expression of experiences of transcendence. He proceeds by ignoring the experiential basis, separates the symbols from this basis as if they had a meaning independent of the experience which they express, and with brilliant logic shows, what every philosopher knows, that they will lead to contradictions if they are misunderstood as propositions about objects in world-immanent experience."⁶ Voegelin seems to concur with Plato's estimate that only political catastrophe can follow such "enlightenment." Against this, we may set Untersteiner's sympathetic portrait of Gorgias as a mind which has intuited a great truth, the insight into existence forged by tragedy, and who "has translated [this truth] into philosophical terms without forgetting its literary origin" (U, 202). It is not my intention in raising this question to propose some facile historical analogy by whose means we might anticipate a balance sheet of good and bad consequences for deconstruction. Rather, I believe the most fruitful reflection on deconstruction will be one which reanimates its inherence in the temporality of the tradition it interrogates and carries forward.

2. Gorgias and Plato

Gorgias appears in person in Plato only in the dialogue which bears his name. E. R. Dodds argues that Plato regarded him neither as a philosopher, nor even as a sophist, for unlike the latter, he did not claim to teach

virtue. He "was simply *deinos legein* (Symp. 198c)," a skilled speaker, and in response to Socrates' characteristic and energetically pursued inquiry about what exactly he *is*, Gorgias replies that he is a "rhetorician" (*rhetora*, *Gorgias* 449a). In general, Dodds remarks, Plato treats him "with the consideration due to an elderly and respected literary figure whose personal probity was unquestioned."⁷ What is particularly striking is that Gorgias rapidly falls silent in the dialogue, as though the rhetor has lost chief characteristic in the confrontation with philosophy. For Gorgias claimed he was "never at a loss for words" (DK 82B17). But of course the subject has changed from the nature of rhetoric to the role of virtue in political life. Since Gorgias did not claim to teach virtue, he can scarcely have much to say about this. He seems in fact more interested to hear what Socrates has to say and keeps trying to quiet his own followers, who want to quibble or show off their powers of speech. Gorgias' genial, shame-faced, and polite vacillations give way to the cynical ~~extremism~~ of Callicles, as the master rhetorician loses control of the situation and of his own pupil. Having read the dialogue, Gorgias is said to have remarked, "How well Plato knows how to satirize!" (DK 82A15a) His reduction to silence is avenged by Jacques Derrida.

In fact, it seems to me the figure of Gorgias saturates the Platonic text, or at least he may stand as the representative sophist against whom the philosopher constantly fences. Whether Plato is exploring the difficult relation of being to saying in the *Theaetetus* and *Sophist*; probing the possible connections between forms and things in the *Parmenides*; or looking on disapprovingly at sophistic abuses of language in the *Euthydemus*—Gorgias or his diffusion into "gorgianism" or just sophistry is always nearby. The fullest, yet most tacit reply, not simply to what Gorgias may have said but to what Gorgias *is*, can be found in the *Phaedrus*. That dialogue is centered on the topic of *logos*, a term which takes in not only the arts of discourse, but the mental powers which deploy them on the road to insight, carried along that road by the motive power of erotic attraction toward a goal that escapes formulation.

The sophist, of course, would not put it this way. The aim of discourse is persuasion, power over others, for their own good, if possible, for the speaker's good without question. Plato shrewdly discerns the issues in that conception. First of all is the inevitable dialectic of masks and domination that it entails. The *Phaedrus* begins with the reading of a speech by the

great orator Lysis, a sophistic display or set piece in which a lover pretends to be a non-lover in order to persuade the boy he loves to yield (the trick is not just to claim that the non-lover is a better lover to yield to, but to give the lover who speaks a [feigned] identity which distinguishes among the boy's pursuers). Or more accurately, Lysis pretends to be a lover pretending to be a non-lover in order to show his skill and seduce boys like Phaedrus to study with him. Or even more accurately, Phaedrus pretends to be Lysis pretending . (in order to – what? Seduce himself? Seduce Socrates?) The boy – or perhaps the god love – has power over the lover, who deploys the Power of language to master the situation, in the process submitting himself to the power of rhetoric, that is, to Lysis, who strangely enough must submit to the monetary power his students have over him by concocting this sort of display piece. Meanwhile, no boy could be so foolish as not to see the point and Socrates with equal ease penetrates the rhetorical pretenses and prentiousness of the speech. Only Phaedrus seems thoroughly taken and taken in, his mind awhirl with talk of love.

Even before the issue arises explicitly, writing and speaking are also at stake. The complex style, interwoven and exaggerated, which Gorgias taught Athens, undecidably combines the deliberateness of written composition with the improvisatory skill of the occasional speaker. Phaedrus has brought the written speech, the scroll sticking out of his tunic, as Socrates, on the watch for things sticking out of tunics, notices. But he has come to practice it, to memorize it, so that he can pretend to speak it spontaneously, under his own inspiration, and perhaps equally to turn it into a model for speaking this way whenever a similar occasion offers (for it would be incredible luck for exactly *this* situation to occur; but what occasion would be "similar" and how would one recognize it is such?). When Socrates replies with an even better speech on the same premisses, Phaedrus learns the power of a speaker who knows what he is talking about. Socrates then leads him to a speech about love and madness whose frank design is to draw him into a life in pursuit of wisdom. This second and "sincere" Socratic speech with its strange interplay of mythos and logos, insight and imagery, turns Phaedrus so completely round that he suddenly scorns Lysias and recalls how politicians criticize him as a mere speech-writer. Socrates immediately points to the hypocrisy of those who thus condemn speechwriting, but love to have their names on laws, and he and Phaedrus take up the large question what makes speaking and writing good or bad.

After a discussion of speaking, Socrates turns to writing. But the distinction between bad and good writing becomes a distinction between

writing and a metaphor for writing, a writing "in the soul," that is, Socratic conversation: in fact, writing as such is again condemned without qualification. And thus Plato joins, perhaps, even inauguates, that mistrustful subordination of writing to speaking, of language to logic, which is the cornerstone, for Derrida, of the "metaphysical tradition." The particular picklocks Derrida uses to break open this vault are widely recognized, if not yet much reflected on. I want to attend to one or two in order to link him to Gorgias.

From the outset, one senses in Derrida's essay a certain sympathy for Theuth, the hard-working Egyptian god who, in Socrates' myth, brings his many inventions, including writing, to Thamus the king for inspection and approval, before they are transmitted to men. Thamus, however, takes an independent view, and condemns writing as conferring only the appearance of memory, learning, and wisdom. Theuth is permitted no reply. Derrida turns to the scholars on Egyptian religion to tell us much more about Theuth: he is the moon, the judge, the guardian of law, guarantor of truth, inventor of writing, of number and measure, of games, patron of archives and libraries, the savior and healer of Seth's severed eye, the god of medicine and equally of magic, the creative word through whom the world was made. Derrida's points is that once Plato lets this indeterminately variable figure into his text, he will be unable to control and limit its affiliations, not simply because they override his conscious meaning, but because they tie together in a rigorous and necessary system the reserve from which he draws the distinctions he needs to articulate that very meaning. But Gorgias' "Apology for Palamedes" defends an inventive trickster precisely parallel to Theuth against Odysseus' accusation that he has betrayed the Greeks to the Trojans. Gorgias' Palamedes mentions his invention of letters, written laws, number, measures and weights, military aids (reportedly, tactics an art parallel to the "putting together" of letters into syllables and of numbers into measurements), powerful beacons, swift messengers (rapid communications) and the game of checkers. Ernst Wst adds that the invention of letters was inspired by observation of the flight of cranes, and that Palamedes also invented dice, as well as a knowledge of the stars sufficient to set the hours for changing guards. He scorned healing arts already known, but gladly found new ones; some accounted him a magician.⁸ It has been argued both that Socrates drew from Gorgias the doctrine that "no one does wrong willingly" and that his *Apology* systematically echoes the *Palamedes* in order to refute its ethical and rhetorical doctrines.⁹

Gorgias' interest in this mythic polymath is no more accidental than Derrida's interest in Theuth—or Socrates', for that matter. Emerging to prominence in the Fifth Century, myths of the "great discoverers" and of the progress of human reason were enthusiastically adopted by sophists. What is key in a figure like Palamedes or Theuth is measure, that is, putting things together in a way that can be examined by thought (logos). We have a sort of "analysis and synthesis" whose counterpart in Plato is dialectic. Socrates' scepticism about these myths is indicated not only by the displacement from Greece to Egypt, undercutting Greek claims to originality, but also by the introduction of an examination and judgment of inventions. Palamedes mentions his inventions, but does not submit them to judgment as part of his defense. Socrates checks Theuth's enthusiastic partisanship by permitting him no reply to Thamus' condemnation of writing. Derrida's strategy, however, is technically sophistic. Quintilian (3.1.10; DK 80B6) attributed to Protogoras and Gorgias the discovery of "general arguments," *loci communes*, the "commonplaces" or "topoi" on which the speaker could draw to alter the proportions things have in them in the audience. Likewise, Derrida draws on the realm of opinion, *doxa*, recorded in myth and organized by that encyclopedic literacy the sophists' inaugurated, to extend the figure of Theuth, to enable him to overflow his "place" in the Socratic discourse even while he has been forced into silence.

But not only the figure of Theuth and the strategy of *Toposforschung* is common to Gorgias and Derrida. Gorgias' style has been a subject of reproach since antiquity. John. D. Denniston asserted that he took "certain qualities inherent in Greek expression, balance and antithesis, and exaggerate[d] them to the point of absurdity."¹⁰ To make the balance more obvious, Gorgias keeps his causes short, equal in number of syllables, and well marked by rhyme and by like case endings. He repeats words, balances the semantic level with synonyms and antonyms, and closely juxtaposes words of similar derivation (paronomasia : monos monoi). While no modern uninflected language can exactly parallel Greek, it is easy to recognize here the resemblance to Derrida. His favourite stylistic devices heap up parallel clauses and words, usually varying slightly in structure, sound, and sense : "the transgression of the law...a law of transgression", "repetition" (doubly nice, since itself a repetition); "the space of silence and the silence of space"; "the truth of the word and the truth which opens itself to the word"; the series "pharmakos/pharmakon/pharmakeus." These strings include figures of thought as well as sound : "Thought in this original reversibility, the *pharmakon* is the *same* precisely because it has no identity. And the *same* (is) in supplement. Or in difference. In writing." Typically, this series leads us step by step over a considerable

territory. It is a style of antimetabole, paranomasia, repetition, tautology, oxymoron, the joint assertion of mutually exclusive phrases, and of “emboitement,” the nesting effect of the *mis en abime*.

Speaking of Gorgias, Denniston sums up, “Starting with the initial advantage of having nothing in particular to say, he was able to concentrate all his energies upon saying it.” It may be doubted whether one could thus artfully deploy words without having anything to say, and perhaps such an art may itself have something not unimportant to say. But in any case from Denniston’s condemnation we can elicit the positive insight, to return to Jacqueline de Romilly’s formulation, that existence is irreducible to thought or speech. The opposition of having something to say and having a way to say it belongs to the separation and subordination of speech to thought, of the rhetorician to the philosopher. But the very question whether having a style disqualifies Gorgias (or Derrida) as a “serious” philosopher is ill-formed, not a neutral inquiry, but a polemical strategy. Gorgias remarked that one should destroy one’s opponent’s jest with seriousness and his seriousness with jest: what is presumed is a situation of opposition and the labor of undermining the opponent. With whom? With what audience of judges? With what purpose or victory in mind? Gorgias calls his “Encomium of Helen” a *paignion*, a play-thing, and scholars have not hesitated to use the word against him. Are we to see Gorgias merely as the buffon of sophistry, the court jester of the pre-Platonic philosophic scene? Perhaps this is precisely his role – that of the trickster, the shape changer, the master of appearance, who is needed to introduce a certain mobility into a world of wooden mental counters and hostile exchanges. One discovers with Gorgias not exactly “philosophy” in the sense of a dogma one can master and stick to, emerging from it as from a well-constructed fortress to engage the enemy before the walls, but just this mobility of mind which is the experience of thinking, of seeing what can be said on any occasion, in response to any question, briefly or at length.

It is precisely the liberation of language from being and thought that opens space for the play of gorgianic style, for the elaboration of autonomous utterance through tropes and figures. That these bring oratory closer to poetry is entirely appropriate: both, according to Gorgias, rely on *apate*, the power of language to deceive, to create a world of appearance which rises out of the soil of *doxa*, of all that “is said.” Such a language excluded the careful distinction of “senses” of terms, each held firmly in place by

reality so as to avoid intercontamination and absent-minded verbal associations and puns. Language is a "a powerful lord," an autonomous power that works "by means of the finest and most invisible bdy" (DK 82b11.8) to produce its effects like witchcraft on the hearer's soul. What Gorgias feels is his own situation in the human universe of discourse, the ground covered with prior utterance, a world where speeches are bandied back and forth and opinion veers now this way, now that, in a swift and endless whirl.

But again, it would be quite mistaken to set up a sharp opposition of style to thought here, chiefly because that opposition has presumed a certain definition of thought. Both Cicero and Quintilian (DK82A25) observe that Gorgias exploited commonplaces in order to amplify or deflate a subject, to praise or to blame. The Gorgianic art is epideictic, that is, it does not answer the Socratic question, *ti esti*, what is it? But the treatise on not being suggests that this is in its nature an unanswerable question, one that speech qua speech is not concerned with. In Plato's dialogue bearing his name, the master sophist Protagoras with stubborn belligrancce refuses the binary oppositions Socrates proffers him, well disguised traps as they are. Gorgias' technique may be more successful: he revels in binaries, but reduces both alternatives to absurdity or impossibility. He offers no synthesizing resolutions of distinctions, but leaves the dilemma undecidable ("indecidable"), indescribable ("indicible"). Gorgias' thinking does not obey a law external to itself, but it does obey a law: the "Helen" ends with the boast, "I have observed the procedure (nomos) which I set up at the beginning of the speech.. " (DK 82B11.21) Ernst Lux points out that both the "Helen" and the "Palamades" do not in fact rely on elaborate rhetoric; but on a clear procedure of argumentation.¹¹ In each case a thesis is proposed for defense (Helen is innocent; Palamades is innocent), and then the *opposite* is considered and shown to lead logically to impossibility. The original thesis is then affirmed. The procedure rests on general logical grounds and on *loci communes*: that is, the appeal is to logical reasoning and to thinking through the logical possibilities of accusation in general, not to any empirical facts (in the "Helen", but for the repetition of her name, we would lose sight of her altogether, for nothing at all particular to her or her situation is mentioned; only the most general grounds of argument, applicable to any such case, are brought forward). Any merely emotional appeal is explicitly rejected in the "Palamades." Gorgias does not merely stand for style in opposition to thought, but to a fully developed way of elaborating discourse (logos) completely different from "dialectic."

I certainly need make no special point of what seems to me the close resemblance to Derrida. Throughout the analysis of the *Phaedrus*, Derrida relentlessly pursues unity, system, necessity, rigor, coherence, structure, law, and binary oppositions. His is not a welter of emotional appeals and stystistic flourishes, but a numbingly simplified logic, one aimed like a sword at the "conditions of possibility" of Plato's ideas and especially his distinctions. The reading would lose its exemplary force on any other basis and become merely one more empirical, *ad hoc* interpretation of a single Platonic text. To be sure, the point is to locate the "undecidable" term out of whose reserve are drawn both sides of a hierarchized distinction. But the demonstration would be merely local unless the process shown followed an inescapably general logic. What I want to assert, then, is the possibility of characterizing Derrida's treatment of the *Phaedrus* as "Gorgian." It uses sophistic resources, brought forward out of Plato's own text, to set back into play the world of words Plato is seen as absorbing only in order to silence it the more effectively. Through Derrida, Gorgias leapfrogs Plato.

Plato

In using the dance to figure the relationship I want to establish between Gorgias, Gadamer, Plato, and Derrida, I mean to avoid any simple oppositions or alliances Derrida is not Gorgias' representative, nor does the possibility of reading Derrida as carrying out a "Gorgian" reading of Plato suggest a possibility of "correction." Still less would I want to equate Gadamer with Plato or set his interpretation of Plato over against Derrida's as merely correct. It is true that both Derrida and Gadamer seem to find in Plato's richly variegated writings at least the issues, if not the answers, central to their own philosophical reflection. This is sometimes claimed to be the situation of every interpreter: as Emerson said, we bring home from the Indies of our reading only the riches we carried with us on the voyage out. In a limited sense, the claim is doubtless true; but in a forceful sense, it is not, and the fact that it is not is just the strength and the weakness of workaday philology. We who are philologists can but rarely claim to "have" a philosophy — we have a few more or less entrenched opinions, most of them borrowed from this thinker or that, the whole a shifting mass or heap underpinned by no very coherent or consistent bed rock of views about things. Such incoherence helps us avoid many local blunders—we do not see far enough into consequences and connections to sense that a particular passage contradicts a cherished prejudice (or illustrates it), and so we feel neither the temptation nor the need to misread it

in a sense more congenial to ourselves. The risk, however, is that we will fail to rise above the local, or above what I will dare to call the merely textual, in order to give our mind to what our author is saying. To understand what our author is saying-to-us requires that we actually think it. And here the advantage lies with those who can think and think well. Those of us who cannot think quite so well must inevitably turn to those who can in order to learn what we must understand is being said to us. We are left in a paradoxical, indeed an irritating position. Powerful thinkers who interpret other powerful thinker often seem to philologically irresponsible. They commit misreadings and blunders that would embarrass a beginner. Their own thinking is no smooth steel glass in which the author they read is flawlessly mirrored, and we must ceaselessly measure one author against the other, so that we are never confident which we are using to interpret which. Yet these thoughtful interpreters manage to establish an idea, a way of looking at the thing the author interpreted is saying, a way which somehow endures as our best, indeed our only path to that author.

This peculiar situation is the Gadamer has followed relentlessly into the heart of understanding. I can illustrate it with his essay, "Hegel and the Dialectic of the Ancient Philosophers." Hegel believes that in the *Paramenides* of Plato, the sharpening of contradictions through dialectic is not a mere propaedeutic exercise, but has a positive content : Plato wants us to see that "the identical must be recognized in one and the same respect as different."¹² Gadamer comments :

As has long been established, Hegel arrives at this view through a total misunderstanding of passage 259c in the *Sophist*. His translation reads, "what is difficult to grasp yet true is that what is another is the same, and *specifically in one and the same regard*, in reference to the *same aspect*" (XIV 233) What is actually said is that what is difficult to grasp yet true is that when someone says, the same is in some way different, one must inquire in *which* sense and in *which* respect it is different. Taking the same as different in a vague sense without specification of the respect and producing contradictions in this way is, contrary to Hegel's interpretation, expressly characterized as purposeless and as a concern of beginners only.

"There can be no doubt," Gadamer adds, that Hegel's interpretation is "unjustified." Gadamer then proceeds to show "what positive view in this matter Hegel has which makes him convert the meaning of a not particularly obscure passage into its opposite." The details of this demonstration

are not our subject here. But it leads to the conclusion that “even if he is mistaken about specifics” Hegel has “understood Plato’s position as a whole correctly.” (HD, 24) The core of this “correct understandning” is Hegel’s grasp of “that which he sees everywhere where philosophy exists—speculation.” (HD, 30) For Gadamer, what sustains this fundamental and orienting insight which Hegel achieves is Hegel’s power, only partly conscious, “to conjure up the speculative content hidden in the logical instinct of language.” (HD, 31) Precisely from the irreducible ambivalence of Hegel’s encounter with Greek thinking, Gadamer achieves a further insight into their common sustance : in his words, “the dialectic development of thought and lestning to the speculative spirit in one’s own language are in the final analysis of the same nature.” This insight goes beyond Hegel’s understanding of himself, but the fact that reflection on him makes it possible argues for the conclusion Gadamer reaches in *Truth and Method* in a closely related discussion : “Hence whoever wants to learn from the Greeks has always first to learn from Hegel.”¹³ It is thus not a question simply of correcting Hegel in the light of our own autonomous and more accurate understanding of Plato. Rather, our most compelling insights into Plato arise when we accept it as our task and our opportunity to interpret him, that is, to think what he says to us, within a historical situation of which Hegel is a decisive moment. The approach to Plato through Hegel has the same advantage Gadamer elsewhere finds in the fragmentary glimpses of Plato we get through Aristotle’s critique : precisely because they occur within the fully articulated thought of another major thinker, we know what to make of them.

From this vantage point, what is striking about Derrida’s discussion of the *Phaedrus* is not simply the originality of insight librated by his attention to the theme of writing, but the extent to which his interpretation remain within the tradition of a neo platonic reading of Plato. Derrida does not question that Plato yearns for essence, trut, presence, a single hierarchy of rigorously distinct concepts which make and “master” all oppositions, a changeless “same” withdrawn from the confusions of ordinary life. He occasionally recognizes that the oppositions he is deconstructing constitute “platonism,” considered here as the dominant structure of the history of metaphysics.” (D, 172) As he traces the rigorous law or system which simultaneously weaves and unravels Plato’s text, Derrida repeatedly raises the issue of “the author’s intention,” and the repetition indicaies a certain embarrassment. He rejects setting up any authorial intention over against the text’s actual system of signification and with it rejects establishing the text over against the linguistic or cultural system

which constitutes the conditions of possibility of its signification. What seems obvious, however, is that "Plato's intention," if invoked against Derrida's interpretation, in fact simply abbreviates a rival and traditional interpretation of the text. One may reject that interpretation, but in the name of what? Derrida is forced back on a concept of "necessity": the "Plato" posited by "platonism" is "constrained" to acknowledge the specific incoherence that overtakes his desire for rigorous knowledge, an incoherence which is not external to that desire, but arises within and through the language that brings it into being. Derrida gives us a fresh opposition of thought and language, as "vouloir-dire" and "écriture," as the attempt to "dominate" or "master" language and languages resourceful escape along paths opened by logic's "necessary" self-subversion. Derrida's interpretation forces apart a rigorous system" of the text from a "Plato" (of "platonism") who does not and cannot "intend" that system, but is caught in it by "necessity." Such a conception leaves the status of the interpretive reading problematic. By refusing to speak for Plato, Derrida becomes unable to speak for himself. The "Pharmacie" opens with the assertion that the reading of Plato's writing and the writing of that reading all submit to the logic of supplementarity. But it closes with a hallucination of Plato in a drugstore, engaged in futile efforts to analyze and distinguish, mistaking the echoes of his monologue for dialogue, laboring through the night, disturbed by knocks on the door from outside, which themselves echo *Macbeth*. This caricature solidifies the neo-platonic reading of "Plato" into specular image which arrests the open interplay of readings that forms the interpretative tradition, and by doing so, it conceals the entire problematic of "establishing the text."

Gadamer focuses his discussion of the *Phaedrus* somewhat differently.¹⁴ In all writing, he notes, the question arises whether "there is not in the in the use of words always already something like a drive toward fixation." This question arises equally sharply at the level of meaning, for "how is the unity and self-identity of something meant and communicated built up into its self-identity in the temporal flow of happening?" Aristotle already stresses that the "universal" arises not from the logic of argument or the coherence of a syllogism, but rather out of *mneme*, memory. Primary is memory's power to hold perceptions until they form a unity and raise themselves into the firmer durability of the universal, built up on *logos*. We are here never far from language and its life of meaning. But Gadamer insists we must widen this Aristotelian analogy between work and concept. He adduces the *phrase*, both in its negative rhetorical sense of

“mere phraseology” and in its positive musical sense. The unity which breathing and intonation give the phrase points to the “connection between repetition, which is never quite the same, and the constituting of one and the same.” In verbal formulas—magic spells, prayers, blessings, curses—the familiarity and even meaninglessness of the syllables actually constitute the power of the saying. The connection of literature with ritual and the fixation of texts through memory or writing which makes possible their recitation and repetition all stand under this image of a logos “written” in the soul by memory (*Philebus*, 39b).

From this perspective, there is no sharp difference between the oral and the written, and writing seems at most a technical registration of an already existing characteristic of language. It is the *Phaedrus* which brings sharply forward a difference between the spoken and the written. If the orator must keep an expert eye on the audience he sees in front of himself, then there can be no merely natural transition from the oral to the written, which figures its audience as absent. We are left to determine the legitimate uses of writing, something Thamus himself does not explicitly do. For it can hardly be a question of rejecting writing, which long since had secured its place in the world of the polis. Socrates accords positive value to two uses: writing may serve as a “note” (*hypomnema*) to “remind” us (*hypomnesis*) of what we must then remember (*mneme*); and writing may serve for “play” (*paidia*) and “holiday” (*heorte*), drawn out of everyday necessities into the mental mobility of philosophic leisure (*schole*). But he contrasts another sort of discourse (*logos*), written in the soul of the hearer, sown there like seed and yielding further “intelligent words” (*epistemai logoi*) as fruit: the contrast is not only with legitimate forms of writing, but equally with speaking, whether casual or oratorical. The conception of words “written in the soul” returns us to *mneme*, memory, and the doctrine of anamnesis, whose essence I would put formulaically as “knowledge is the ability to dispose at will of what is known.” Writing is an appropriate image for the relative fixity of what we can always lay hands on. But temporality is inherent in such a conception, for it takes place within the living memory of a finite human being. And even more in the image of a fruitful or reproductive logos what is at stake is “the temporality and sleeping away, which stamp human finitude.” Philosophy is not the possession of wisdom, but its endless quest. As with the images of spiritual reproduction in the *Symposium*, we are reminded that “nothing in the human spirit is a firm possession, everything needs the tireless overcoming of forgetting and the fresh building up of what stays awhile.” The frozen self-identity of writing effaces the necessity for all human

knowledge, that it can exist only if it gains a new actuality for itself. Plato seeks not the frozen repetition of the same but the endless play of difference.

Gadamer is prepared to ask whether Plato here goes too far, whether there are not texts - and precisely those which establish for us the idea of a "text" in an eminent sense - which have their importance in the inviolable fixity of their "letter"? Despite the primacy of unwritten law, Plato himself finds a role for the written law, to which the judge returns and which guards against distortion, loose paraphrase, demurrer. Even beyond the letter lies the unity of sound and sense in poetry. In poetry as in liturgical language, "growing familiarity" with its fixed form "not only does not deplete it, but enables it - as the same - to grow ever richer and speak to us ever more penetratingly." Plato seems to acknowledge this when Diotima speaks of laws and poems as the "children" of their creators. Against Plato's apparent rejection of written works, we must set this recognition that they too can live on, but also and only in memory: "They have their existence not in the fixity of dead letters, but in constantly new application and appropriation, as the same and as ever new and other." Even the "fixed" text thus renews its being: "Memory Is the mother of all the muses."

In interpreting the *Phaedrus*, Gadamer thus reasserts his fundamental insight into Plato. One could express this insight as his insistence on the form of dialogue and his refusal to separate a systematic "doctrine" from this form of presentation (as the neo-platonists did). Plato's example permits Gadamer in *Truth and Method* to translate into specifically hermeneutic terms his analysis of the general structure of experience.¹⁵ The fundamental negativity of experience, the discovery of one's own finitude which comes with the realization that a thing is not as we first thought it was, has the form of a question. In Socratic terms, the beginning of inquiry is a recognition, a knowing that we do not know. Out of the acknowledgment of one's own ignorance coupled with the desire to know arises the question, which brings an object into an openness bounded by the horizon of the question. The formulation of the question requires an explicit establishing of presuppositions. These presuppositions delimit the sense or direction in which an answer can be meaningful as an answer to this particular question. But in becoming explicit, they can also themselves be brought into question. The function of the question is, precisely, to make things questionable, to conceive them as possibilities among other possibilities. By thus opening

arguments pro and contra, the question leads to knowledge, whose superiority over preconceived opinion is precisely its awareness of opposed possibilities. Insofar as answer is held in close relation to question, platonic dialogue is quintessentially antidogmatic. It does not consist either in the emergence of dogma nor in the mered issolution of received opinion (in contrast to the sophistic art of confounding opinion by confronting it with its equally valid opposite). The art of dialogue lies in being able to go on questioning in a way that carries both partners along under the guidance of the topic under consideration. The monotonously repeated "yes's" of Socrates' interlocutors testify to this need to verify that both participants in the conversation are still together and also, by their very blandness, these "yes's" testify to the necessity that the conversation be led by whatever is being discussed and not thicken into a mere dramatic clash between individuals. By no means is the questioner in command, so as merely to lead his partner to a predetermined conclusion. What the questioner asks must have been and remain a question for him, and his task is not merely to pounce on flaws in his respondent's answers, but to bring out whatever truth they have. The questioner's "art" is "to prevent the suppression of questions by the dominant opinion" (TM, 330), even if that opinion is his own. Hence, he will reproach an interlocutor for too easy an acquiescence and even suggest questions or answers on his behalf. The process aims to bring out an opinion and strengthen it through testing so that it overcomes all opposing argument which attempts to limit its validity. That is in the give and take of question and answer, no prior opinion is secure, but rather ideas, concepts are formed as the working out of a common meaning. This fluidity of thought and language contrasts sharply with the "rigid form of the statement that demands to be set down in writing." (TM, 331) Against the reduction of poetry and philosophy to a literature interpreted by the sophists for didactic ends, Plato creates a literary form which "places language and concepts back within the original movement of the conversation" and so protects words from all dogmatic abuse." (TM, 332) The textual form of the dialogues thus shows us how we are to take the thinking they exhibit: as the emerging response to an instigating question. Dialogue is not simply a peculiarly inefficient way of presenting a dogmatic system in frustratingly fragmentary glimpses.

In thus generalizing from Plato the hermeneutic insight of the priority of the question, Gadamer is simply drawing the conclusion for theory of several decades of the interpretation of Plato. In "Dialectic and Sophism in Plato's *Seventh Letter*,"¹⁶ Gadamer shows how the emerging historical situation of platonic interpretation enables us to understand the

“weakness of the *logoi*” the *Seventh Letter* emphasizes. All the means through which the thing communicates itself to us—words, conceptual elaborations (*logoi*), illustrative figures (*eidola*), and even insight itself—all are indispensable for true knowledge, and yet none can enforce that knowledge in another person nor even, despite its correctness, be sure of its ability “to withstand a ‘logical’ argument which would refute it.” (DD, 107) The dialectical exercise of the *Parmenides* shows that even the dialectical procedure of concept formation “contains something arbitrary and uncertain.” (DD, 110) It leads Socrates “only to the *negative* insight that it is not possible to define an isolated idea purely by itself, and that very interweaving of the ideas militates against the positive conception of a precise and unequivocal pyramid of ideas.” (DD, 110) The multiplicity of language is not for Plato simply “a burdensome ambiguity to be eliminated but an entirety of interrelated aspects of meaning which articulate a field of knowledge.” (DD, 111) Hence the source of aporia is also the source “of the *euporia* which we achieve in discourse. He who does not want the one will have to do without the other” Gadamer continues, “An unequivocal precise coordination of the sign world with the world of facts, i. e., of the world of which we are the master with the world which we seek to master by ordering it with signs, is not language. The whole basis of language and speaking, the very thing which makes it possible, is ambiguity or ‘metaphor,’ as the grammar and rhetoric of a later time will call it.” (DD, 111)

Gadamer comes to a further and, in my view, finally more important hermeneutic insight, which is the surprising fruit of an interpretative excursion into the most arid technicalities of platonian doctrine, namely, number theory and the dialectic of the One and the Many. This is the final significance of the fact that all the means through which the thing presents itself are necessarily involved in “the dialectic of the image or copy,” (DD, 112)—that is, in order to present the thing, they must themselves be something, and hence, cannot be the thing they present. If it therefore “lies in the nature of the means of knowing that in order to be means they must have something inessential about them,” and if at the same time we are “always misled into taking that which is inessential for something essential,” then the problem is “how a thing can [ever] be there in what is said in such a way that it is truly there,” that is, “comprehensible and present for me and for you.” (DD, 113) We might suppose that this happens in everyday experience, where is constituted a solidarity unshakable by mere argument: one who tries to refute what everyone knows would simply make himself ridiculous, a social outcast.

But as Gadamer says, "Greek culture in the age of sophism...had gone through the eerie experience that in discussion any insight can be confounded," not only everyday common sense, but even mathematics. Obviously, in the "momentous matters of living rightly" (DD, 115), "the knowledge which we require of one another" is even more endangered. (DD, 116) The Socratic art of conversing (DD, 117) is certainly intended to resist this danger of being talked out of one's insightful grasp of such a thing as the just or the good. But it does not do so simply by forcing a greater methodic rigor of argument, but in the only way possible, namely, by sustaining a "shared inquiry" which abjures "all contentiousness" and all "yielding to the play of question and answer." (DD, 121) Within that area of mutuality it is possible to experience "the merging of what is disparate into an astonishing and transparent unity of many far-reaching implications." (DD, 119) This *euporia*, this "felicitous experience of advancing insight" is the "very dialectic of the One and the Many which establishes the finite limits of human discourse and insight—and our fruitful situation halfway between single and multiple meaning, clarity and ambiguity." (DD, 119-120) The unity or whole here, which is ultimately "the whole of reality" (*tes holes ousias*, *Sev. Let.* 344b), "does not mean an intact whole of any specific thing being talked about," Gadamer stresses. (DD, 117) Rather, in any insight an entire nexus or web of ideas is involved" (DD, 119), so that "what is, is as the whole of the infinite interrelationship of things, from which at any given time in discourse and insight a determinate, partial aspect is 'raised up' and placed in the light of disconcealment." (DD, 120) According to Gadamer's interpretation, even the *Timaeus* shows how much "this intermediate status defines the mode of being of the realities of our world" (DD, 120), for the opposition between the ideas and the resistance of substance, that is, Necessity, has its origin "not in cosmology but in dialectic" (DD, 121), that is, in just this dialectic of the One and the Many Gadamer concludes, "The labor of dialectic, in which the truth of what is finally flashes upon us, is by nature unending and infinite." (DD, 121)

Gadamer's point is to characterize through the dialectic of the One and the Many both the formation of our understanding of what language offers to our understanding and also the relation of what is understood to its multiple presentations in the ongoing history of its interpretation. The language of interpretation is our means of understanding and communicating our understanding, and at the same time it is other than what is understood. It would be wrong to hypostatize what we seek to understand as "correct" meaning and to suppose we might have some way of grasping

it free of the “weakness of the *logoi*.” It would also be wrong to treat as the end of the matter the experience we all have in discourse, namely, “that any insight can be confounded.” (DD, 123) Discourse is the medium of all interpretation, and we can consequently apply to interpretation, as Gadamer himself has done, the conclusion he draws from reading Plato’s *Seventh Letter* :

Philosophy had to put itself on the very same basis from which the danger of sophistic verisimilitude arose and therefore finds itself in the constant company of its shadow, sophism. As dialectic, philosophy never ceases to be tied to its origin in Socratic discussion. What is mere talk, nothing but talk, can, however untrustworthy it may be, still bring about understanding among human beings—which is to say that it can still make human beings human. (DD, 123)

The core of the difference between hermeneutics and deconstruction, as I see it, is whether our relation to tradition is to be understood as a conversation, a relation of question-and-answer, or as “*écriture*,” a relation of supplementarity. But it would be entirely alien to Gadamer’s hermeneutics to regard this as a difference that could be synthesized or compromised or even posed as a choice. The “good will” (*eumeneis elenchoi*, *Sev. Let.* 344b) which is for hermeneutics the cornerstone of all understanding requires not the defeat of an opposed view, but that it be strengthened until it yields an insight that cannot be evaded or surpassed and on whose full acknowledgement the persuasiveness of its apparent opposite in fact rests. In an exchange with Derrida, Gadamer extended the “rupture” which for Derrida characterizes writing to the widest applicability in the experience of “dialogue and dialectic,” of coming to an understanding through language.¹⁷ The partner to a conversation must not attempt to hold fast to the position which, if he is speaking what he really believes, constitutes his identity. He must be prepared, as Plato’s *Seventh Letter* strikingly puts it, to have not just his words, but his soul refuted. As Gadamer concludes, “One surrenders, oneself, in order to find oneself. I believe I am in fact not from Derrida when I underscore that one does not know in advance what that self will be when found.” (TI, 61) When a dance ends, none of the dancers has scored a victory.

Notes and References

1. In *La dissemination* (Paris : Editions du Seuil, 1972), p. 123. Further references given in text as D followed by page numbers. My translations,
2. For texts, see *Die Fragmente der Vorsokratiker*, ed. Hermann Diels and Walther Kranz, II (6th ed.; Berlin : Weidmann, 1952), 271-307. Further citations given in text as DK followed by the author's identifying number (Gorgias is 82), A for testimonia or B for fragments, and the number of the fragment, with, subsection where applicable. See also the texts with Italian translation and useful notes in *I Sofisti : Testimonianze e frammenti*, ed. Mario Untersteiner, II (Florence : La Nuova Italia, 1949), 2-149. (Pseudo-) Aristotle's summary of the treatise on not-being appears in Aristotle, *Minor Works*, tr. W. S. Hett (Loeb Library; Cambridge, Mass. : Harvard Univ. Press, 1936), pp. 496-507. G. B. Kerferd labors hard and, I think, successfully with the extremely corrupt text of Aristotle in "Gorgias on 'nature or that which is not,'" *Phronesis*, 1, no. 1 (November, 1955), 3-25. All of Diels-Kranz' fragments of Gorgias are translated by George Kennedy in *The Older Sophists*, ed. Rasamond Kent Sprague (Columbia, South Carolina : Univ. of South Carolina Press, 1972), pp. 30-67. A partial translation of the "Ecomium of Helen" which tries to reproduce its stylistic flourishes can be found in La Rue Van Hock, *Greek life and Thought : A Portrayal of Greek Civilization* (rev. ed. New York : Columbia Univ. Press, 1931), pp. 164-67.

Despite the rapidly growing literature on the subject, still the best guide in my opinion is Mario Untersteiner, *The Sophists*, tr. Kathleen Freeman (New York : Philosophical Library, 1954). pp. 92-205 are on Gorgias. Helpful is G. B. Kerferd, *The Sophistic Movement* (Cambridge : Cambridge Univ. Press, 1981) and W. K. C. Guthrie, *The Sophists* (Cambridge : Cambridge Univ. Press, 1971). A standard and sound study is Charles P. Segal "Gorgias and the Psychology of the logos," *Harvard Studies in Classical Philology*, 66 (1962), 99-155. In my interpretation, I followed Untersteiner closely, since he cannot be suspected of distorting Gorgias in order to facilitate a comparison to Derrida and deconstruction. References to his book will be given in the text as U followed by page number.

and Christof Hardmeier (Munich: Wilhelm Fink, 1983), pp. 10-19. Since I summarize this short essay in sequence, I have not given page references; the translations are mine.

15. See especially TM, 325-41.
16. In *Dialogue and Dialectic: Eight Hermeneutical Studies on plato*, tr. P. Christopher Smith (New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 1980). Further references given in the text as DD followed by page number.
17. The exchange consists of Gadamer's lecture "Text und Interpretation" (pp. 24-55; Derrida, "Guter wille zur Macht (I): Drei Fragen an Hans-Georg Gadamer" (pp. 56-58); Gadamer, "Und dennoch: Macht des Guten willens" (pp. 59-61); and Derrida, "Guter wille zur Macht (II): Die Unterschriften interpretieren (Nietzsche/Heidegger)" (pp. 62-77)--all in *Text und Interpretation*, ed. philippe Forget (Munich: Wilhelm Fink, 1984). The first part of Gadamer's lecture was published as "Le defi hermeneu-

tique," tr. Philippe Forget (pp. 333-40); in the original French Derrida, "Bonnes volontes de , puissances (une reponse a Hans-Georg Gadamer)" (pp. 341-43); and Gadamer. "Et pourtant : Puissance de la bonne volonte (une replique a Jacques Derrida)," tr. Philippe Forget (pp. 344-47)--all in *Revue Internationale de Philosophie* 38 eme anne, no. 151 (1984). An English translation by Richard Palmer and Diane Michelfelder of Derrida's essay on Nietzsche is forthcoming, *Philosophy and Literature*; an English translation by Dennis Schmidt and Brice Wachterhauser of Gadamer's essay is forthcoming in a book ed. Wachterhauser from SUNY Press. On the exchange, see Richard Palmer, "Improbable Encounter : Gadamer and Derrida," *Art Papers*, 10, no. 1 [January/February, 1986], 36-39 ; and Fred Dallmayr, "Hermeneutics and Deconstruction," in his book *Critical Encounters : Between Philosophy and Politics* [forthcoming. Notre Dame Press].

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Blake's Golden Load

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How many bards gild the lapses of time ! (Keats)

At the threshold of William Blake's poetic career we find a small, much-mined volume of poems called *Poetical Sketches* (1784). His only work published in conventional letterpress, it begins with a little poem of beginnings, *To Spring*, followed by three other poems addressed to each of the remaining seasons. On the face of it, these poems would seem to be eminently simple and comprehensible as representations of a human voice as it changes and develops in an ongoing relationship with an external Nature. But like the rest of the volume, these poems are unreadable—save in the most banal sense—unless we locate them in a context of discourse mapped by codes of literary practices. Considered as the clearly imitative and derivative work of a late eighteenth-century adolescent, to bring them under the reins of interpretive control seemed at first to pose few problems.¹ But as Blake's reputation for 'originality' and 'creative genius' has grown in the last few decades, the situation has become more problematic. How can the point/place/moment of origin of an original genius be a belated scene of copying or imitation? A reading of origins is clearly called for, and interpreters of Blake have answered,

There are several lines approach that tempt Blake scholars when confronting the *Poetical Sketches*. One of the most popular has been dismissed by Robert Gleckner as the "anticipative fallacy" (*Prelude* 2), an apt phrase for those like Harold Bloom who maintain (ed) that "at an astonishingly early age, Blake has grasped in sure potential all the fundamentals of his great program and theme" (*Apocalypse* 17). Even Gleckner himself cannot resist anticipation's power when he comes to Blake's season poems, which for him embody a theme "clearly anticipative of Blake's states of Innocence and Experience..... it (the theme) anticipates Los the creator and Urizen, the destructive, tyrannical 'god of this world.'" (63—64).

Most critics do not limit themselves to looking forward but—Janus-like—look backwards to Blake's sources. Here too a special form of double-reading seems inevitable. Prowling through the Bible, works of Spenser and Shakespeare, various Elizabethan songs, Milton, Thonison Young, Collint, Gray, Beattie and the Wartons, Chatterton and the Ossianic prose poems, we can collect an impressive flood of words, phrases and images that reappear in the *Poetical Sketches*. As we do so, we find Elake sounding more and more like his precursors, becoming not an origin but an echo. Fortunately, through the miracle of interpretive ingenuity, we have ways to show that the more he sounds like them the more different he is from them. For example, Geotfrey Hartman can read the last two lines of *To Winter* ("till heaven smiles, and the monster/ Is driv'n yelling to his caves beneath mount Hecla.") as deliberately conventional, so that they become in his oxymoronic formulation "an inspired period cliche" ("Progress" 204). Or, to borrow foom Gleckner again, we find Blake 'amid the remnants of conventional, even hackneyed, phraseology and diction" (68) engaged in "ostensible apishness" (12) which manages somehow to transform "the verbal and imagistic traditions he inherited" into "vision inspired and articulated by true art" (12). Blake seems to have anticipated Borges' Pierre Menard, whose "*visible work*" is unexceptionable and conventional, but whose "other work..... perhaps the most significant of our time" is a "subterranean" project "to prduce a few pages which would coincide—word for word and line for line—with those of Miguel de Cervantes....." Cervantes' text and Menard's are verbally identical, but the second is almost infinitely richer. (More ambiguous, his detractors will say, but ambiguity is richness.)" (38 42). For Menard, the technique of the "deliberate anachronism" allows him to trope his precursor; it is a technique that "fills the most placid works with adventure" and "has enriched.....the halting and rudimentary art of reading" (44) which concerns us here, as would-be miners of textual riches.

Blake's text appears in a context where copying and allusion, or 'imitation,' was not only an expected first stage in any artistic career, but an essential part of the poetic enterprise as an accepted style or mode of composition.² For Blake to offer us "echoes and themes from the Bilble, the classics, and even the high odic tradition of the eighteenth century" is not simply "poetic diction in search of its truth" (Hartman 194) but poetry in search of a *context*, and finding one in an 'echo chamber' where it is impossible to echo the Bible directly, without also echoing a style or mode of echoing in which the original scuce of sound has long been lost. The

task of the reader is similarly difficult, if s/he wants to hear the voice of a controlling and self-contained individual poet escaping all the forces that undermine and challenge his individuality. How can we grant Blake a distance from the conventions he seems to invoke, granting him that origin-ality that means 'being present' at the time and place of a *neu* beginning? There is more at stake here than a reading of a few individual poems: we are contemplating the birth of an 'original poetic career, one which signals the coming of the new era of Romanticism. To seek this understanding is to contemplate a poetic act as a rebirth of language itself, comparable to the originary event that might have generated the first human utterance; and since individual words can do their work only in a field of discursivity, we must locate Blake's work in a completely new context rather than as a moment in a series that is governed by prior organization and differentiation. We must do this in spite of the fact that the discourse of Romanticism was not yet in place (though it is for us, hence we may well bring it with us *to* Blake), and in spite of the fact that the external form or surface of Blake's work presents itself to us in a form which Hartman can call a "splendid pastiche" (194). Splendid or not, a "pastiche" is a work that imitates the style of prior works, a style which is itself a principle of organization where 'originality' is either not valued or not possible. Finally, what if a text represents itself to us as an echo of a series of echoes of an originary voice, echo invoking the master-trope of irony, to distance itself from the naieve presumption of saying something new?

Morris Eaves has tried a reading of Blake's "theory" which argues for a "radical" Blakean transformation, where he "may in some respects seem to echo Reynolds and Opie," but in fact is "not recycling classicism but performing a critical experiment in encoding radical romantic ideas in an Enlightenment vocabulary."

It is fair to say that Blake parodies Enlightenment criticism in such instances but essential to see also that the parody is in another way true. The method involves nothing more unusual .. than retaining the manner of the object of parody while altering the matter, or, more specifically, silently shifting the grounds on which decorum rests. Reynold's concessions to truth for the sake of oversetting truth are grounded in Enlightenment mimesis, Blake's truth in romantic expression. (159)

For Eaves the same terms can function as "mimesis" or "expression" through some kind of shift of "grounds" which doesn't involve the *surface*

of the text, which functions only as a mask. We might well ask how "parody" (which is dependent on its object) can either signal or effect a shift of grounds. Similar problems are found if we invoke the trope of irony, a rhetorical mask which signals the metalinguistic code which is either the most distant from the essence of an autonomous expressive subject (the *iron* is not responsible for what he says) or the closes to it (his *personal* meaning is not determined by the conventional meanings of the words he uses). In the ironic mode only the speaker knows what he really means, and sometimes perhaps even he does not know.

What we have in these approaches is a system of similarities and difference, where even the most extreme similarity is seen as superficial, while the difference claimed is radical. In the precursor text the poetic surface hides error, while in Blake it reveals truth. In one case any simplicity of the surface reveals radical simplicity, but in another it proves radical complexity. Writing of "To the Muses" in the same volume, Gleckner notes "the fundamental Augustan conventionality of the diction," yet claims that "it owes virtually nothing to any poetic model and achieves a bold complexity belied by its limpid surface" (29). Even the conventional tropes of eighteenth-century verse can be transformed if we agree with Bloom, who claims that "Thomson's personifications are clear and simple," but Blake's "become actual mythmaking" (*Apocalypse* 1).

Were I to develop it here, my own interpretation of the season poems might in some ways provide a similar instance, since it would doubtless sound *like* various aspects of other readings. I do agree with the general view that these poems are early and vigorous instances of what Blake would later call "Mental Fight" – not "the mental warfare that resurrects the crucified truth" or "demands that we fly with him on his plumed wide wings to the realms of truth" (Gleckner 11, 13-14). To put it another way, Blake does not give us *his* "golden load" of song and truth, but rather follows in an epitomizing and ironic way the seasonal and tropological system for producing "truth" that prevailed in the 18th century. One of the problems of fully appreciating parody is that we cannot understand it unless we have some minimal sense of the original. A parody (*parodia*) is a song written alongside another song, as though in the margins or between the lines of a prior book. The qualities we associate with style or 'voice' are important for its recognition, and Blake gives a great deal of attention to qualities of voice throughout the *Sketches*. His attention is not merely to isolated nuances or repetitions of prior voices in the form of verbal echoes, but to the power and potential of those voices as they are

inscribed in and practiced within a systematized code of poetic discourse—including those rhetorical techniques or strategies (like apostrophe, use of the pentameter) that operate to create the representational effect of a 'speaking voice'. In the *Sketches* Blake may be read as 'trying on' a variety of voices, not in the superficial manner that one can try on a suit of clothing, but in the manner of his advice to God: "If you have formed a Circle to go into / Go into it yourself & see how you would do" (516).

Such trials do not in every case have to be critical or ironic, even if they are self-conscious and tentative. In *L'Allegro* Milton pretends to test the Allegro mode partly to see how it would do ("These delights, if thou canst give, / Mirth with thee, I mean to live."), but also to find grounds to bid it go "hence," to trope on it in order to *turn from* it to the pleasures of the melancholy prophetic mode in *Il Penseroso*. Like all poets after Milton, Blake tries both modes, but in doing so—in a poem like "Memory, hither come"—he shows that he understands how the two modes have been structured by Milton and his followers into a system, a poetic progression from the "merry notes" of the music of day to "places fit for woe; / Walking along the darken'd valley, / With silent Melancholy." Blak's "Mad Song" shows signs of discomfort with and in the systematic progression, representing the singer's awareness that even though the system is constituted by his own song ("My notes.....strike the ear of night, / Make weep the eyes of day; / They make mad the roaring winds, / And with tempests play.") he can imagine no way out of a system which links his potential for song with a cyclical diurnal progression. He must continually "turn" his back to the illusory "comforts" of the east, the daily return of the sun and the annual return of spring and eros, in order to remain in a metaphoric night of his own making.

I turn my back to the east,
From whence comforts have increas'd;
For light doth seize my brain
With frantic pain.

The conventional seasonal invocation begins with an apostrophic address to the "east," with the poet figuratively turning his back to the implied audience. There is then a 'rhetorical' madness in Blake's song, where the fictive singer while trying to turn against the system can only turn within it. Light, whether the false light of the physical sun, or the metaphorical "light" of philosophical insight, seizes his brain in its epistemological grasp. He is much more like a lyrical photophobic

Edward Young than the Elizabethans with whom he is so often compared. The song "How sweet I roam'd" is quite different in tone and effect, but deserves comparison on a number of points. Chief among them is that recurring shock of recognition each time we read the poem and realize that *this* is the "song" that is sung *in* the "golden cage," with its "golden pleasures" and its "golden wing" incapable of free poetic flight. In it we can simultaneously hear Blake singing the song, indulging in its golden pleasure, and taking the role of the Phoebus who

loves to sit and hear me sing
Then, laughing, sports and plays with me ;
Then stretches out my golden wing,
And mocks my loss of liberty.

There is a complex system of poetic power at work here, in which the seductive force of a poetic mode is inextricably intertwined with the powerlessness of that mode.

The seasons poems give us a three-fold use of the word "golden," with the third instance concluding the third season, as Autumn departs leaving behind his "golden load" or harvest of song.

TO SPRING

O deck her forth with thy fair fingers ; pour
Thy soft kisses on her bosom ; and put
Thy golden crown upon her languish'd head,
Whose modest tresses were bound up for thee !

TO SUMMER

O thou, who passest thro' our vallies in
Thy strength, curb thy fierce steeds, allay the heat
That flames from their large nostrils ! thou, O Summer,
Oft pitched'st here thy golden tent, and oft
Beneath our oaks hast slept, while we beheld
With joy, thy ruddy limbs and flourishing hair.

TO AUTUMN

O Autumn, laden with fruit, and stained
With the blood of the grape, pass not, but sit
Beneath my shady roof.....
Sing now the lusty song of fruits and flowers.

"The narrow bud opens her beauties to
"The sun, and love runs in her thrilling veins ;
"Blossoms hang round the brown of morning, and

“Flourish down the bright cheek of modest eve,
“Till clust’ ring Summer breaks forth into singing,
“And feather’d clouds strew flowers round her head.

“The spirits of the air live on the smells
“Of fruit ; and joy, with pinions light, roves round
“The gardens, or sits singing in the trees.”
Thus sang the jolly Autumn as he sat,
Then rose, girded himself, and o’er the bleak
Hills fled from our sight ; but left his golden load.

Clearly there is here some version of a ‘progress of poesy, that we must understand in order to read the poem. The Spring-Summer-Fall progression has tempted many critics to perceive a poetic alchemy in which Blake transforms his raw material into what Bloom calls “This ‘golden load’” of lyricism, which “the departing poet bequeaths us” before leaving. Whereas ‘How sweet I roam’d’ is for Bloom an account of “the deceptions of nature as the responsible agent of transition” (19), he detects in *To Autumn* “a mature harvest bard who sings a song of truition” (16).

Gleckner’s assay of Blake’s golden load determines, as so many readings do, that the Spring-Summer-Autumn series is superior visionary poetry, complete in itself, representing “the imaginative achievement of oneness, fullness, and joy” (69) in “a vision of what eternally exists really and unchangeably” (68). At the end “Autumn flees, but only from corporeal vision” (68), in a move that escapes the seasonal cycle which for Blake represents “error.” Blake is thus deconstructing the “prevailing seasonal paradigm” (70) and “the conventional framework of the cycle” (71) which asserts “the comforts of a conventional rebirth of Spring to console our sense of loss in Winter the very mythological construct and tradition Blake is at some pains to subvert. Time is not the Time” (73). In thus raising the question of Blake’s relationship to discursive structures, and in particular to “seasonal and diurnal paradigms,” Gleckner is moving towards an important context. However, by not having an adequate sense of those seasonal and diurnal paradigms—as they are embodied in 18th-century works such as Thomson’s *Seasons*, Young’s *Night Thoughts*, and Cowper’s *The Task*, Gleckner is unable to perceive either the similarities or the differences that might profitably guide our attention. In missing the point, he re-enacts the seasonal paradigm itself, ironically (for us) attributing that re-enactment to Blake, and confirming one of the basic truths of the paradigm—that what is most attractive in nature is also the most dangerous.

A more careful reading of Blake's precursors would show that the season of Winter was important for them precisely because it was the season *within* the seasons that forced a rupture of the otherwise endless cycle of the physical ratio. Winter provided the opportunity to experience the rupture of the moral sublime, in the form of a felt experience of the incomensurability between the empirical and the spiritual or rational, an experience that was occasioned by external sense yet forced a recognition of the need to transcend the limitations of external sense. Poets of the eighteenth century had already made a turn that Gleckner and others have missed, contrasting the authentic colors of Nature with the 'colours of rhetoric,' which were figurative only. But with the epistemology of Locke, linked with the discoveries of Newton in the *Opticks*, the colors of Nature were themselves brought into the realm of human language and rhetoric, requiring a new reading and opening the way to a new writing. The seasons themselves could thus be read as *tropes*—or 'turns' in a rhetorical progression and a tropological curriculum in which the *absence* of color (winter whiteness for Thomson and Cowper, the blackness of night for Young) is the final trope of insight. Thomson's claim that his song called "Spring" is *painted* by Spring means that it is colored by the same "bright enchantment" that deceives those who do not have the "sage-instructed eye" which can separate the "ethereal" colors of the rainbow from the "white mingling maze" that cannot be directly perceived by the human eye or expressed in human language.³

The apostrophic trope that opens most poems addressed to seasons has the appearance of an authentic event, an act of power and participation. As a 'turn' (*apo-strophe*, turning away) from the reader to Nature, the poet can discover that the seasons are themselves turns in the year, consequences of the turns in the circuit of the sun. In apostrophizing Spring, Blake's opening poem turns to Spring ("our longing eyes are turned/ Up to thy bright pavillions") to ask Spring to "turn/ Thine angel eyes upon our western isle." For the first three seasons, natural event seems to correspond with and the respond to poetic event, responsive to the pathos of human desire, until we reach Winter where "He hears me not" and "I dare not lift mine eyes"—unable to perform the turning gesture which inaugurated the re-turn of Spring. Or did it? Turn in Winter is a turn in the circuit of communication which emphasizes a *break* in that circuit, and raises the possibility that the turning eyes and voice in the apostrophic discourse were united only in a contingent and illusory union.

Blake's Season poems need to be read in the context of a self-conscious use of figurative language in the interests of a verbal self-negation that

marks so much of the poetry of his precursors, and leads them to locate their vantage-point in Winter, on the metatropological level of irony which, though having to continue to use the naive tropes can, by using them self-consciously, evoke a difference that is expressed as the non-expressible, or represented as the non-representable. The "natural" seasonal turn to winter becomes a rhetorical turn to the trope of irony and difference, a turn away from the naive tropes of resemblance and contiguity that produce an illusory metaphoric golden load as the unproblematic affirmative fruit of the union of Logos and Eros—a turn that anticipates Elliot's world-weary equivalent of Blake's "Mad Song" which experiences April as "the cruellest month" and tries to turn its back to the east, as well as the humorous perspective of Burns' ode to spring in *The Merry Muses of Caledonia*:

Latona's Sun looks liquorish on
Dame Nature's Grand impetus
Till his pego rise, then westward flies
To roger Madame Thetis

If we return now to Gleckner's reading of Blake's seasons, we can see more clearly some of the problems he has in adequately defining for Blake a "vision" that "is complete with the end of *To Autumn*, in its totality inherent in and symbolized by Autumn's 'golden load.'" The negative truth that Gleckner attributes to that vision is Blake's discovery of the 'error' of a contrary vision based on the paradigm of the natural cycle. This truth requires a final 'turn' *To winter*, and our reading of it as "a spectrous parody, in proper sequence, of Spring-Summer Autumn" (70). Such a reading, while claiming to define a Blake different from his seasonal precursors, unwittingly locates him in a prior discourse of Truth, already inscribed in a rhetorical system especially designed to produce it, so that interpreters can recognize its familiar iterability at the same time that they insist that it comes forth with the novelty and freshness of a new spring. In such a system, the same truth needs the same error, time after time, and cannot exist without it. The cycle of Truth ("coming and going . . . united") is inseparable from the cycle of Error. The truth that language can express in sensory images to express the truth.

Readers can 'find' this message in Blake's poems, not because they are different from the tropological curriculum of other season poems, but because they are in fact so much like them in general outline and technique. No doubt Blake was trying on the seasonal paradigm, going into and repeating its progression 'to see how he would do, and to see how it

would do. I imagine him therefore in a much more problematic and interesting situation, feeling strongly the tug of what Vico called "sensory topics," the libidinal tug of the East, and of the Sun continually rising as "the unique, irreplaceable, natural referent, around which everything must turn, toward which everything must turn" (Derrida, *Margins* 251). But I imagine Blake also feeling the counter-tug, of the sun as the paradigm of metaphor, the sensory sun which may exist in poetic discourse only as metaphor, that heliotropism which is both a movement turned toward the sun and the turning movement of the natural sun that *sets* each day as surely as it rises. Blake ambivalently contemplates this ambiguous "golden load," left behind by his troping precursors and by the ever-westerling Sun. Then he too flees from our sight, leaving a rhetorical "golden load" for our assay.

II. MADE IN THE SHADE

Sol tibi signa dabit, solem quis dicere falsum audeat? (Vergil)

Begin, ephebe, by perceiving the idea
Of this invention, this invented world,

The inconceivable idea of the sun. (Wallace Stevens)

What we want is to . . . re-establish the living organic connections with the cosmos, the sun and earth, with mankind and nation and family. Start with the sun, and the rest will slowly, slowly happen. (D.H. Lawrence)

The sun is the sensory object par excellence. It is the paradigm of the sensory *and* of metaphor: it regularly turns (itself) and hides (itself). As the metaphoric trope always implies a sensory kernel, or rather something like the sensory, which can always not be present in act and in person, and since the sun in this respect is the sensory signifier of the sensory par excellence, that is, the sensory model of the sensory . . . then the turning of the sun always will have been the trajectory of metaphor. (Derrida)

Phoebus is dead, ephebe. But phoebus was
A name for something that never could be named.
There was a project for the sun and is. (Wallace Stevens)

One of the most widely shared views of the eighteenth century was that civilization and the arts flourish best, and could only have started, in a temperate zone. In an imagined golden age before the fall, when the ecliptic and equatorial circles coincided, this special relationship with the sun would have been perpetually maintained in certain favored

equinoctial areas where sowing and harvest could follow their own rhythm. With the tilting of the earth's axis, the ecliptic became oblique, and the alternations of the seasons began. Whether Christian or pagan, seasonal poetry must locate itself in a special relationship to the sun in order to flourish. We can see Blake's test carefully defining this relationship in *To Summer*, in preparation for the 'fruitful' song of Autumn:

Beneath our thickest shades we oft have heard
Thy voice, when noon upon his fervid car
Rode o'er the deep of heaven; beside our springs
Sit down . . . , .

Our bards are fam'd who strike the silver wire:
Our youth [s] are bolder than the southern swains:
Our maidens fairer in the sprightly dance:
We lack not songs, nor instruments of joy,
Nor echoes sweet, nor waters clear as heaven,
Nor laurel wreaths against the sultry heat.

The sun leaves Virgo near the end of August to enter Libra, where the autumnal equinox coincides with the 'time' of Blake's *Autumn*. Blake's "shades" here are autumnal, as the song of jolly Autumn evokes the full vegetable spectrum from spring to harvest. It is a special kind of shade conducive to poetry, but it is also the special 'shade' of the laurel wreath, the shade of pastoral poetry, which defines a situation close to but protected from nature; not a transitory diurnal shade, or a seasonal equinox, but a literary *topos* (i.e. "place") which presumes to escape the contingencies of a fallen natural world and reconstitute of the golden age before the fall. By Blake's time, as recorded in Gray's "The Progress of Poesy" (1768), the "track" of pastoral had followed the sun westward, leaving 'parnassus' for the Latian plains, "moving north to "climes beyond the solar road" so that Shakespeare could be born "far from the sun and summer-gale."

It is by locating Blake's inaugural poems in the context of pastoral poetic tropes that we can best see his point of entry into the practice of poetry, and see his work as paradigmatic for poetry and its interpretation. Pastoral has a special place among the genres as a set of organizing and enabling conventions and a hallowed function as the organizing genre for the progression of the poetic 'career.' As such part of its function is to be ostensibly left behind by the poet, while its organizing effects, though hidden, continue to determine the fate of poetry. "What is the pastoral convention, then, if not the external separation between the mind that distinguishes, negates, legislates, and the originary simplicity

of the natural? There is no doubt that the pastoral theme is, in fact, the only poetic theme, that it is poetry itself" (de Man, *Blindness* 239).

This 'convention' was inaugurated in England by Spenser's *Shephearde's calender* (1579), confirming the vergilian 'progression' and making pastoral the inevitable beginning point for a poetic career. In this tradition the young poet finds his starting-point to be situated by the pastoral *umbra* and especially prepared for his beginning efforts.⁵ Although sheltered, it is a place in a dynamic system which turns, moving the poet forward, so that the beginning gesture in the genre receives the promise of self-transcendence: "to invoke it is already to assume the insufficiency of the tradition in the very act of rehearsing its tropes" (Fish, 6) "That is, the desire of the poet to rise above the pastoral is itself a pastoral convention and when the speaker . . . gives voice to that desire he succeeds only in demonstrating the extent to which his thoughts and actions are already inscribed in the tradition from which he would be separate . . . he is only playing out the role assigned him in a drama not of his making" (Fish, 10). Pastoral is thus continuously aiming at (or turning, troping towards) something it is not, something absent, something greater on the ascending scale of generic progression. But it is much easier to get into this pastoral machine than to get out of it, as the singer in Blake's "golden cage" ("How sweet I roam'd . . . ") found out too late.

A comparison of the infant's entry into language (*infans*, incapable speech) with the poet's entry into poetic discourse can add a certain emphasis to this point. Both are instances of the individual's assumption of the place produced for him by a complex of discursive formations; and in both cases what appears to be a new beginning reveals that the subject always already finds itself and its discourses in place.⁶ As tales of origin, both take the same form of a 'diachronic fable of a synchronic functioning' (Mac Cabe 87). In the development of a child there is a moment when the child enters language by becoming aware of certain places which s/he can occupy as a speaking subject; these places are identity-producing points of insertion into language. In pastoral winter is typically represented as a time before speech is possible, the silence before speech blossoms in spring and to which it returns in the cycle ("He withers all in silence" *To Winter*). In the meantime there is a 'temperate' zone of poetic utterance, that pastoral zone which defines in de Man's phrase--the only poetic theme . . . poetry itself."

Vergil's first *Eclogue*, in the pastoral convention that provides the aegis for all seasonal poems, had articulated the poet's place as that occupied by Tityrus (*Lentus in umbra*, "relaxed in the shade"), whose special

location allows uninterrupted fertility for his crops and flocks, and the corresponding leisure for poetic production. In this he differs markedly from Meliboeus, whose lack of protection means he must drive his goats on an unending path, a slave to the seasonal sun, ranging the world from the torrid deserts of Africa to the frigid climes of England (*At nos hinc alii sitientes ibimus Afros... et Penitus toto divison orbe Britannos*). Commentary has speculated since Servius on the human identity of the absent protector / benefactor who provides Tityrus with his creative *libertas*, but I would like to suggest as a metaphorical alternative that the absent benefactor is the sun, whose *absence* (as natural force and object) is necessary to provide an artistic place of *libertas* for the free reign of the poet's tropes.

If the possible subject of poetic enunciation is already inscribed in the synchronic pastoral machine which constantly provides the only and already-available position characteristic of any discursive formation, then that position can be seen to have a special relationship to the sun, a prototypical relationship characteristic of that between all signifiers and their 'real' signifieds, which are mental constructs rather than the natural objects with which they have only a rhetorical relationship. Our experience of the natural sun embodies this relationship of presence / absence with unusual clarity, so that the natural relation has become exemplary for poetic troping.⁷ we are affected by the sun without seeing it directly, and our mediated perception (in the 'shade' of language) is *figured* by the literal impossibility of looking directly at the sun without becoming blind. Lucretius warning that the sun will blind you if you gaze at it (*sol etiam cnecat, contra si tendere pergas*) can only be ignored in language used as allegory:

Last of all, he would be able to look at the sun and contemplate its nature, not as it appears when reflected in water or any alien medium, but as it is in itself in its own domain. (230)

Plato's metaphor for ultimate philosophical insight here does not contradict the fact that "unmediated expression is a philosophical impossibility" (de Man, *Blindness* 9) but embodies that fact in its language-mediated troping on the equation between natural blindness and philosophical insight.

The epistemological model of this relationship was worked out by a number of thinkers in the seventeenth century, with Descartes third meditation being one of the clearest and most accessible examples. The distinction he makes between "adventitious ideas" (that appear" foreign to me and coming from without"), ideas that are "innate," and those that are "made or invented by me" (196-7) leads him to the example of the sun as exemplary instance :

For example, I find present to me two completely diverse ideas of the Sun; the one in which the Sun appears to me as extremely small is, it would seem, derived from the senses, and to be counted as belonging to the class of *adventitious ideas*; the other, in which the Sun is taken by me to be many times larger than the whole Earth, has been arrived at by way of astronomical reasonings, that is to say, elicited from certain notions *innate in me*, or *formed by me in some other manner*. Certainly, these two ideas of the Sun cannot both resemble the same Sun; and reason constrains me to believe that the one which seems to have emanated from it in a direct manner is the more unlike . (198-99 italics added) 8

Since the 'made' sun (one of the *factae vel factitiae* 19) has "more objective reality" than the natural sun, it can be carried over metaphorically to figure the "innate" idea of the sun which hides its rhetorical origins in the image of the "inexhaustible light" of a God who dazzles the powers of the human mind as the natural sun dazzles its powers of sensory perception. 9

Hobbes echoes the dynamic aspect of this 'constructed' sun by finding the model for its making already in the mediated structure of sensory experience. For him our sense of outward forms comes neither directly from external objects nor from the "divers motions" exerted by those objects on the senses. Instead, it is the "resistance or counter-pressure, or endeavour of the heart, to deliver itself" of the pressure of those motions (85). What we call "sense ... in all cases, is nothing else but originall fancy, and our image making faculty ["Imagination"] is what "is called *Sight*; and seemeth not to be mere Imagination, but the Body itself without us" (85, 657). Imagination is a faculty of mediation (i. e. an *umbra*) which functions in the *absence* of the objects of sense perception: "and the motion made by this pressure, continuing after the object is removed, is that we call *Imagination and Memory*" (658).

For Hobbes our "image" of the sun, like our "idea" of it, is known only through the inward motions of the heart, an inward imagination that produces light in spite of the 'blindness' of natural perception. Imagination, or "decaying sense" (88) can reappropriate as metaphor the solar phenomenon of the eclipse as an external image of internal phenomena: "The decay of Sense in men wakig, is not the decay of the motion made in sense; but an obscuring of it, in such manner, as the light of the Sun obscureth the light of the Starres, whiich starres do no less exercise their vertue by which they are visible, in the day, than in the night" (88).

These two models, the ontological and the epistemological, exhibit the conceptual basis for the endless set pieces on the sun that shine out with special brilliance in seventeenth- and eighteenth century poetry. Cut off from sensory perceptions, safe in the rhetorical shade of his nocturnal *unbra* ("from objects free, from passion cool . . . these tutelary shades/ Are man's asylum") Young revels in the "Darkness [that] strikes thought inward . . . drives back the soul/ To settle on herself, our point supreme!" (*Night V*, 120 130). From this withdrawn vantage point the domain of language turns heliotropically towards the "dominions" of the sun:

Full ample the dominions of the sun !
Full glorious to behold ! How far, how wide,
The matchless monarch, from his flaming throne,
Lavish of lustre, throws his beams about him,
Farther and faster than a thought can fly,
And feeds his planets with eternal fires !

(*Night IX*, 1617-22)

The dazzling radiance of the absent sun becomes an implicit figure for the poet, also "lavish of lustre," who throws out his tropes like rays of light emitted from the sun. In both cases the *effect* of presence and familiarity hides by its brightness and vividness the absence that makes it possible:

Behold the light emitted from the Sun,
What more familiar, and what more unknown ?
While by its spreading Radiance it reveals
All Nature's Face, it still itself conceals,
Blackmore ii/ 386-9)

If we can leap now, from Descartes in his little room and Edward Young at his midnight desk, to Proust in his corklined study, we find him writing a passage in *Swann's Way* that both hides and reveals his scene of writing. Having resisted his grandmother's suggestion that he go outside to play, Marcel finds his place "stretched out on [his] bed, with a book, in [his] room which sheltered, tremblingly, its transparent and fragile coolness from the afternoon sun."¹⁰ The only light in the room is a "glimmer of daylight" which is captured in the image of "Yellow wings" as it remains "motionless... poised like a butterfly."

It was hardly light enough to read, and the sensation of the light's splendor was given me only by the noise of Camus... and also by the flies executing their little concert, the chamber music of summer: evocative not in the manner of a human tune that, heard *perchance* during the summer, afterwards reminds you of it but connected to summer by a more necessary link: born from beautiful days, resurrecting only when they return, containing some of their essence, it does not only awaken their image in our memory it guarantees their return, *their actual, persistent, unmediated presence*.

The dark coolness of my room related to the full sunlight of the street as the shadow relates to the ray of light, that is to say it was just as luminous and it gave my imagination the total spectacle of the summer, whereas my senses, if I had been on a walk, could only have enjoyed it by fragments.... (italics added).

De Man gives this passage what he calls "a rhetorically conscious reading" (*Allegories* 15) by following the movement of its tropes as they express two different way of evoking the natural experience of summer--the difference between chance/contiguity (metonymy) and necessity/analogy (metaphor). For my purposes here the names of the tropes are not as important as the underlying distinction, which is the same one that marks the crucial Romantic opposition between symbol and allegory. For Coleridge the symbol is a motivated sign; "it always partakes of the Reality which it renders intelligible; and while it enunciates the whole, abides itself as a living part in that Unity, of which it is the representative," while allegorical signs are "but empty echoes which the fancy arbitrarily associates with the apparitions of matter" (30).¹¹ For proust the indirect sunlight and the music of the flies seem at first

to offer the necessary link" of the motivated sign or symbol, free from the fortuitous chance of sensory experience which can yield only fragments. The passage can be seen as self-referential in its implicit claims to have transcended the contingent natural world through the kind of mastery by which a lepidopterist captures a specimen and mounts it on a board. But de Man exposes the dependence of this dominion (of essential figures of substitution) on contingent figures of substitution, so that the "return" or "resurrection" of the flies in the text is a "rhetorical mystification" in which "metaphor becomes a blind metonymy" (102).

De Man's concern here with the battle between the tropes can create its own mystification, but it can also help us to see that the real battle being staged is between 'nature' and 'art'. In this encounter *both* metaphor and metonymy are crucial weapons, but each has a drawback which makes it inadequate alone to create the illusion of permanently present value. Metaphor, which relies on resemblance and analogy, can create the effect of an unchanging relationship in the absence of one of its terms or elements; but the other side of this effectiveness is that its terms must always be separate and distinct-- I can assert "x is y" metaphorically when x is *not* y (otherwise I would be making a literal statement, not a figurative one). So if I write "Love is golden," only certain parts of the 'gold' are carried over in the metaphoric transfer because--as Midas found out--love and gold are different. As signifiers both words are present in my discourse, their signifieds absent; yet I can claim a link or relationship that obtains between "love" and "gold" even if there is neither love nor gold in the world. If I write "the air is golden" (even though at the moment it is raining) my implicit claim is that the sun is shining or glimmering through the air; the air will be golden only as long as the contingent relationships (sun, air and clouds, my position, etc.) remain the same. But these are notoriously transitory.

As the metaphor finds a permanent link dependent on separation metonymy finds a contingent link, a moment of proximity that cannot, remain in a world of comings and goings. With this distinction in mind, we can now see more clearly the strategy of proust's text, which is to achieve the *combined* effect of metaphor and metonymy, thereby convincing us that Marcel *really was* in that room as described. Of course that fleeting moment ("fragile . . . poised like a butterfly") is gone; but its departure testifies to its authenticity, since it must have been there to

fade. It can be “resurrected” in the ‘present’ text being written by ‘Marcel’ (“I had stretched out...”) and the resurrection confirms for us that Marcel *was* there in the shade “with a book” that he was writing about “a book” that he was reading *in the same shade*. But the real ‘Marcel’ for us is Proust, whom we must read and ‘resurrect’ in *our shade*.

The important opposition here is not simply between metaphor and metonymy for both are, in spite of their differences, merely tropes. The difference is between “the chamber music of summer” and a ‘human tune’ only “heard perchance during the summer” which therefore will only “remind you” by an accidental association. For Coleridge this was the distinction between the Imagination (which worked like nature in achieving its organic unities) and the Fancy, which was arbitrary and mechanical. We can see in it also the contrast between the plenitude of nature with its motivated signs and the emptiness of human writing, the arbitrariness of human signifiers. It is precisely this distinction that allows writing to triumph over nature by losing to nature, since the Nature that triumphs over art is itself an *effect* produced by an art that hides its artfulness. Proust’s text must suggest the evocative quality of the “flies little concert,” which in turn is evocative of summer because the song is “born from beautiful days, resurrecting only when they return, containing some of their essence.” The text’s change at this point to the present tense emphasizes the paradoxical *identity* of the two modes of song which are being contrasted; what was is, and will always be, because of the “necessary link” between the flies’ “little concert” and beautiful days. The ambiguous reference of the pronoun (“it does not only awaken their image in our memory; it guarantees their return, their actual, persistent, unmediated presence”)/ “elle n’en réveille pas seulement l’image dans notre mémoire, elle en certifie le retour la présence effective, ambiguë, immédiatement accessible”) and the emphatic shift to the present tense wagers a redemptive identity between the music of the flies and the evocative power of the text. The punning trope “chamber music of summer” (“la musique de chambre”) shows that the music, like the flies themselves, can exist for us only as textual effects, chamber music produced and consumed in the pastoral *umbra* of a darkened room (“dans ma chambre Cette obscure froideur de ma chambre”). For we too are figured in the triumph of the text, produced as readers who like Marcel turn our backs on nature for the text which has captured and unified its essence.

At this point we could linger over Proust’s text, and listen also to the ‘chamber music’ of Keats’s “small gnats” that provide their similar fragile

[metonymic link ("borne afloat/ Or sinking as the light wind lives or dies" *To Autumn*), or listen to Yeats's "sensual music" in *Sailing to Byzantium*:

That is no country for old men. The young
In one another's arms, birds in the trees,
— Those dying generations — at their song,
The salmon — falls, the mackerel — crowded seas,
Fish, flesh, or fowl, commend all summer long
Whatever is begotten, born, and dies.
Caught in that sensual music all neglect
Monuments of unageing intellect.

Yeats changed his opening from "This..." to "That...", reflecting the way in which the voyage "to Byzantium" is always over before the poem begins. A "that" can only be produced by a "this", in a mutual production. In order to escape from being "Caught in that sensual music" and to get "out of nature" the poet aspires to a higher "artifice of eternity" In the meantime that "sensual music" has been caught in the golden cage of this poem's form, the 'Chamber music' of its ottava rima stanzas (*stanza*, "rom").

Once the effect of the opposition between nature and art (symbol and allegory, metonymy and metaphor, inside and outside, etc.) has been established *within* a text, then the text (or its 'textuality') will always win. The strategy of Gray's "Ode on the Spring" can provide a final, more humorous example. In the first 'stanza' the poet calls on spring to "wake the purple year" to new life, so that the poet can retire beneath an "oak's thick branches."

Beside some water's rushy brink
With me the Muse shall sit, and think
(At ease reclined in rustic state)
How vain the ardour of the crowd,
How low, how little are the proud,
How indigent the great !

Nature would seem to have produced a special vantage - point from which position, paradoxically elevated though "reclined," the poet can look down on the many, the proud, the great. As the images of shade and coolness in the first stanza evoke in turn the mediating shade and metonymic presence of the sun, so in the second stanza the generic flies appear as "insect youth," floating "amid the liquid noon" and reflecting sunlight in their "gaily-gilded trim." In the third stanza the poet conspicuously

appropriates the flies for reflection in "Contemplation's sober eye" and for a metaphor of the "race of man." The "race" image is ironic, for all progressive motion is circumscribed in the "airy dance" of lives that "end where they began" whether "brushed by the hand of rough Mischance,/ Or chilled by age." At this point we might well be struck by the circularity of a poetic progression looking for its origin and finding it first in the shade (whence the poet called on the sun and spring to come and *make* the shade), and then in the 'dead' cliche of the flies' dance of death, causing the poem itself to end where it began, in the dust of dead metaphors. But this closed circuit of bookish rebirth is ruptured in the fourth stanza when the flies ("the sportive kind") turn the tables on Contemplation's sober eye, labeling the poet "A solitary fly!" who violates the "race" of nature, who *begins* where he should *end*, with death.

On hasty wings thy youth is flown ;
Thy sun is set, thy spring is gone--
We frolic, while 'tis May.

The chain of substitutions here seems to lead to the desired effect of a structured truth—progression that moves towards victory for an authentic originary voice of Nature. That voice says "we frolic" *now* "while 'tis May", providing a putdown/send-up of the pedantic poet caught in the intertextual circuit or pastiche of his cliches. We can see, however, that the flies have not broken the circuitous web through their opposition between "we" and "thou", but have simply taken their preinscribed place. Seeming to win, they instead lose to the poet who has 'won' by staging his own defeat. The endless regression of preinscribed commonplaces is ruptured by a 'return' to the synchronic 'return' of nature, reborn every year as fresh as ever, redeeming dead metaphors as well as the dead land. The implied redemption of poetic language is made explicit by Rosamund Tuve in her assertion that "the commonplaces of seasons poetry are.. not traceable to any 'influence' except life under the same stars" (58). But that vision of life and art unified under and by the stars is only an effect produced within language, a (very common—) place within discourse ready long before Tuve occupied it, a self—serving commonplace *about* commonplaces that can be repeated indefinitely ("Moreover, as Rosamund Tuve *properly* has warned us ..." Gleckner 57).

If we glance now at Blake's texts (especially *Summer - Fall*) we can see that he has exploited the same devices in the same ways to the same effects, although the ambiguity of his structure makes it equally possible to read several messages; art is superior to nature, nature is superior to

art, *Blake's* art combines both nature and art, is superior to both nature and art, etc. The complete annual circuit of the sun is evoked, from absence ("our longing eyes are turned/ Up") in spring to absence ("I dare not lift mine eyes") in winter. The effect of presence is produced in summer ("we oft have heard thy voice") through the mediating figure of echoes and reflected light :

We lack not songs, nor instruments of joy,
Nor echoes sweet, nor waters clear as heaven,
Nor laurel wreaths against the sultry heat.

The effect is intensified in *To Autumn* by a move to the imperative present tense ("Sing now the lusty song of fruits and flowers"), and the quotation marks suggest that we have the actual *words* sung by Autumn. in the form of "a song of praise for what the land does under Autumn's auspices" (Gleckner 67). But the effect of the quotation marks also confuses the identity of the singer. Autumn does not produce words put fruits; if words are the 'fruits' of Autumn they are so by metaphor only, so that we can take these as the words of the poet (or "a mature harvest Bard" for Bloom, *Apocalypse* 15) indulging in an implicit prosopopoeia. The confusion is further compounded by the effect of another song *within* this song within a song, as the response to "Sing now" is the turn elsewhere, back to spring when "The narrow bud opens her beauties to/ The sun... Till clust ring Summer breaks forth into singing." The authentic and authenticating "jolly voice" (as "song of fruits," song that grows like fruit, is about fruit, and is fruit) doubles the poet's own song of seasonal/solar progression from Spring to Summer. It starts not with full-blown flowers, but with "blossoms" that "hang." And the present tense, like the blossoms themselves, turns out to be past, anticipating the climax of Autumn's song in the "singing" of "clust' ring Summer" which is also past, and then the Autumn's song (where *was* it ?) gives way to the past of "He sang", and to the absence that turns out to have governed the whole 'progression which, while seeming to move forward, has only produced a series of copies of itself within itself, a *mise-en-abyme* of representation without origin or referent

But few readers read the poems this way, because they are designed to focus our attention elsewhere and to produce a different effect of organic progression and unity. It is in this "clust' ring" effect of union (a cluster is a group of things or persons 'growing together' into a 'clot') that the combined play of metaphor and metonymy can best hide itself as rhetoric, so that we 'hear' the song of Autumn as we 'heard' Marcel's flies. That

the effect can be overpowering is evidenced by Gleckner's ecstatic rhapsody in the verb-mood of reality, the indicative : "Love now *is* united with the land : earth and season *are* one. Blake accents this union .. the song of the season and the songs of the land *are* the same songs. Autumn indeed *is* definable now only in terms of its union with the earth : it *is* 'laden with fruit' ; it *is* 'clust' ring Summer' ; it *is*, in succession, poetry, dance, fruits and flowers, buds and beauties, the sun, love and the blood pulsing through human veins, blossoms, morning and eve.. song, spirits of the air, joy, gardens, trees." Blake's Autumn is no allegorical "Spenserian reaper holding 'in his hand a sickle'. Instead he *is* his fruits" (67-68, italics added). It is "Blake's vision" that reveals all this to us, a vision based on "ideas, concepts, not percepts" but which has the "solidity of symbol and the sensory verbal qualities" (68). This Autumn that "*is* his fruits" flees for Gleckner, but "only from corporeal vision" (68) so that "Blake's vision" can be "ontologically verified by his (Autumn's ? Blake's ?) disappearance from sight" (69) "Autumn may be 'fled from our sight, but his 'golden load' is clearly the wholeness of the seasons as Blake's vision has just revealed that to us" (67).

III. Nor all that glisters gold

Money is a kind of poetry (Wallace Stevens)

The poem functions like gold (Ezra Pound)

I would have some body put the Muses under a kind of contribution to furnish out whatever they have in them that bears any relation to Coins. (Addison)

But how *has* "Blake's vision" revealed that "golden load" to us, and what are we as readers left with in the form or figure of a "golden load ?" Have we too become like "The spirits of the air (that) live on the smells/ Of fruit ?" If there is the *smell* of fruit, there must ("through his (Blake's) fusion of cause and effect, tenor and vehicle, literal and figurative" (68) *be* fruit 'there' somewhere. But the fruit has always gone, leaving behind only the metonymy of 'smell', and even metonymies can only 'smell' figuratively. So what can we make of the ambiguous "golden load" that seems to shimmer before us, offering itself as a reword for reading the poem as Melville's "gold doubloon" offered itself to the first one to "see" the white whale ? At the threshold of its departure the light of the sun is caught briefly by clouds and motes in the air which 'reflect' it most just before the darkness of its absence. But this is the most transitory of phenomena, and since the sun is always coming and going it is our contingent relationship—or vantage point—that constitutes

the threshold of arrival or departure. To trope on the image of shimmering air is to trope on the contingencies of transitory relations, to lose the golden load even in the act of imaging it. Something of the permanent effect of metaphor is necessary if the “load” is not to slip through our fingers, but it must be a “symbolic” metaphor, one that in Coleridge’s terms “always partakes of the Reality which is renders intelligible” rather than “empty echoes which the fancy arbitrarily associates with the apparitions of matter” (what Melville’s Ishmael would call a “hideous and intolerable allegory”). The task for the poet’s words is an alchemical one, to trope on tropes themselves, as “a material of vulgar origin,” turning them from a de-based analogon of ‘real’ gold into the thing itself.¹²

But ‘real gold’ is already so implicated in tropological circuits that for the poet it can only function as the metaphor of metaphor; and it is gold’s remarkable availability to be taken *as something else* which allows it to circulate as the measure of that ‘real value’ which is always elsewhere. As Marx points out, the precious metals are useless in the direct process of production and easily dispensed with as articles of consumption or means of existence (130). Their value inheres instead in how they appear: “Sie erscheinen gewissermassen als gedrogenes Licht, das aus der Unterwelt hervorgegraben wird, indem das Silber alle Lichtstrahlen in ihrer ursprünglichen Mischung, das Gold nur die höchste Potenz der Farbe, das Rot, zurückwirft” (130) / “They appear, in a way, as spontaneous light brought out from the underground world, since silver reflects all rays of light in their original combination, and gold only the color of highest intensity, viz. red light” (Stone 211). Traditionally gold stands for the absent sun, its ‘shining’ ability to reflect red light giving it the effect of a literalized metaphor of the sun, or of an actual deficit produced and left behind by it. Since the sun is the putative source of all ‘natural’ production, the *appearance* of gold produces the effect of an essential value. “Nature no more produces money than it does bankers or discount rates. But since the capitalist system of production requires the *crystallization* of wealth as a fetish in the form of a single article (“den Reichtum als Fetisch in der Form eines einzelnen Dings *kristallisieren muss*”), gold and silver appear as its appropriate incarnation (*Inkarnation*). Even while denying its ‘naturalness,’ Marx here invokes the metaphor of the myth of natural solar production (*kristallisieren, Inkarnation*) for that ‘silver or gold money crystal’ which is “not only the product of the process of circulation, but in fact is its only final product” (131).¹³ Thus “the universal product of the social process or the social process itself as a peculiar natural product, a metal hidden in the bowels of the earth and extracted therefrom (131).

The 'peculiarity' of gold as a 'natural product' is its combination of durability, malleability and relative indestructibility, together with its *Schein*, all of which allow it to "appear, in a way, as spontaneous light." "Spontaneous" is only one of many ways to translate the adjective in Marx's *gediegenes Licht*, but all of them emphasize genuine value (*gediegen*, "solid, massy, unmixed, pure, genuine, true, superior"). The relationship of gold to that value is its "shining in a certain way" (*Sie erscheinen gewissermassen*), so that it has a *Schein*, an "appearance" (the meaning can range from "light" to an I. O. U. or paper money. Thus insofar as the power to appear (i. e. to reflect or represent) is understood to be an essential part of the gold itself, we might say that gold offers itself oxymoronically as a *gediegan Schein*, a source of value and the appearance of value combined, as if the gold reflects itself or is its own reflection.

There is another way in which gold "becomes idealized within the process of circulation" (116). For gold properly to circulate as money, it must be stamped with an inscription that indicates its value, and the fact that the inscription is *on the coin* gives it an indisputable authenticity. But in spite of its special natural properties, the process of circulation which *realizes* gold's ability to function as a medium of exchange also *idealizes* its essence. "The circulation of money is a movement through the outside world... In the course of its friction against all kinds of hands, pouches, pockets, purses, money-belts, bags, chests and strong-boxes, the coin rubs off, loses one gold atom here and another one there and thus, as it wears off in its wanderings over the world, it loses more and more of its intrinsic substance. By being used it gets used up... It is clear, says an anonymous writer, that, in the very nature of things, coins must depreciate one by one as a result of ordinary and unavoidable friction" (88). This leads the coin almost instantly to a situation in which it "represents more metal than it actually contains" so that the longer it circulates the greater the discrepancy between its form (as inscribed coin) and its substance, until finally "the body of the coin becomes but a shadow" (89). This inevitable decay—so often compared with the *use* of language and metaphor—assures that the gold coins will become "transformed by the very process of circulation into more or less of a mere sign or symbol" (91).

"But no thing can be its own symbol" (91), and gold will be 'brought to rest' to form a *hoard* or "*Schatz*" (105), which will be substituted for in the process of circulation by "subsidiary mediums" "*subsidiaren Zirkulationsmittel*" (91) which can "serve as symbols of gold coin not because they are symbols made of silver or copper, not because they have certain value, but

only in so far as they have no value.” We thus have a series of substitution (from exchange value of commodities to gold money, sublimated by circulation into its own symbol, first in the form of worn coin, then in the form of subsidiary metal currency) which ends “finally in the form of a worthless token, paper, mere *sign of value*” (94). At this point the state, which at first only impressed its stamp on gold, “seems now to turn paper into gold by the magic of its stamp” (98). And paper money, worthless in itself, can circulate as a signifier of difference, mediating between the relative worth of commodities based on the consumers’ faith in the presence elsewhere of the absent signified whose value is governed by labor value or the system of ‘natural productivity’ governed by the sun. The importance of ‘faith’ in this system of exchange is brought home by Marx’s approving paraphrase of Bishop Berkeley, who asked, “if the denomination of the coin remains, after the metal has gone the way of all flesh, cannot the circulation of commerce still be maintained?” [Werke, 97: “*Wenn die Denomination der Münze beibehalten wird, nachdem ihr Metall den Weg alles Fleisches gegangen, wurde nicht dennoch die Zirkulation den Handels fortbestehn?*”]. Berkeley’s point is that the presence—even elsewhere—of something that is absent from “the circulation of commerce” is unnecessary, since it functions precisely as an absence. With this comment we find ourselves located in a structured system of exchange that needs both absence and faith—the structure of writing:

When a man writes, he is in a structure that needs his absence as its necessary condition (writing is defined as that which can necessarily be read in the writer’s absence), and entails his pluralization. Writers ignore this troubling necessity and desire to record the living act of a sole self—an auto-biography. Whatever the argument of a document, the marks and staging of this resistance are its ‘scene of writing.’ When a person reads, the scene of writing is usually ignored and the argument is taken as the product of a self with a proper name. Writers and readers are thus accomplices in the ignoring of the scene of writing. The accounts of texts are informed by this complicity. (Spivak 19)

Whether we call it “complicity” or “faith,” this newest fable of writing is the rediscovery in our time of a link between absence and writing that is probably as old as the invention of writing as a practice that depends on and exploits.¹⁵

We can now see the importance of “Blake’s” in my title, and in Gleckner’s repeated phrase “Blake’s vision.” After the sterility of a

debased rhetorically wintry age, Blake's voice seems to call out and by its power transform the 'climate' of English poetry into the spring of Romanticism. The imputed power of his authentic word not only names being as a presence, it *calls itself into being* as the authentic utterance of a subject William Blake who says (i. e. writes) "Sing now" and whose voice becomes one with nature, present to us as the natural emanation of a transcendental principle higher even than nature, an epiphany of a permanent presence ordinarily hidden from 'vision', which can be revealed through the poetic word. The poet in this system takes the place of the dazzling absent sun/god, who can both sanction and be *credited* with everything discovered in his verse. Blake's vision is the "golden load" of a treasure which he has produced alchemically from the debased coin of previous poetic discourse, and that is his property—'proper' to him - as the effective agent of transformation. It is a treasure hoard which he has taken out of the value-destroying "circulation" of language or prior discourse, a poetic treasure removed even from the circuit of the natural sun and the seasons ("language *turns*, so to speak, as the earth turns" / Derrida, *Grammatology* 216) and kept elsewhere to prevent decay :

Re-engrav'd Time after Time
Ever in their youthful prime
My Designs (shall still *del.*) unchang'd remain
Time may rage but rage in vain
For above Times troubled Fountains
On the Great Atlantic Mountains,
In my Golden House on high
There they Shine Eternally (480-81)

This is one of Blake's many versions of the system of circulation, and one which contains an interesting change precisely at the point of asserting the permanence of an absent treasure, suggesting perhaps that what the work of art is, is not what it is supposed to be. Instead of presence, we have yet another golden metaphor of presence. Presence itself is preserved by remaining absent. What circulates 'below' the "Golden House on high" are only messengers, Blake's 'messages' that circulate like paper money, their value dependent on faith in the author as autonomous subject and source of value, dependent on the authority of his intentions. Like the sun itself, we cannot see those intentions directly, only the *Schein* of its golden load. The relationship is one for which Locke takes gold as his prime example, where the appearance of gold in its secondary qualities must "depend" on (i. e. "hang from") its "substance" (that which

"stands under"). For Locke, the gap between the essence of a substance and its *Schein* means that we can never know true gold. "For let it be ever so true, that all gold, i. e. all that has the real essence of gold, is fixed, what serves this for, whilst we know not, in this sense, *what is or is not gold*? For if we know not the real essence of gold, it is impossible we should know what parcel of matter has that essence, and so whether *it* be true gold or no" (2, 97).

Added to the uncertainty of the relation between the appearance and the essence of gold is the inevitable slippage between the signifier "gold" and its signified, for "the precise signification of the names of substances will be found not only not to be well established, but also very hard to be so" (2, 114). "That which I mean is this, that these being all but properties, depending on its real constitution, and nothing but powers, either active or passive, in reference to other bodies, no one has authority to determine the signification of the word gold (as referred to such a body existing in nature) more to one collection of ideas to be found in that body than to another: whereby the signification of that name must unavoidably be very uncertain" (2, 116).

Marx provided an alternative to this lack of authority when he observed that as the state, in fixing its mint price, gave "a certain name to a piece of gold," so the state "can turn paper into gold by the magic of its stamp (98). For those involved in the economy of poetry and literary interpretation this function of the state is performed by the literary establishment through its various departments or 'interpretive communities,' which seem to be the agencies that establish the exchange value of the poet's "endless monument" reared against the way of all flesh.¹⁵

De Man has identified as a typical response to the poetic "monument" that practice which he calls 'monumentalizing' in which "the dead are made to have a face and a voice which tells the allegory of their demise and allows us to apostrophize them in our turn. No degree of knowledge can ever stop this madness, for it is the madness of words" If knowledge cannot stop the madness of language itself, what are we to do? "What would be naive is to believe that this strategy .. can be a source of value and has to be celebrated or denounced accordingly" (Shelley" 73, italics added), Either to celebrate or denounce "accordingly" would be to play the same naive game 'of the heart' (*accordare*, from *cor*) which seeks to bring into agreement the play of language and the real world. The high rhetorical tone of de Man's announcement that we must give up the pursuit of literature as a *source, of value* and that we must also renounce

the temptation to denounce, would thus be yet another example of that madness of language. For him to *announce* is rhetorically to *denounce*, to become a 'messenger' (both words come from *nuntius*, 'messenger', and originally meant the same thing) of a different truth, a truth—or inevitability (*toujours déjà*)—of the no-truth of *differance*. A "renounce" is the failure to follow suit in a card game. We might say that de Man has taken up Descartes invitation to *jouer aux cartes*, but failed to follow suit, instead trumping Descartes' ontological suit with that of a 'trickster god' of language who makes and rules (madly) all discourse—the only game in town while we wait for another trump, the last trump that signals the harvest of death. Until the end, he pursued his project to show that the claims of metaphor and symbol, the most privileged of Romantic tropes, can always on closer reading be decomposed into chains of metonymic or causal—associative formations. The attempts of Romantic metaphor to 'carry over' a metaphoric golden load that bridges the gap between the dualisms of subject/object, man/nature, inward/outward, can do so only by hiding its own rhetorical path, passing off as self-sufficient metaphor or symbol a golden load that can always be seen to be a kind of allegory whose 'message' is artificially contrived and sustained.

Relentlessly, he called our attention to the paper money of allegory, that 'other word' which is all we can ever *read*. Paradoxically, such efforts can seem to value the efforts of Romanticism precisely because they so clearly fail to make good their promise, producing instead language that approaches an inevitable limit in self-conscious reflection on its own nature and genesis. In doing so, de Man had to resist even the temptation "to conclude that our own literary modernity has reestablished contact with a 'true' Enlightenment that remained hidden from us by a nineteenth-century Romantic and realist epistemology that asserted a reliable rhetoric of the subject or of representation," since all such "syntagmatic narratives" are themselves "part of the same system as paradigmatic tropes...a correlative of rhetoric and not the reverse" ("Epistemology" 29–30). An "epistemological discipline" can always discover the same gap between faith and knowledge, pointing us towards Paul's truism that "faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen" (Hebrews 11, 1).¹⁶ whether we like it or not, the result will always be "as you like it," with faith our only 'touchstone' for determining the value of the golden load.

AUDREY I do not know that poetical is. Is it honest in deed and word? Is it a true thing?

TOUCHSTONE NO, truly ; for the truest poetry is the most faining, and lovers are given to poetry, and what the swear in poetry may be said, as lovers, they do feign.

The pun on "feign" (to take and to desire) points to the link between lovers and poets and readers that enables them to persuade themselves that they have found the object of their desire, whether it be an "ill-favored thing" or a "golden load." Art and interpretation are rhetoric, and rhetoric is the art of persuasion.

Isaiah answer'd. I saw no God. nor heard any, in a finite organical perception ; but my senses discover'd the infinite in every thing, and as I was then perswaded. & remain confirm'd ; that the voice of honest indignation is the voice of God. I cared not for consequences but wrote.

Then I asked : does a firm perswasion that a thing is so, make it so ?

He replied. All poets believe that it does, & in ages of Imagination this firm perswasion removed mountains ; but many are not capable of a firm perswasion of any thing. (Blake, 38-39)

Notes and References

As always. I wish to acknowledge an unrepayable debt of gratitude to a stimulating and ongoing exchange of ideas and manuscripts with Nelson Hilton and Paul Mann.

1. Blake was 26 when the volume was published ; the "Advertisement" says they were written between the ages of 12 and 20.
2. For example, when he collected his *Poems* in 1768, Gray acknowled-

ledged a large number of 'imitations', all of them notably acceptable according to traditional standards, and some of them so obscure as to suggest ostentation. And he wrote to Edward Bedingfield (*Correspondence*, II. 477) that he "could shew them a hundred more instances, which they never will discover themselves."

Some critics, like Young (*Conjectures on Original Composition*, 1759)

were beginning to protest that the best way to 'imitate' the originality of the renowned ancients was *not* to copy them. But others, like William Duff (*Essay on Original Genius*, 1767), argued that any form of true originality was no longer possible for the modern poet.

3. I discuss these issues at greater length in "The Tropology of Silence in Eighteenth-Century English Blank Verse" *The Eighteenth Century: Theory and Interpretation*, 26. 3 (Fall 1985) 211-238.

4. The geographical / tropological sense of a 'temperate' zone in Europe had already by the time of Rousseau become 'a most banal opposition' (Derrida, *Grammatology* 216). Always accompanied by some dimension of libidinal 'temperance', this aspect was dominant by the end of the century. Thus Mary Wollstonecraft could observe that "the mass of mankind" are "the slaves of their appetites" (133) and speculate that "if from their birth men and women be placed in a torrid zone, with the meridian sun of pleasure darting directly upon them, how can they sufficiently brace their minds...?" (116). "Happy the nations of the moral north!" (1. 64. 1) echoed Byron, far from "that indecent sun" (1. 63. 2) "Where all is virtue, and the

winter season/ Sends sin, without a rag on, shivering forth" (1. 64. 2-3). Freud emphasizes the necessity of mastering both internal and external 'heat' in his famous micturition myth (37),

5. The range of modes of entry extends from the relatively straightforward approach of Pope, who "imitates expressly those which now stand first of the three chief Poets in the kind, Spenser, Virgil, Theocritus" (note to first edition, p. 15 Oxford) through the ironic self-mocking futility of Gray in his first major poem in English, writing "At ease reclined in rustic state" ("Ode on 'the Spring'" (1741) to the heroic ambition of Wordsworth, receiving "assurance of some work/ Of glory" while stretched out at ease in his "green shady place" (3)

6. "Discourse" comes from the Latin verb *discurrere*, to run about, by way of the French *discourir*. The poet's "career" ("a course of continued progress," from *Carraria*, road for vehicles) finds its path already laid out.

7. See Derrida's "White Mythology : Metaphor in the Text of Philosophy" (*Margins*) for an exploration of the 'sun' in the rhetoric of philosophy. Ricoeur

dismisses the exercise as "fantastic extrapolation" (289).

8. This conclusion was to become a commonplace of the eighteenth century. For John Dennis, the natural sun was "a round flat shining Body, of about two foot diameter" but the Cartesian sun, "made or invented" in 'meditation' is "a vast and glorious Body, and the top of all the visible Creation, and the brightest material Image of the Divinity." Blake rewrites the distinction as that between "a round Disk of fire somewhat like a Guinea" and "an Innumerable company of the Heavenly host crying Holy Holy Holy is the Lord God Almighty I question not my Corporeal or Vegetative Eye any more than I would Question a Window (cf. "the clear windows of the morning" in *To Spring*) concerning a Sight I look thro it & not with it" (565 66).

9. Blakean apocalypticists should note that Descartes has here already achieved in meditation an 'uncovering' of the Truth hidden behind the natural sun. Is this the Truth Blake's invented sun Zoa Los/Sol is reaching for?

Los his vegetable hands. Outstretched his right hand branching out in fibrous strength Seizd the Sun. His left hand like dark

roots coverd the Moon And tore them down cracking the heavens across from immense to immense Then fell the fires of Eternity with loud & shrill Sound of Loud Trumpet.

Blake's Presentation of Los as the forger of poetic truth, pounding his anvils to build the 'real' Jerusalem, may be prefigured by Descartes, emphasis on the man-made status of the 'real' sun.

10. My English quotations from Proust are taken from de Man's translation (*Allegories* 13-14). French references are to the Pleiade edition).
11. Coleridge is often credited as the 'source' of this distinction. Todorov's chapter on "The Romantic Crisis" traces it back to Karl Philipp Moritz, though he admits "a certain arbitrariness in this decision" (148).
12. Paul Valéry devines poetry as "an effort by one man to create an artificial and ideal order by means of a material of vulgar origin" (192). This is the 'alchémie du verbe' of Rimbaud which later inspired Breton and his group-
13. Marx uses these figures repeatedly in the *Kritik*. "In its virgin metallic state it holds locked up all the material wealth which lies unfolded in the world

of commodities.....it is the direct *incarnation* of universal labor in its form, and the *aggregate* of all concrete labor in its substance" (103).

14. When Herodotus' *Histories* we find the story of Deioces the Meda a king famous for establishing one of the world's first bureaucracies, and for combining invisibility and absence with writing. First he built his seven-walled city (Ecbatana) in concentric circles, with the innermost wall of gold, for his inner sanctum where he lived and ruled ; then he introduced written communication as his medium of ruling, in order to assure his invisibility. "And when all was built, it was Deioces first who established the rule that no one should come into the presence of the king, but all should be dealt with by the means of messengers : that the king should be seen by no man" (1. 99). Similar stories are told of Kublai Khan.

15. For Pound, to locate the source of value in the interpretive community would amount to that practice of usury which is "contra naturam" (*Kultchur* 281), or false value created *ex nihilo* with nothing 'real' to back it up, with no congruency between sign and referent. But his argument for genuine money (and authentic poetry or art) as a "representa-

tion of something else" (*Prose* 443) simply raises the same problem of the relationship (correspondence, difference) between the metaphor's tenor and vehicle. It must thus evoke precisely that which will always be *absent* from the metaphor or word, inscribed in a system of *difference*. "It is nature, the actual existence of goods, or the possibility of producing them, that really determines the 'economic' capacity of the state (or poem).....Economic habits arise from the nature of things (animal, mineral, vegetable)" (*Prose* 312, 257). In such a system both money and language operate by effacing their own materiality, disappearing (as signifier) when they mediate (as a signified *difference*) between the relative values of commodities. See Andrew Parker for a more detailed discussion of Pound's economic models.

15. "Substance" here translates Paul's *hypostasis* ('that which stands under'). The meaning seems to be either that things without reality in themselves are made real (given "substance") by faith, or that there are realities for which we have no material evidence, whose real existence, we can only know through faith.

Whitman's Presence : Apostrophe, Voice, and Text in Leaves of Grass

TENNEY NATHANSON

Glendower : I can call spirits from the vasty deep.

Hotspur : Why so can I, or so can any man, but will they come
when you do call for them ?

—Henry IV, Part I, III, i

Like many of Whitman's poems, the major new piece in his 1856 edition, "Crossing Brooklyn ferry," is studded with declarations as different reconcile with one another as they are exorbitant. Whitman's penchant for the grand pronouncement, which may strike us as embarrassing, can be troubling as well, since the doctrine thus exuberantly propounded is often difficult to parse into comprehensible form. "Crossing Brooklyn Ferry" is a case in point. Here, we may find rapturous praises of sexuality and the life of the ordinary body, side by side with descriptions of that life which are altogether more tormented. These, in turn, are set against the odd and confusing image of incarnation itself as a rather violent act which creates the body only by "striking" it from a "float forever held in solution" (62).¹ We may find our poet celebrating those moments in which "glories" may be "strung like beads on my smallest sights and hearings" (9), but also the more elusive declaration that the objects glimpsed in the midst of such flux somehow 'furnish (their) parts toward eternity' (131). He praises transience and commands it to continue : "Flow on, river ! Flow with the flood-tide, and ebb with the ebb-tide !" (101). Yet he also declares to the objects of the harbor scene that he and others like him have the power to abrogate all such change : "We descend upon you and all things, we arrest you all."²

Much Whitman criticism has been occupied with the daunting task of working such exuberant but barely compatible declarations into some manageable doctrinal arrangement. We may find various expositors of

“Crossing Brooklyn Ferry”—determined to set the poet’s propositional house-of-cards in order — making paraphrasable sense of the poem by confining their attention to some few of its pronouncements while resolutely ignoring others. Thus Edwin Miller calls the poem “a hedonistic statement of faith” and “a sustained hymn to joy—the joy of the sensuous body”; “a serene meditation on mutability,” content to be “part of the flux it depicts.”³ Yet for James Miller, the poem offers a profound “insight into the world of spiritual unity”; the poem’s “recognition of the existence of a transcendent spirituality,” he says, is its true center.⁴

Both readings, I think, suggest the dangers of applying such doctrinal terms to early Whitman, foundering on the grand assertions he blithely strews about him as he moves through his poem. The poem itself, I shall try to show, makes altogether more mobile and idiosyncratic use of the terms on which such criticism fastens, catching up the poet’s declarations into the illogical but convincing imaginative space in which the tensions among them are subsumed.

For sprinkled among Whitman’s pronouncements concerning the harbor scene and his infrequent evocation of some float held in solution beyond it, we may find suggestions of a more unnerving order. They are all phrased as apostrophes, addressed directly to us. “Who was to know,” our poet asks us in the seventh section of “Crossing Brooklyn Ferry”

what should come home to me ?

Who knows but I am enjoying this ?

Who knows but I am as good as looking at you now, for all you cannot see me ? (89-91)

A similar suggestion, in the poem’s third section, is made in less equivocal terms :

It avails not, neither time or place - distance avails not.

I am with you, you men and women of a generation, or ever so many generations hence,

I project myself, also I return - I am with you, and know how it is. (20-21)

These apostrophes possess an imaginative urgency unsurpassed in Whitman’s work : and the presence they seem to conjure up is perhaps his finest and most disconcerting invention. It is evoked repeatedly in “Crossing Brooklyn Ferry,” appearing liberally in his other early poems as

well. This elusive form is Whitman's most convincing trope of the poet's imperial power : it seems to act directly upon us in a way that poetry ought not be able to. If Whitman's early work bears on us in a manner not ordinarily associated with poetry, the peculiar force it manages to exert is indeed very largely due to this presence the poet's apostrophes announce. This force, in turn, depends on the sense of voice' of present speech, which makes this presence credible - a sense of voice on which Whitman repeatedly insists. Despite his penchant for the doctrinaire pronouncement, the particular "truth" the poet of the early work will tell us will thus be less important than how he will claim to be able to tell it : directly and personally to each of us, whoever and wherever we may be, and whenever we may live.

Such claims, of course, will eventually provoke our scrutiny. The relation of the poet's voice to the text in which it appears is a central and by no means simple feature of Whitman's poetry, suggesting that his grandest trope of power is a trope of pathos and desire as well : there is unavoidable irony in the fact that the poet's direct addresses to us appear in a book, and Whitman himself will worry this problem ceaselessly, denying it or wishing it away. I want, further on, to attend to such awkward difficulties. But first, we should let the poet's voice and presence work on us as Whitman meant them to. Their effects, to say the least, are extreme.

For insofar as the presence announced by the poet's apostrophes can be rendered convincing, Whitman's odd imaginative space is necessarily implied, its conflations of ordinary logical oppositions already accomplished. "Body" and "soul," for example, can no longer comfortably be defined through mutual opposition. At once too vaporous and elusive to be thought of as an ordinary body, yet claiming to impinge on us in the here and now of our actual world with too much quirky specificity to be thought of as a soul, this presence works to efface the very distinction between the material and the ideal from which those terms ordinarily take their meanings. It also elides the distinction between the transitory and the eternal. Speaking from its own particular time and place, this presence seems also the transcend it, projecting itself through intervals of time, as well as space, it thereby works to annul. It can pronounce itself to be "here" and mean everywhere ; it can say it speaks "now" and mean forever. It can also suggest that it comes "personally to you now" (227), as the poet declares in "Starting from Paumanok," and be speaking at once

to everyone ; it exerts a peculiar, centripetal pressure on the individual identities of those it reaches.

This invention has especially unnerved those critics intent on seeing Whitman's poetry as expounding some more stable idea of order than such an elusive form implies. "This suggestion of the poet's physical presence," James Miller remarks with some loss of composure, "perhaps meant to shock us with its novelty, is surely intended to imply the immanence of spiritual union."⁵ Reducing the poem's strangest and most moving assertion to an allegorical status which makes it both banal and trivial, he goes on to describe "Crossing Brooklyn Ferry" in doctrinal terms which would adequately characterize only a later and much lesser mode.⁶

Edwin Miller, intent on viewing the poem as a celebration of the sensuous body, consigns the addresses to us which evoke the protagonist's rather more magical form to a marginal status : they are a kind of touching addendum to the poem's essential burden. By means of them, he suggests, Whitman's own ecstatic hedonism is passed on to others.⁷

The presence announced by Whitman's apostrophes, though, is difficult to regard as simply the emissary of a message concerning healthy bodies : it violates the very laws and limitations to which ordinary bodies are subject. Whitman is indeed intent, as Quentin Anderson points out, on redefining what we might mean by a body ; and in "Crossing Brooklyn Ferry," as elsewhere in his early work, the presence suggested by the poet's apostrophes is Whitman's principal means of this redefinition, obliquely compelling all other versions of the protagonist toward its contours. For the poet of 'Crossing Brooklyn Ferry' is a much edgier celebrant of the body than Edwin Miller suggests. Most of the poem's long sixth section describes the experience undergone by the inhabitant of an ordinary body, a particular person whose interactions with other, independent individuals are neither calm nor assured. These descriptions are hardly sanguine :

It is not you alone who know what it is to be evil,
I am he who knew what it was to be evil,
I too knitted the old knot of contrariety,
Blabbed, blushed, resented, lied, stole, grudged,
Had guile, anger, lust, hot wishes I dared not speak,
Was wayward, vain, greedy, shallow, sly, a solitary committer, a
coward, a malignant person,
The wolf, the snake, the hog, not wanting in me,

The cheating look, the frivolous word, the adulterous wish, not wanting,

Refusals, hates, postponements, meanness, laziness, none of these wanting (69-77)

Miller remarks of this passage only that "the vices of the protagonist establish his ordinariness and his accessibility."⁸ The increasing turbulence of these lines, though, records a torment which refuses such placid disposition. That turbulence is mitigated here only by the speaker's supposed relation to what he describes : these lines claim to record a past experience, and the supersession of the kind of life they record is crucial to the poem.⁹

The tormented catalogues of this section are in fact followed immediately by one of the poet's direct address to us. Projecting himself through time, he thereby attains that peculiar vantage from which the difficult experiences just described may be said to be in the past. The particular, limited individual full of ordinary human needs and desires also disappears, replaced by that form whose way of acting on us, we shall see, is of an entirely different order :

Bloser yet I approach you,

What thought you have of me, I had as much of you—I laid in my stores in advance,

I considered long and seriously of you before you were born. (86-88)

Similar declarations, employing phrases which come in their repetition to seem formulaic, recur at crucial points throughout the poem :

I project myself a moment to tell you—also I return.¹⁰

What is it, then, between us? What is the count of the scores or hundreds of years between us?

Whatever it is, it avails not—distance avails not—distance avails not. (54-56)

These declarations are at once improbable and oddly compelling. We can begin to account for their peculiar force, I think, by appeal to J. L. Austin's notion of performative utterances.¹¹ in the proclamations just quoted, language no longer quite seems to function as mere description. To term these utterances statements, reports of an already existing fact, accounts for none of the slightly spooky feeling they provoke. For the speaker's invisible presence seems to rise up and hover near us precisely as we hear these words. Though it might be suggested that he must

have been here already—we simply didn't realize it until he told us so—I think we feel instead that those very words which announce the speaker's presence also and at once produce it.

Performative utterances, Austin tells us, make something true by virtue of declaring it—"I now," for example, "pronounce you man and wife." They operate, as this single example should suggest and as Austin is careful to stipulate, only in circumstances sanctioned by custom; they may "make something true" only within a cultural matrix of codified institutions and practices.¹²

Whitman's performative aspirations, it should be evident, are altogether more grand. Rather than simply altering somebody's social status, the declarations I have been quoting seem to produce an actual presence by speaking. These proclamations of the poet's presence are indeed the most successful instances of a magical performative power regularly imputed to utterance in both Whitman's poems and tracts on language—a power approaching that of God in Genesis, the power to call things out of the void and produce their presence by speaking their names: "See! steamers steaming through my poems!" (253), Whitman declares in "Starting from Paumanok,"

See, in my poems, old and new cities, solid, vast, inland, with paved streets, with iron and stone edifices, and ceaseless vehicles, and commerce (258)

"(I) have distanced what is behind me for good reasons," he proclaims more programmatically in "Song of Myself," "And call any thing close again when I desire it" (672-73). Whitman's posthumously published "The Primer of Words is largely engaged in propounding a systematic if quirky theory of words and names which serves to justify such performative aspirations.¹³

The poet's declarations of his personal presence, though, attain a peculiar credibility often lacking in his other performatives. The imaginative pressure exerted by these announcements derives, I think, from Whitman's illogical but effective appeal to our experience of ordinary voices. For if we direct our attention to the evident mode of these declarations—to the voice we seem to hear—they reduce to a tautology: what is declared is the speaker's presence; but the very fact that we seem to hear this declaration already implies that someone must be present to make it. Whitman's appeal to our experience of voices is as canny as it is effective: for the poet's utterance seems to compress all space and time into the modest intervals which actual voices can traverse.

Produced by Whitman's slippery appeal to our sense of voices, this presence is to be thought of as no mere trick of words. Thus Whitman suggests, in a passage I already cited, that an acutal body hovers above us :

Who knows but I am as good as looking at you now, for all you cannot see me ? (91)

Made credible by the voice we seem to hear, this body is modeled on the voice as well. It is thus not quite sufficient to suggest, as does Ivan Marki, that Whitman carefully shapes a seemingly oral idiom because this idiom will conjure up an "intimate experience of the poet's person."¹⁴ For the person suggested by the voice and modeled on its apparent traits is no ordinary one—he is altogether remarkable.

Like the voice which announces its presence, this body seems to move through spatial intervals without resistance or delay. It domesticates the space it so effortlessly traverses, making everywhere feel like "here."

It also short-circuits temporal distinctions. This body occupies its own particular present, yet also the future inhabited by its auditors. An oral announcement, Walter Ong reminds us, "exists only when it is going out of existence," only in a particular moment.¹⁵ Whitman's apostrophes, by playing on this fact, seem to produce a body for which all moments are one ; time is pressured toward eternity as simply as our protagonist tells us he is with us "now".

This body also seems to overcome the disturbing multiplicity and independence of persons described in the poem's sixth section. As invisible as the voice which announces and projects its presence, it no longer stands over against us, discrete and separate from ourselves. No longer confined within those bounding surfaces by means of which ordinary bodies appear and come into contact with each other, it can flow not only around us, but also within us :

Now I am curious (.....)

(.....) what is more subtle than this (.....)

Which fuses me into you now, and pours my meaning into you.¹⁶

It works to annul the very difference between persons, already implying the peculiar sort of world in which, as Whitman declares in "Song of Myself," "every atom belonging to me as good belongs to you" (3)

This figure very largely produces the illogical sort of space and time which Whitman celebrates in the poem's more overtly visionary pronouncements concerning the harbor scene. That scene, it is true, is pressured toward similar contours by the poem's grand catalogues as well. Their

elaborate patterns of grammatical suspension and repetition create an insistently centripetal space and time which seem to collapse inward toward the poet. And their careful avoidance of finite predicates renders a scene devoid of independent actions which language would merely depict or represent, instead presenting a passive landscape upon which the poet's words seem to act or exercise performative force. But the emanating presence produced by the poet's addresses to us is Whitman's most convincing means of creating a space and time, and an object world, which have been wholly subsumed by the poet. It makes credible his most exorbitant declarations :

Keep your places, objects than which none else is more lasting ! (125)
We descend upon you and all things, we arrest you all ¹⁷
Not you any more shall be able to foil us, or withhold yourselves
from us,
We use you, and do not cast you aside--we plant you permanently
within us. (128-29)

This body evoked by the voice is conjured up in many of Whitman's other early poems as well, working effects similar to those produced in "Crossing Brooklyn Ferry." So an invisible but earthy presence arises as the poet directly addresses us in "Starting from Paumanok" :

O Death ! O for all that, I am yet of you, unseen, this hour, with
irrepressible love,
Walking New England, a friend, a traveller,
Splashing my bare feet in the edge of the summer ripples, on
Paumanok's sands (212-14)

In "Song of Myself", speech or the poem are indeed declared to *be* the poet's presence and body :

This is the press of a bashful hand.....this is the float and odor
of hair,
This is the touch of my lips to yours this is the murmur of
yearning (378-79)

Such declarations are comprehensible only in light of Whitman's repeated conflation of the poet's body with the voice which announces and seems to produce his presence.

In Whitman's early work such a form comes to preside loosely over other, more local versions of the poet's body, obliquely and illogically compelling the particular figure we see toward the dissolving contours Whitman's apostrophes suggest. The body Whitman celebrates in his

early work has almost always been endowed with the traits of the voice or breath, or of the liquid and vapor with which these are associated. Seeming to effect his endless re-birth through a kind of parthenogenesis, this figure defined by the voice is virtually godlike. If he nonetheless takes trouble to reveal his powers and convey his visionary understanding to us, he does so, it would seem, simply so we may share his marvellous secret.

The tone of Whitman's apostrophes works to confirm just such a generous sense of his motives. These addresses sound for the most part self-confident and forceful, as the poet sweeps aside all possible demurs. At other times, they tease us toward acquiescence with a gently taunting quality :

What is it, then, between us ? What is the count of the scores or hundreds of years between us ? (54-55)

Though the tone of such appeals serves to blur our recognition of the fact, an extravagant economy has nonetheless been set in motion by these apostrophes and their way of working on us. It may be glimpsed in a brief, atypical aside in the fourth section of "Crossing Brooklyn Ferry", an aside which sounds, in comparison with its surroundings, both tentative and wistful. Directly preceded and followed by the sort of self-confident apostrophes I have been describing, this passage consists principally of declarations made from the strange "present" produced by such announcements ; but, atypically, it is not addressed to us :

I loved well those cities,
I loved well the stately and rapid river,
The man and women I saw were all near to me,
Others the same--others who look back on me, because I looked forward to them,
The time will come, though I stop here today and tonight. (50-53)

This economy, these lines make clear, turns on a series of related substitutions or displacements. First, an actual present moment has been, or, will be, relinquished in favor of an envisioned moment, a moment which the poet may here describe in the present tense only with some noticeable strain. Second, a finite figure, lodged in a particular body and caught in a particular place and time, all of which are made to sound temporary and provisional, looks forward rather wistfully to that moment in which we will "presently", as it were, hover in his vaporous form, joining those others engaged in "looking back on" the particular man who here seems so uncomfortable and out of place. Finally, the men

and women aboard the ferry have been, or will be, replaced in the protagonist's attention by his endless audience.

Here, however, the expansiveness and generosity which typify the poet's direct addresses to that audience, suggesting that his relations with us have a wholly altruistic character, are not in evidence. Instead, the poet acknowledges that he has struck a bargain and made a careful investment :

Others the same—others who look back on me, *because* I looked forward to them

The specifically envisioned repayment of attention here briefly foregrounded lies at the heart of all Whitman's transactions with his intensely imagined future audience. That the poet is striking an imaginative bargain with futurity is confirmed by his later resort to an overtly economic metaphor to describe his relation to us :

What thought you have of me, I had as much of you—I laid in my stores in advance (87)

The benefit of this investment derives from the peculiar "you" with whom the bargain has been struck, a "you" whose paradoxical contours arise precisely through such apostrophes as this one—a "you" made to seem both immediate and totally inclusive. The poet, Whitman's tone implies, is near "you", and "you", are near him yet "you" are, or is, everyone. If "you" pay as much attention to him as he does to "you", then his stores have indeed been laid in wisely : his rate of return is directly proportionate to the size of his audience.

Yet if we come back from this later line to the poem's fourth section, we can note not only the possible advantage of such an imagined bargain, but also its tenuous status and the consequent vulnerability of the figure who envisions it. For our poet here hovers suspended, in two different forms, between what the poem invites us to call his past present and his future present, and perhaps either was or will be, but is not "now" quite near anyone. The awkwardness of the syntax and the tentative tone make us aware of how dependent this figure is, for all his powers, on the concluding of his bargain, the participation of his audience in this oxymoronic moment of "looking (back and forward) on."

This precarious economy, though, slips out of sight whenever our poet addresses us directly. For his apostrophes seem to produce the eternal moment he here envisions with such difficulty ; and they imply a 'presence

which can diffuse itself by simply speaking, a figure which is master of the very encounter and scene on which the poet here seems to depend.

A line later deleted from the eighth section of "Crossing Brooklyn Ferry" may therefore manage to strike us as outrageous without quite being surprising. For the economy glimpsed in Whitman's aside suggests itself more generally in his work in terms of the unsettling problem of the poetry's own mode. We may thus find Whitman carefully circumscribing the sort of encounter which we are to imagine as taking place between ourselves and our poet. The crucial, later-deleted line is the final one, which, as it were, wards off a misunderstanding which might have dangerous consequences :

We understand, then, do we not ?

What I promised without mentioning it, have you not accepted ?

What the study could not teach—what the preaching could not accomplish is accomplished, is it not ?

What the push of reading could not start is started by me personally, is it not ? (98-100)

Another, similar suggestion persists in all versions of the poem, also working to undermine our notion that the protagonist and his words persist only in the form of a text we are reading :

Consider, you who peruse me, whether I may not in unknown ways be looking upon you ! (112)

These pronouncements regularly risk provoking the very disbelief they urge us to suspend. In "So Long !", for example, Whitman proclaims :

Camerado ! This is no book,

Who touches this, touches a man (53-54)¹⁸

Such declarations are startling and insistent enough to suggest that Whitman's supreme fiction is perhaps the myth of his poetry's own mode. They are matched by admissions that the poet's magical way of acting on us would be threatened by this seemingly accidental and avoidable possibility that his utterance might be entrapped in a text or book. So in an early version of 'A Song for Occupations' the poet declares :

This is unfinished busines with me . . . how is it with you ?

I was chilled with the cold types and cylinder and wet paper between us.

I pass so poorly with paper and types..... I must pass with the contact of bodies and souls.¹⁹

Writing, of course, does not attest to the poet's presence : it repeats words spoken in another place and time, and offers us only the

representations of speech and the personal presence speech implies. Texts do not project writers to readers, creating a mythical place and moment which abrogate space and time. Writing and reading must be ruled out of the poet's imaginative universe, among other reasons, because they fail to effect such a magical emanation.

But we might profitably puzzle a bit longer over the properties of writing as characterized by Whitman. We should note not only the differences he spells out between writing and the voice, but also the odder intertwining of the traits assigned to writing and the powers ascribed to the poet's utterance, an intertwining which Whitman obliquely suggests but also seeks to discredit. This intertwining will reduce itself, at last, to a truism: *Leaves of Grass*, after all, is a book, however strenuously Whitman may work to make us hear a voice emerging from it. This truism, though, is less important than Whitman's tortuous evasions, which suggest both how deeply committed he is to his trope of voice, and how complex the relation of that voice is to the writing which, at first, seems simply to threaten it.²⁰

Texts, of course, do possess considerable powers of diffusion of duplication. But the mere representations produced by writing, Whitman often stresses, lack the active powers of living things, and more especially of the living presence to which the poet's voice attests, a presence everywhere busy touching us, pouring itself and its words into us, or blowing its rejuvenating breath into our parched interiors. Thus Whitman repeatedly denigrates representations, reminding us of their inertia. In such characterizations, writing becomes a crucial metonymy for representations in all their guises. So in "A Song for Occupations," he teasingly reminds us of the limitations of writing and representations by lending ironic credence to an impossibility:

When the script preaches instead of the preacher (.....)

When I can touch the body of books, by night or by day, and when they touch my body back again (...)

I intend to reach them my hand, and make as much of them as I do of men and women like you. (145, 147, 151)²¹

Even such dismissive characterization are sometimes couched in tropes which suggest an odd imaginative urgency. Thus books and writing are associated not merely with inertia, but with death - a death from which the poet of *Leaves of Grass* would somehow miraculously escape: "And in libraries I lie as one dumb, a gawk, or unborn, or dead," Whitman declares in "Whoever You Are Holding Me Now in Hand":

But just possibly with you on a high hill (...)
Here to put your lips upon mine I permit you (16, 17, 19)

But such denigrations of writing, even at their most urgent, are less revealing than another aspect of Whitman's extended invective against this mode. Sometimes faulted because it lacks the powers of the voice, writing is elsewhere inveighed aganist because it manages to exert an exorbitant force which ought not to belong to it, which captivates us despite its supposedly illusory or illicit character.

In such diatribes, Whitman focuses with particular urgency on writing's power of repetition. Sometimes viewed as simply impotent, the repetitions effected by writing are then seen as pernicious. Whitman's already odd trope of writing as not merely inert but dead, in such characterizations, grows truly startling. For writing comes to exercise a kind of necromantic power : the illusory repetition of speech worked by texts is figured as ghostly or vampiric. Bewitched by those no longer alive, the living do their work, as Whitman suggest in his 1856 Preface, "pressing the noses of dead books upon themselves and upon their country"²² In Whitman's rather grisly anthropomorphism here, texts weigh on us like corpses. And if he declares in "Scng of Myself" that, in reading books' we feed on the merely spectral—"nor look through the eyes of the dead... nor feed on the spectres in books" (35)—these spectral presences, which repeat themselves only by virtue of our perverse coperation, seem to feed on us as well, exercising a power that is truly ghoulish.

Whitman elsewhere accords such bewitching capacities to all manner of representations. Images, of course, are eminently detachable form what they represent, bearing an inherent capacity for duplication which living things do not possess. In Whitman's more urgent imagining, they also divert our attention from the natural objects of which they should serve to remind us, but whose places they seem always eager to usurp. In "Respondez" ! a vitriolic diatribe against a culture perversely infatuated with representations, the seductive power of books is a crucial instance of this fetishism of the image :

Let nothing but love—songs, pictures, statues, elegant works, be permitted to exist upon the earth ! (...)

Let shadows be furnished with genitals ! Let substances be deprived of their genitals ! (...)

Let books take the place of trees, animals rivers, clouds ! (40, 51, 59,)²³

Whitman sometimes accords representations an even more startling power, a power of which those ominously-equipped shadows already give some hint. He will suggest, for example, that models of the human form can affect the physiology of babies about to be born, the powers of the representation not simply bewitching our attention, but insinuating themselves into the very act of procreation. Attractive statues will help produce attractive babies, while caricatures will lead to human deformities :

Exaggerations will be revenged in human physiology Clean and vigorous children are jetted and conceived only in those communities where the models of natural forms are public very day. (1855 Preface)²⁴

And I say that clean-shaped children can be jetted and conceived only where natural forms prevail in public, and the human face and form are never caricatured("Says", 12) ²⁵

The power Whitman ascribes to texts and representations in such invectives suggests a reaction which is very nearly phobic. We may account for the urgency of such imaginings, I think, by noting that in these passages the powers attributed, in perverse form, to writing and representations have an uncomfortable affinity to those supposedly quite different powers exercised by the poet's voice and presence. Like the poet's presence, texts and representations may reproduce themselves endlessly. More magically, in Whitman's exorbitant imagery, they may impinge directly on the world of living creatures with remarkable force, a force approaching that accorded to the poet's presence and his performative powers. These similarities, and more especially the fact that Whitman not only admits but exaggerates the powers of writing and representations, may suggest that the appearance of the poet's voice in a text is neither incidental nor wholly damaging. But his insistence on the perverse or illicit character of those powers serves to ward off, as it were, a fatal confusion to which we might otherwise fall prey : not a confusion, exactly, between writing and ordinary voices, or between representations and ordinary presences - such a confusion is neither likely nor damaging to the poet's project—but between writing and the poet's mythic voice, between representations and his perfectly iterable presence. For these supposedly wholly different entities are uncomfortably near to virtual identity.

Perhaps the clearest evidence of this disturbing relation is the fact that, while Whitman insistently disavows the role of writing in "Crossing Brooklyn Ferry," all the powers attributed to the poet's voice in fact

perfect themselves through writing. The poet's voice does not, as Whitman would have it, appear in a text by accident or incidentally. It achieves its mythic power, exceeding the capacities of ordinary voices, precisely by helping itself to the resources of a writing it must deny.

The point, I suppose, is an obvious one ; but it bears a bit of spelling-out since Whitman's insistence that he projects himself to us simply by speaking works to make it hard to see.

Actual voices, of course, have limited powers of diffusion. But the voice which augments itself with writing can produce itself everywhere, announcing itself wherever it finds a reader, coming to occupy a location which is wholly ambiguous. The strangely spaceless space of "Crossing Brooklyn Ferry" arises largely through this textual circumstance.

The apparent ability of Whitman's mythic voice to diffuse itself through time arises more obviously through recourse to a text : only the voice which has helped itself to writing speaks eternally.

The vaporous body which may fuse or pour itself into us is also created through Whitman's canny manipulation of a text. Actual voices, of course, project themselves from bodies which remain finite and bounded. In Whitman's text, however, there is no body, but only the haunting illusion of an unlocatable voice. Paradoxically, the voice we seem to hear as we read, unencumbered with an actual body, may therefore define an implicit body wholly modeled on its own characteristics. The presence who addresses us in Whitman's poems comes into being only through the text, which effaces a particular body in order to effect its resurrection in idealized form.

Despite such benefits, writing must nevertheless be ruled out of the imaginative universe of Whitman's early work. For it perfects the powers of the poet's voice and body, but only as the obverse of what they are declared to be : it produces not an actual presence but a representation, the trope of a presence, or the presence of a trope. All Whitman's diatribes against writing serve finally to spell this out, consigning the poet's magical form to the very status from which appeals to the voice work to exempt it.

The recognition thus persistently evaded by Whitman's trope of voice is, as I noted earlier, in some literal sense nothing but a truism. But it is less important to an understanding of Whitman to record this truism than to acknowledge and lend adequate weight to the fact of how deeply the poet is committed to warding it off.

Repeatedly in his early work, Whitman indeed attempts to legitimize the presence modeled on the voice as well as the performative powers this presence seems to dispose, by means of a grand and preposterous reversal or crossing of categories which very largely structures his imaginative universe. As unlikely as it is insistent, this reversal seeks to name language itself as the key to presence, and to explain away whatever violates the ideality language suggests by terming it merely phenomenal. In a crucial displacement, Whitman regularly assigns the term "representation" to objects as they ordinarily appear, standing over against the poet and foiling his attempts at mastery; in Whitman's characterization, such objects fail to manifest themselves fully—they merely "indicate" what they are, as the poet puts it in "Crossing Brooklyn Ferry," remaining veiled behind their opaque surfaces. Whitman's trope of the actor condemned to play "the same old role" (84), in the ferry poem, exerts a similar pressure on our conception of the relation between selves and their ordinary bodies. Words or names, by contrast, are declared not to be arbitrary representations or designations of objects, but to possess an intrinsic, organic connection to their otherwise inaccessible interiors or essences. Such organic names do not merely comprehend, but exercise mastery over the things they name. This performative power, programmatically declared in "The Primer of Words," is mimed in the poet's grandest catalogues. In Whitman's imaginative reversal, the terms representation and presence, as these are more usually employed to describe the relation between words and things, have thus changed their places, obscuring the operation which brings the poet's ideal forms into being: the world has become the mere sign of itself; the sign, by contrast, produces *the world itself*.²⁶

The presence announced by the poet's apostrophes, who transcends the limited body mired in space and time which poorly represents him, is at once Whitman's most exorbitant and convincing instance of this reversal. "I and mine do not convince by arguments, similes, rhymes," the poet declares in "Song of the Open Road": "We convince by our presence" (138-39). But this imperial figure becomes what Whitman will be willing to mean by a presence precisely by virtue of being what we would term a representation. The very notion of a perfected presence, of a self devoid of all compromising contingency and particularity who will redeem change and dispersion, arises through the iterability of representation, a movement perfected in Whitman's apostrophes and the curious, Möbius-strip-like repetitions these effect.²⁷ Whitman's trope of voice, in such a

context, may be seen as working to make this reversal credible : exercising all the powers of representations, the figure produced by the voice, our experience of ordinary voices implies, is nonetheless a literal, living presence. Writing, conversely, undoes this grand reversal, naming the sign as sign, the poet's presence as a representation.

We may thus locate the poet's transfiguring presence, and the imaginative economy which produces him, within the tradition both traced and displaced in the work of Jacques Derrida. Derrida's meditations on the uncomfortable intertwining of ideal presence and representation, of the "thing itself" divorced from its accidents and the sign in its iterability, can help us name both the pattern of Whitman's ambitions and the overdetermined structures that make those ambitions endlessly elusive. It is just such an unstable economy that I have so far attempted to describe.

Such a generalized conclusion, though, would make the mistake of skewering Whitman's work on an imaginative structure that inhabits the poetry, but does not of course quite determine or account for its local movements. Rather than coming to rest with the truism that Whitman's work can never quite perform what it claims to, we need instead to follow the play of possibility and impossibility through his poetry, tracing the poet's shifting stances toward his own dilemmas and difficulties. For Whitman's poems do not merely illustrate his claims concerning performative speech and the poet's presence, but repeatedly re-enact and re-inflect them ; the poet's voice and presence exist for us as a meditation on their own possibility, a meditation always shadowed by the finally unrealizable status of the poet's claims.

This complex play of possibility and impossibility, Jonathan Culler suggests, is at work in all lyric apostrophe.²⁸ For apostrophe, Culler argues, always marks the lyric's desire to transcend a merely representational mode : it both enacts and calls into question the vatic pretensions of lyric speech. This astute description of the ambitions at work in apostrophe is especially important for a consideration of Whitman's addresses to his audience. Culler's account can help us to see Whitman's exorbitant claims as oddly exemplary : for lyric apostrophe, he notes, typically aims to "substitute a temporality of discourse for a referential temporality," working to produce "a play of presence governed not by time but by poetic power."²⁹ Culler also insists on the scandalous quality such of ambitions, a scandal that helps explain the embarrassing provoked by Whitman's claims to dispose us simply by addressing us. But most

important, Culler goes on to suggest that such moments of apostrophic speech are characteristically *about* the very scandal they perpetrate and the embarrassment they provoke : they are the crucial site in which the lyric stages its own ambitions. So Culler invites us to attend to "the complex play of mystification and demystification at work in the neutralization of time through reference to the temporality of writing."³⁰ His account thus warns us against considering the embarrassment of apostrophe as a sign of the lyric poet's supposed naivete : for he argues that the very scandal of such moments forces us "to read apostrophe as sign of a fiction which knows its own fictive nature."³¹ Yet at the same time, he insists, apostrophes trouble us because they strain against the very distinction they also necessarily recall : they put into play the boundaries between the real and the fictive, provocatively denying the disjunction they also rediscover.

This scandalous quality of apostrophe is of course crucial to Whitman's addresses to us. For our poet, as we have seen, repeatedly insists that he hovers near us as we consider his creation ; he claims to escape the confines of the very works that have produced him. The provocative quality of such gestures, Culler reminds us, is hardly an index of naive self-mystification : Whitman's apostrophes are a complex site in which the poet's claims for language are always both asserted and called into question ; in which what Derrida names logocentrism or the myth of the sign is at once enacted and inscribed. Our task is thus to accent this play of mystification and demystification in Whitman's addresses to us appropriately : granted that such moments are not merely mystified, we need to ask what sort of stake they have in the mystifications they set in motion, and how they encounter whatever works to demystify them.

There are of course no final answers to such questions : for Whitman re-stages this central scene in his poetry endlessly, inflecting it differently not only in different poems but at different points in his career. But in his early editions, Whitman characteristically confronts demystification with anxiety and melancholy ; such responses are a kind of counterpoint to the expansive, self-confident exuberance with which the poet's presence is typically proclaimed, suggesting the importance of a canny but precarious movement of self-mystification in his work. For Whitman's poems are pressured repeatedly by doubts about the working of their language, hovering over such equivocations furtively but obsessively. Exploring such problems as Whitman's trope of mode and the peculiar status of the poet's presence, we may thus perhaps recover the odd combination of exuberance

and pathos, of *grandeur* and peculiar poverty, which defines this poet. For Whitman's imaginative project depends largely on his making credible a tenuous and barely conceivable mode of communication – a mode which would convey the poet's actual presence to us as easily as representations are disseminated by ordinary writing.³²

The utterly tenuous nature of this possibility not only reveals itself in Whitman's outlandish, explicit denials that his poems make use of writing; it also hovers in his most strongly affecting local pronouncements, troubling them and lending them a mobile, divided tone. The ambiguity of such pronouncements, which for all their *grandeur* and seeming self-assurance are also full of wit and wistfulness, at times suggesting a pathos approaching despair, is crucial to Whitman's greatness: it saves him from being the merely programmatic poet – however grand and visionary – he has sometimes been said to be.³³ No poet perhaps makes greater claims for the performative powers of language than Whitman; yet his best poems are full of moments in which the bravado of his declarations passes over very delicately into a more quizzical and vexed awareness. The pathos which haunts such declarations almost always turns on the rarely acknowledged but scarcely negligible circumstance that the poems, while they declare themselves as present utterance, in fact are written. Focusing on the role played by writing in Whitman's declarations, we may glimpse language and the poet falling back into the very world of ordinary, limited persons they seek to transfigure, inscribing their own performative gestures in a space they do not command and cannot redeem.

At their best, these declarations hover quite movingly between performance and desire. So in an address to us from "Song of Myself" which I quoted earlier, the performative force depends on Whitman's typically exorbitant conflation of word and object, of language and actual presence, a conflation made credible by our sense of voice:

This is the press of a bashful hand .. this is the float and odor of hair,

This is the touch of my lips to yoursthis is the murmur of yearning (378-79)

But we may hear a certain pathos here as well, arising as we sense the distance between these words and what they name, between the pronouncement and the presence it suggests or tropes, but cannot produce.

Whitman's tentative idiom here in part expresses the typical furtiveness of his desire; but it suggests as well the tenuous nature of the poet's claims to performative power, the longing of this language to be more than language.

The frequently amorous, tender quality of such announcements suggests the personal pressures at work in them, and the need they imaginatively fulfill. Such declarations almost always have a certain poignancy. There is frequently a simultaneous insistence on both the presence of the poet's actual body and the disembodying effected by the text. This disembodying, it is true, permits the poet to appear in his elusive and irresistible form. Yet this perfecting of the poet's presence at once renders impossible what it assures; it empowers desire only by dissolving the body in which desire might be fulfilled. A certain melancholy thus lurks in an encounter imagined in "So Long!" :

Camerado! This is no book,
Who touches this, touches a man,
(Is it night? As we here together alone?)
It is you hold, and who holds you,
I spring from the pages into your arms—decease calls me forth.
(53-57)³⁴

These declarations of the poet's presence also have a paradoxical, and ultimately impoverishing, effect on the "you" to whom the poet speaks. I noted earlier the benefits of the sort of "you" Whitman's apostrophes concoct. Announcing themselves as a voice but diffusing themselves through writing, these pronouncements conjure a "you" simultaneously intimate and universal: as unique as the single addressee the intimate tone implies, yet as numerous as the audience reached by his text:

O my comrade!
O you and me at last—and us two only ("Starting from Paumanok,"
266)

A certain assurance accrues to the figure who has mastered such a sleight-of-hand, the assurance of the man with countless lovers. Such assurance often lends the poet's overtures an air of relaxed confidence, and a slightly teasing, flirtatious quality, virtually unique to Whitman:

This hour I tell things in confidence,
I might not tell everybody but I will tell you. ("Song of Myself,"
387-88)

This declaration indeed makes its very trick of mode the occasion for its flirtatious innuendo : Whitman's election of "you", a selection made from a field of "everybody," is a seductive gesture which turns on the magical transformation of the text which everyone may read into the tender and intimate voice which addresses a single, chosen partner.

Such flirtatious gestures are already rather remarkably sophisticated in their manipulation of tone and of the curious possibilities of Whitman's fictive mode. Yet the assured, seductive quality which turns on this metamorphosis of writing into speech has its sadder underside. It suggests itself as we sense the poet's voice falling back into the writing from which these accents emerge : for writing drains this "you" of its specificity and renders poignant the intimate tone of the implied speaking voice. The anonymity of this generic "you" indeed hovers within such locutions, for all their more confident and winsome qualities : it leaves the poet face to face with his book, imagining a lover he has not only never seen, but has turned into the faceless features of his audience of readers.

Whitman's conjuring tricks with the mode of his poems serve to effect an assured and imperial relation with an endless audience of intimates and lovers ; yet the writing which permits such feats not only reminds us that this figure is a trope, but suggests that even this trope of a presence depends on us for its very existence. Writing thus returns this poet and his poems to the very world of particular, contingent relations they seek to efface. Said to be diffused by a voice, the protagonist's ideal form is resurrected only as we read his text ; we create the imperial figure the voice seems to announce, the presence which seems to produce itself through an act of parthenogenesis.

Very rarely, Whitman acknowledges this precarious relation and its crucial role. In such moments, the writing and reading usually banished from the poet's universe are openly admitted into its confines : they serve as a sign of the poet's dependence on other people. We may find such admissions most widely in Whitman's *Calamus* sequence, which, as Anderson reminds us, celebrates particular rather than imperial affections ;³⁵ they dominate the poem "Full of Life Now" which appears there :

Full of life, sweet-blooded, compact, visible,
I, forty years old the Eighty-third Year of the States,
To one a century hence, or any number of centuries hence,
To you, yet unborn, these, seeking you.

When you read these, I, that was visible, am become invisible :
Now it is you, compact, visible, realizing my poems, seeking me,
Fancying how happy you were, if I could be with you, and become
your lover ;

Be it as if I were with you Be not too certain but I am now with
you.³⁶

Here the poet's "seeking is acknowledged, as is the interval between the moment in which he writes and those moments in which we may read him, a gap which makes all such seeking furtive and wistful. And the communion with the poet's audience regularly declared as fact is here acknowledged as a trope, suggesting the melancholy of all such indirection and displacing it only slightly by assigning it primarily to reader rather than poet. Whitman does reassert his performative powers briefly at the poem's very end. But the performative claims cued by Whitman's always eerie "now" are rendered wholly tenuous by the equivocating phrase in which this word appears, as well as by the renunciation of all such literal powers in what precedes.

These equivocations are moving in themselves ; but they acquire their peculiar resonance through contrast to the grand imaginative myth they both allude to and disperse.

We may hear such doubts for the most part only in the undertones which haunt the poet's declarations ; and only, as it were, as we remove ourselves from the sphere defined by his voice and its emanation. We may sense the poet's need for us in "Crossing Brooklyn Ferry," despite what he declares, though it lurks far behind the leading tone :

It avails not, neither time or place - distance avails not,
I am with you, you men and women of a generation, or over so
many generations hence (20-21)

The imperial figure who dominates "Crossing Brooklyn Ferry" begins to dissolve as we think about reading these lines. For we may then *hear* a somewhat subdued but finally urgent entreaty here : a plea for our assent, our cooperation in this scene by virtue of which the poet may perhaps become the trope of what he declares himself already literally to be—the omnipotent figure capable of such a transfiguring act.

We may sense the poet's hesitancy and need, as well, as we re-read these lines from "Song of Myself" :

This hour I tell things in confidence,
I might not tell everybody but I will tell you. (387-88)

Whitman's mythic voice speaks always in a space which it has rendered near, and to those compelled into the circle of its intimacy ; but it speaks in a text which disperses that space again, to other people toward whom its words may echo, but whom it can never master or subsume.

Notes and References

1. Since my aim here is to define an imaginative economy central to Whitman's early work but relatively incidental to the later poetry, I quote from the earliest published versions of the poems cited unless otherwise noted ; quotations from "Crossing Brooklyn Ferry" refer to the text of the 1856 edition, where the poem is entitled "Sun-Down Poem." See *Leaves of Grass : A Textual Variorum of the Printed Poems*, ed. Sculley Bradley, et. al. (New York: New York University Press, 1980), I, 217-25. For convenience, line numbers cited in the body of my paper refer to the standard "deathbed" edition : see for example *Leaves of Grass : Comprehensive Reader's Edition*, ed. Harold Blodgett and Sculley Bradley (New York New York University Press, 1965), hereafter cited as *CRE* ; my inclusion of subsequently-deleted lines, as well as Whitman's tinkering

with lineation, accounts for the occasional discrepancy between the number of lines quoted and the line numbers cited. In view of Whitman's fondness for ellipses in the 1855 edition, I put brackets around my own to indicate elisions in the passages I quote.

In what follows, I make use of "Crossing Brooklyn Ferry" as my specimen text. The poet's apostrophes to his audience occur with particular frequency there and perform a function central to the poem ; "Crossing Brooklyn Ferry" thus offers a condensed, explicit version of an imaginative structure evident elsewhere in Whitman's early work in more diffuse form. My account of the sort of transformation Whitman seeks to negotiate in the poem is very much indebted to Quentin Anderson's analysis of "Crossing Brooklyn Ferry," as well as to his other published remarks on

Whitman and my conversations with him. See especially *The Imperial Self; An Essay in American Literary and Cultural History* (New York : Alfred A. Knopf, 1971), pp. 88-165.

2. This line, one of a number which follow line 125 of the *CKE* version, is dropped from the poem in 1881.
3. See Edwin Haviland Miller, *Walt Whitman's Poetry: A Psychological Journey* (New York : New University Press, 1968), pp. 199-201.
4. See James E Miller, Jr., *A Critical Guide to Leaves of Grass* (Chicago : The University of Chicago Press, 1957), pp. 80-81.
5. James Miller, *Critical Guide*, p. 86.
6. In keeping with such a reading, James Miller assigns the addresses to us which assert the poet's presence a merely didactic function. They serve to inform the reader, through a disconcertingly physical trope, of a "mystical" or "spiritual" truth which the poet has supposedly apprehended in some other, more ethereal form: "The reader's feeling, at the end of the poem, that he and the poet are interfused represents his insight into the world of spiritual unity" (*Critical Guide*, p. 80). A more tantalizing account of Whitman's apostrophes is offered by Richard Collins, who suggests that they allow the poet to re-create himself, transcending time and space, by impinging on his audience. Oddly enough, though, Collins goes on to assert that Whitman means to "by-pass" language, which he supposedly sees as arbitrary and inadequate. The apostrophes, that is, are again reduced to a kind of didactic function, becoming the supposedly deficient trope of some independently-arrived-at vision. But these addresses imply a mode of presence which would otherwise be difficult to imagine. See Richard Collins, "Whitman's Transcendent Corpus: 'Crossing Brooklyn Ferry' to History," *Calamus* 19 (May, 1980), 24-39.
7. See Edwin Miller, *Walt Whitman's Poetry*, p. 209.
8. Edwin Miller, *Walt Whitman's Poetry*, p. 205.
9. Anderson stresses the fact that the poem's sixth section depicts a kind of life which must be repudiated and from which the poet has supposedly already escaped; he does not focus on the role which the poet's apostrophes to us play in this escape to a less tormented mode of interaction. See *Imperial Self*, pp. 122-124 and 135-36.
10. This line, which follows line 49 of the *CKE* version, is omitted in 1881.

11. See J.L. Austin, *How to Do Things with Words*, 2nd ed., ed. J.O. Urmson and Marina Sbisa (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1975), especially pp. 1-66. In *Language and Style in Leaves of Grass* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1983), C. Carroll Hollis demonstrates persuasively that Whitman's use of performatives or "illocutionary acts" is a key element of the poet's early style, also detailing the virtual disappearance of such speech-acts in the poems composed after 1860, a disappearance which helps explain the loss of intensity in Whitman's later work. Hollis sees performative utterance as part of the poet's rhetorical or persuasive machinery, discussing its effect on Whitman's audience: through illocutions, Whitman endows his printed poems with something of the immediacy and force of lectures or oral performances. My own interest in Whitman's performatives is rather different: rather than looking at the whole range of Whitman's illocutions, I concentrate on those "declaratives" which seem to produce the poet's presence; and these declaratives, I argue, rather than simply increasing Whitman's persuasive powers, redefine our very sense of the poet, and indeed his sense of himself.

12. Austin therefore classed "writing a poem" among the mere "etiologies" of performative utterance: performatives in fictions are not "seriously" meant (see *How to Do Things with Words*, p. 9). Of the many critics who have formulated versions of speech-act theory applicable to literature, Richard Ohmann offers perhaps the most succinct and useful rule transformation: while in social discourse "we assume the real world and judge the felicity of the speech acts," in a fictive context "we assume the felicity of the speech acts and infer a world." (Quoted in Stanley E. Fish, "With the Compliments of the Author: Reflections on Austin and Derrida," *Critical Inquiry* 8 [1982], 696.) Whitman's performatives and the peculiar sort of presence they seem to conjure up are central to the early poems: the world these announcements force us to "infer" is one they have dramatically re-shaped. Yet Whitman's repeated insistence that he literally hovers near us as we encounter his poems puts peculiar pressure on our sense of this world as "fictive": the poet's presence is said to overflow the very boundaries of the work by means of which it appears. The "conventional procedures" invoked by Whitman's

performatives are indeed those of the shaman, who masters actual presences by intoning their names; see Anderson, *Imperial Self*, p. 163.

The vexed relation among the "normal," the "conventional," and the "fictive" in performative utterance is explored in the by-now-infamous exchange between Jacques Derrida and John R. Searle. See Derrida, "Signature Event Context," *Glyph* 1 (1977), 172-97; Searle, "Reiterating the Differences: A Reply to Derrida," *Glyph* 1 (1977), 198-20; and Derrida "Limited Inc," "Glyph" 2 (1977), 162-254. Derrida's probing of the relation between oral and written performatives is especially useful in relation to Whitman's pronouncements, which appear in a text whose existence the poet seeks to deny.

13. See "The Primer of Words," in *Daybook and Notebooks*, ed. William White (New York: New York University Press, 1978), 3:728-57.

14. Ivan Marki, *The Trial of the Poet: An Interpretation of the First Edition of Leaves of Grass* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1976), p. 26. Here, as elsewhere, Marki stresses Whitman's oral style and the fact that it is meant to imply the poet's personal presence. He does not deal, though, with the

rather extraordinary qualities this presence seems to possess.

15. Walter J. Ong, S.J., *Interfaces of the Word: Studies in the Evolution of Consciousness and Culture* (Ithaca, N. Y.: Cornell University Press, 1977), p. 136. Ong's praise of the voice and its immediacy, and his stress on the inadequacy of writing as a substitute for the voice, may remind one of Whitman's own pronouncements.
16. Lines 92, 96, and 97. In the portion of line 96 I have elided, Whitman implies that the agency which can fuse the poet's vaporous form into his future auditors might also act through his finite body: "what is more subtle than this which ties me to the woman or man that looks in my face." He thus illogically seeks to endow the particular man who rides the ferry with the apparent powers of the figure modeled on the voice.
17. This line, one of a group which follows line 125 of the *CRE* version, is dropped in 1881.
18. I quote here from the 1867 text, which except for punctuation is identical to *CRE*. In the original 1860 version, the "Camerado!" which makes these lines a direct address is absent.
19. These lines are part of a group which begin the poem in 1855;

they are replaced by the *CRE* opening in 1881.

20. Jacques Derrida's work on the history of the opposition between writing and the voice, the values assigned to these terms, and the intertwining which confounds such valorizations has obvious bearing on what follows and has been central to my thinking about Whitman. See Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, trans. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1976), especially pp. 95-268. Derrida's examination of "expression" and "indication" in Husserl is also relevant: see *Speech and Phenomena, and Other Essays on Husserl's Theory of Signs*, trans. David B. Allison (Evanston, Ill.: Northwestern University Press, 1973).
21. *CHE* version. Line 147 is added in 1856; the direct address in line 151 is introduced in 1860.
22. *CkE*, p. 735.
23. This atypically desperate and bitter poem disappears from *Leaves of Grass* after 1871.
24. *CRE*, p. 722.
25. The poem is excluded from *Leaves of Grass* after 1871. *CRE*, pp. 598-600, reprints the original 1860 text.
26. Far from being peculiar to Whitman, this reversal might be

said to underlie idealism. As Derrida has it, the sign give birth, at one and the same moment, to the possibility of that ideal, unchanging "presence" to which it seems merely to refer, and to the notion that opaque, shifting appearances poorly "represent" that presence, indicating it only by separating us from it. See for example *Grammatology*, p. 312. Whitman's rather desperate urge for mastery though, comports with his exorbitant investment in the possibility that language might literally command and produce such ideal presences.

27. Compare Derrida's formulations of the relation between all ideal contents and this capacity for repetition which inheres in the sign or representation: by virtue of its iterability, the sign produces the ideality to which it seems to refer; see *Speech and Phenomena*, pp. 9 and 52. In "Crossing Brooklyn Ferry," Whitman's apostrophes wed this general iterability of the sign to the supposed ability of the poet's voice magically to repeat a single utterance forever, encoding this aberrant possibility into the poem. As a result, the purely ideal content which naming ordinarily invokes is transformed in the poem's mythic universe

into an unchanging and idealized presence supposedly literally produced for us as we attend to the utterance which names him.

28. See Jonathan Culler, "Apostrophe," in his *The Pursuit of Signs : Semiotics, Literature, Deconstruction* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1981). pp. 135-54.
29. Ibid., p. 150
30. Ibid., p. 153. Culler's temporality of writing," I think, could better be termed a temporality of writing-as-voice: only the text that is not a writing but an eternally-active voice abrogates time.
31. Ibid., p. 146.
32. In "Blake, Crane, Whitman, and Modernism: A Poetics of Pure Possibility," *PMLA* 96 (January, 1981), 64-85, Donald Pease offers an important and provocative account of Whitman's addresses to his audience. But I find Pease's Whitman to be an overly-idealized figure, altogether less edgy and divided than the poet I am interested in uncovering. The poet Pease offers us is untroubled by the way his performative gestures represent a power they do not quite enact, name a figure they will never quite produce. For Whitman, according to Pease, embraces the pure discursive possibility of

poetry itself. Such a reading of Whitman in effect solves the scandal with which lyric apostrophe confronts us by levering the poet's addresses to his audience into a special, independent imaginative zone. Like Pease, I wish to point to the indispensable role played by Whitman's apostrophes in constituting the very figure of the poet. Like Pease, I want to stress the fact that these crucial encounters are not only the product of an imagined discursive possibility, but also rely on *us* for their realization: the figure of the poet depends on *us* for his very existence, and Whitman's addresses to *us* finally intimate this fact, since the poet's "voice" is resurrected only as we read his text. But while Pease's Whitman embraces such truths, mine seeks to ward them off; his edginess over such dependence is indeed the burden of my account. Effacing the writing which figures this, unsettling dependence, Whitman's myth of voice serves to enlist the discursive moment Pease describes under the sign of the self, of the poet's commanding presence.

In *American Hieroglyphics : The Symbol of the Egyptian Hieroglyphics in the American Renaissance* (New Haven : Yale University Press, 1980), John T. Irwin traces a

similar metalepsis. Noting the relation of the poet's voice to a ceaseless process of Dionysian "becoming" he suggests astutely that Whitman turns this impersonal process suggested by the movement of his discourse into a trope for the self: "the generic 'I' of Whitman's poems is based on the absorption of the cosmos into the individual, the identification of the world with the self. Whitman's avowed Dionysian impulse is simply a reversed, veiled statement of his true Romantic impulse" (109).

33. Richard Chase has perhaps responded most fully to the range of Whitman's humor, which oddly compounds the boisterous and the wistful. See

Walt Whitman Reconsidered (New York: William Sloan Associates, 1955).

34. 1867 text; see note 27, above.

35. See Anderson, "Whitman's New Man," introduction to *Walt Whitman's Autograph Revision of the Analysis of Leaves of Grass (For Dr. R. M. Bucke's Walt Whitman)*, text notes by Stephen Railton (New York: University Press, 1974), especially pp. 32-37

36. The CRE text differs slightly from the original 1860 version quoted here: "sweet-blooded" is deleted, "Lover" is softened to "comrade"; and the poem's final sentence is set in parenthesis. I have omitted Whitman's numbering of stanzas, an idiosyncracy of the 1860, 1867, and 1871 editions.

Deconstruction and Philosophy

SURESH RAVAL.

Christopher Norris, *The Contest of Faculties: Philosophy and Theory after Deconstruction*, Methuen: London and New York, 1985. pp. 247.

Philosophy grounds and defends its claim to rationality and truth only by repressing its own rhetorical character. It is inevitably bound up with fiction, and no attempt, by Plato, Descartes, Kant or Husserl, can remove fiction from philosophy's operative center to its periphery. This is a central tenet of deconstruction, and it has become a central tenet of contemporary deconstructive literary theory which has sought to dissolve the traditionally held distinctions among various disciplines such as literature, philosophy, criticism, psychology, history, and so on. In contemporary analytic philosophy, a central concern has been to decide what should count as competent, rational argument and conditions or criteria for justifying it as such. Christopher Norris attempts, in his ambitious book *The Contest of Faculties*, to bring together Continental and analytic philosophy, and does so by bringing to bear on philosophy the insights of contemporary literary theory as developed by the deconstructive critics and theorists Jacques Derrida and Paul de Man. It deserves attention not only because Norris writes eminently lucid, analytic prose, but also because he exhibits considerable grasp of local complexities in both philosophy and literary theory. In bringing elements of analytic and post-analytic philosophy together with deconstruction, and in bringing all of these together with Habermas's critical theory, Norris aims at nothing less than an ambitious alternative to the account given by Richard Rorty in *Philosophy and the Mirror of nature*. Norris therefore considers it necessary to challenge the mainlines of Rorty's neo-pragmatist thought. Rorty is for Norris a neo-pragmatist who treats deconstruction

as no more than a stage "on the path to a 'poet-philosophical' consensus view of knowledge and human interests" (p. 228).

Norris claims that Derrida, like analytic philosophers, does not "abandon the protocols of reasoned argument" (p. 27) but rather employs them with a logical rigor and tenacity attributable only to the very best analytic and post-analytic philosophers. Thus, for example, when he examines the interpretations of Aristotle by Hegel, Heidegger and Benveniste, Derrida shows how they fail to grasp the full logical and rhetorical complexity of Aristotle's text and are consequently content with various forms of metaphysical or dialectical resolution and closure. Derrida explores, in Norris's view, the leading problems of philosophy through the rigor of their formulation in Plato, Aristotle, Kant, Hegel, and others and shows their texts resisting the drift toward abstract concepts by their repressed, grammatical symptoms. There is rigor here, Norris, in Derrida that analytic philosophers disdain to notice and recognize. This disdain has to do with their conception of what constitutes serious and rigorous reasoning; analytic philosophy tends to move from word to regulating concept without pausing to reflect on those textual processes that impede and complicate such a move. Derrida's affinity with moments of analytic and post-analytic philosophy stems from his confrontation of those very questions of meaning, reference, and truth which preoccupy analytic philosophers from Fregé to Quine, Putnam, and Davidson.

Norris wants to do the sort of things that certain philosopher trained in intellectual history are well equipped to do: he wants to use Davidson to highlight certain tension in relativism and deconstruction, MacIntyre and Putnam to reveal certain difficulties in Rorty. This project loses focus and perspective, however, because Norris does not see that such highlighting of tension cannot be allowed to obscure real conflicts or divergences between, say, Derrida and post-analytic philosophy (Davidson, Putnam, Goodman). At the very least, he would have to show why Rorty's putting together of post-analytic philosophy and contemporary Continental thought (Heidegger, Sartre, Derrida, Gadamer, and Habermas) is less than convincing. Such a critique of Rorty cannot be done by generalized observations about postmodern bourgeois liberalism, Rorty's pragmatist defence of it, and its alleged conservatism. It would have to engage

Rorty at many specific junctures, in terms of both theoretical and metatheoretical arguments. Many recent critics and theorists are quick to label a thinker as conservative and therefore regressive for culture or as radical and therefore energizing, and Norris, for all his refreshing commitment to argument and analysis, is no exception. He seems to be unaware that some insights of Gadamer are crucial to Habermas in his current preoccupation with developing communicative pragmatics. Similarly, Norris overlooks the fact that Habermas's critique of Gadamer has prompted the latter to incorporate certain radical components in his thought, and that these elements can in principle make possible a radical recasting of Gadamer's otherwise conservative aesthetics modelled on Renaissance classical humanism.

As I suggested above, Rorty's critique of what happens when "Habermas goes transcendental" cannot be answered by simply citing Rorty's co-called post-modern bourgeois liberalism and his alleged inability or unwillingness to offer an ideological critique of that liberalism. The difficulties plaguing Habermas's model of universal pragmatics are real, since being grounded in a concept of the ideal speech situation it cannot allow for the possibility of falsification or refutation and lays claim to reason. Consequently, for all its ostensible attempt at grounding reason in practice Habermas's conception of reason remains very much that of *theoria* in the transcendental sense of the term. There is no question about the moral-political animus underlying Habermas's quest for a universal pragmatics, but this does not imply that a stance such as Rorty's, one that questions the univeralist appeal, or ahistorical, absolute reasoning, necessarily deprives itself of a moral-political vision capable of questioning the wrongs in either postmodern bourgeois liberal or radical communist institutions. Rorty's stance isn't bereft of a noble moral-political vision just because the past and present of many liberal institutions justly deserve serious criticism, any more than the marxist stance is bereft of such a vision just because its concrete manifestations in the form of modern communist societies pervert that vision.

In rejecting all *apriori* limitations or hidden constraints on the invention of new vocabularies and new forms of what he calls abnormal discourse, Rorty also rejects all reification of what are only contingent social practices subject to radical change. His radical

pragmatism simply amounts to saying that there are no universally necessary rules of argument and analysis that will inevitably apply to new forms of discourse. If Rorty's observations appear to be cast in universalist vocabulary, that is indeed part of the paradox of the contemporary intellectual: rejection of universalist criteria in the form that seems to entail such a universalism. Rorty might plead here for the usefulness of recourse to metatheoretical arguments, since his criticism of Habermas, like his criticism of analytic philosophy, requires the use of reasoning central to both Habermas and analytic philosophy. For Norris to support Habermas he would have to give some substantively worked out reason to show how he can "ground" critical theory and reach some atemporal, absolute basis which can be shown to lie beneath all possible conversations. This is not the place to criticize or defend the spirit of unrestrained dialectical negativity in Rorty or Derrida. Rorty's pragmatist deconstruction may indeed be as little relevant to social-political praxis as Habermas's universal pragmatics is to real speech situations. My point here is to mark the juncture at which Norris's defence of Derrida, de Man, and deconstruction, one that fundamentally criticizes Rorty while trying to synthesize Habermas with Derrida and the general movement of thought from Quine to Putnam and Davidson with elements of Derrida interpretative practice, goes fundamentally wrong. And this happens from the outset of his project. Rorty has written scornfully of those recent literary critics and theorists who, following de Man, are talking about epistemology in literature to dignify their enterprise, just when post-empiricist analytic philosophy has largely discarded epistemology. Any deference of deconstructive criticism as practised by de Man and his followers will have to confront Rorty's claim head-on, and it will have to come to terms with the implications Rorty draws from developments in post-analytic philosophy.

Unlike Rorty who frequently juxtaposes complexes of very different ideas against one another and generates startling insights, Norris follows a rather well-worn traditional method of analysis and comparison for explicating and judging a particular thinker's work. After giving a substantial analysis and positive assessment of a theorist he goes on to offer qualifications that call into question his own explication and valuation of it. The process of qualifying works in a strict see-sawing fashion, rather than in terms of articulation for many

subtle nuances underlying the position that separates, for example, Habermas from Derrida, or one that separates and connects, at different levels, Rorty, Habermas, and the American pragmatist tradition.

More fundamental problems of analysis and critique reveal themselves when one focuses on particular instances of his analysis. I want to illustrate some of them through a brief analysis of his discussion of de Man. Summarizing de Man's deconstructive practice, Norris says "criticism is most deluded when it thinks to have mastered the play of textual figuration and arrived at a stable, self-authenticating sense. Interpretation becomes an allegory of errors, an endless reflection on its own inability to set firm limits to the textual aberrations of sense ... Deconstruction ... pursues this undoing of sense to the point where it appears a constitutive or *necessary* moment in the reading of texts. There is no escaping a process whose efforts, according to de Man are coextensive with the use of language. But this doesn't mean that deconstruction can so to speak, pull itself up by the bootstraps and theorize from a standpoint of masterly detachment. Its reading will always leave a 'margin of error, a residue of logical tension that prevents the closure of the deconstructive discourse and accounts for its narrative or allegorical mode" (pp. 41-42).

Norris then suggests that Marxism, such as that of Fredric Jameson who believes in the virtues of a totalizing metacritique, can benefit from "the extreme demystifying rigour of de Man's hermeneutics" (Norris, p. 42). Why? Because deconstruction resists and undermines all forms of pre-emptive consensus-thinking which Norris identifies with the postmodern bourgeois liberalism of Rorty and with the conservative ethos of Gadamar's hermeneutics. De Man reads/interprets texts, including political texts in the light of their rhetorical organization, one that discloses a perpetual oscillation between modes of language problematizing all hope of extracting a coherent political meaning. So, then, what would be history and politics for de Man? For de Man, as Norris approvingly quotes him, "textual allegories on this level of rhetorical complexity generate history" (p. 44). De Man's rhetorical analysis pushes to the limits of rational accountability what happens when reading a text and this rigor puts him on the

side of enlightened critique. In other words, the radicalization and textualization of the notion of history poses no problem because de Man arrives at it by following rigorously the protocols of reason and logic. As for politics, de Man's analysis dislocates received categories like 'literature' and 'politics'. His reading is 'political' in this radical sense in that the field of rhetorical tensions brought to view constitutes the space where the politics of reading enacts itself. What values political criticism might acquire would consist primarily of deconstructive analytical effort, expressing even its own liability to error and delusion.

Now, Norris mentions certain Marxist objections to deconstructive practice, and offers his explanation of de Man as the answer. The most trenchant objection is that de Man and deconstructive practice reduce politics to a mere epiphenomenon of textual signification. The summary he give of de Man's reading of Rousseau leaves, in my opinion, the objection completely unanswered. For Norris to give a properly deconstructive response, he would have to deconstruct Marxist objections through an interpretation of the texts in which they figure, for, as de Man has shown, only through the operations of figurative language can one disclose the tensions which undermine any totalizing, absolute implications underlying catagories such as "literature" and "politics". If Norris were to adhere to the deconstructive strategy of de Man or Derrida, he would have to avoid thematic reduction that constantly characterizes his accounts of Derrida and de Man. Moreover, the objections that he cites and wishes to question cannot properly be dealt with in terms of argument, since the very implications underlying the notign of argument and its claim to theoretical detachment and consecutive, logical analysis are what are brought into question by deconstruction. I would surely settle for reasoned arguments to prove that political discourse can and does indeed benefit from de Man's reading of Rousseau, though Norris provides none, and I suspect he cannot find any to drive his point home. His *a priori* commitment is at the basis of his discussion where he misperceives his assertions for reasons.

This method of summarizing deconstructive analysis and then praising it for its rigor recurrently serves the purpose of answering the objections he occasionally raises against deconstruction.

Take, for instance, another trenchant objection that Norris mentions: deconstruction simply invents "ever more ingenious textual complications to keep itself in business and avoids reflecting on its own political situation" (pp. 42-43). "But this is to ignore," Norris goes on to answer, "the very real and pointed implications of de Man's writing for a politics of theory inextricably tied to the problems of textual and narrative representations" (Norris, p.43). It is only resonable that we expect Norris to give an account of these "real" and "pointed" implications. Norris provides, instead, a succinct account of de Man's reading of Rousseau's *Social Contract*, which discloses the field of rheorical tensions that make it impossible for Rousseau's theory of politics to achieve the status of a science. Since, for de Man, a politics of theory is inextricably tied to problems of textual and narrtive representation, he must focus on the field of rhetorical tensions where "the politics of reading is inevitably brought into play" (p. 44). Norris can thus conviently give an argumentative summary of the textual and rhetorical complications articulated by de Man and in effect do everything that the objection questioned, though without any of the negaive force brought to bear on de Man's mode of analysis. The objection he had mentioned is left intact. This method of proceeding reveals the real difficulties underlying Norris's project: he is a *priori* convinced of the truth of deconstructive theory and practice, and he is also sensibly aware of the strength of the objections raised by Marxists and others. His *a priori* convicaion leads him into offering a thematic summary of de Man or Derrida as uncontestable refutations of the objections, absolving him of any need to unpack what he considers, as a real insider, the "real and pointed implications" of de Man's analysis. The upshot of my remarks here is that Norris, in spite of his deconstructive commitment, wishes to present himself as someone who is on the side of enlightened critique and reasoned argument, and is therefore forced to proceeed in a manner that departs from and contradicts deconstructive practice. Consequently, when he asserts that it is Habermas rather than Gadamar who is on the side of deconstruction he misconcives the whole force of Habermas's project of communicative pragmatics and its relation to social practice enlightened critique, and theoria, one that would accuse deconstruction of a reactionary politics. Gadmar's project of hermeneutics, while it draws on both the notion of critique derived from the Enlightenment

and the notions of authority and tradition derived from romanticisms is centrally founded on the notion of impossibility of ever arriving at absolute, determinate, and final interpretations of texts. This project brings Gadamer relatively closer to the hermeneutics of suspicion and hence to deconstruction, without of course reducing it to a strategy of disclosing the field of rhetorical tensions in texts.

In de Man parades take the force of mystery and everything becomes questionable. De Man seems to be working out a project of reformulating literary theory and its problems, by increasing and intensifying its paradoxical content. In American deconstructive practice de Man's type of interpretation and theorizing has won acceptance as theoretical—interpretative explanations and justifications for a post-traditional, post-structuralist, differentiated academic criticism. Insofar as his mode of criticism challenges philosophy and political theory, de Man stakes for post-structuralist, specifically deconstructive, criticism the status as the guardian of culture. The price of saving criticism as the guardian of culture has been, however, the isolation imposed on deconstruction by its privatized, arcane discourse. Derrida has sought to avoid this outcome through his enormous historical and cultural erudition and by deploying its resources for interpretative possibilities. This is why, for all the talk about undecidability and indeterminacy of meaning, Derrida's readings rarely reduce themselves to what appears to amount to the theematics of impossibility of reading so recurrently and persistently marking de Man's interpretative efforts. Derrida's own questioning of Western metaphysics is put under some pressure, however, by a major historical development in contemporary philosophy: the disintegration of philosophical systems presupposed by Derrida's deconstructive strategies as still having philosophical authority.

Now, Rorty may well be wrong about Derrida in trying to place him within a post-philosophical culture, since Derrida's textualist analyses do indeed keep him firmly tied to the metaphysical tradition he deconstructs. For Derrida deconstruction does not imply going beyond or replacing the tradition, as it does an uncovering of those repressed, grammatical traces which undo the concepts and norms affirmed and presumably proven by tradition. If this is so, Rorty would argue, so much the worse for Derrida who must endlessly play the role of articulating the affirmations and their

rhetorical or logical denials implicit in tradition's texts, Rorty would surely agree with Derrida and Gadamer, for all their differences, that one can't stand outside the tradition in order, as it were, to criticize it as a whole, for we do not know, except by sheer philosophical insensitivity, what it is to do that. Wholesale epistemological and methodological critiques are thus put in jeopardy, and this is consistent with the thought of the later Wittgenstein and the pragmatists such as James and Dewey. Rorty, however, would question the usefulness and importance of textualist interpretations of Derrida which forever chip away at the tradition while acknowledging the impossibility of altogether escaping it. Moreover, he would argue that it is only from the perspective of philosophers that Western philosophy from Plato through Descartes, Kant, Hegel to Heidegger has been immensely valuable for society. It is a story constructed by philosophers, and is largely irrelevant to fundamental changes and improvements that have occurred in the West during the last several centuries. Rorty connects this argument to a related one that philosophy should give up not only its role as the Queen of the sciences it claimed until recently, it must also give up its self-asphyxiating isolation if it is to rejoin the cultural dialogue currently underway in adjacent disciplines.

By arguing as he does, Norris, like many deconstructive critics and theorists, seems to be employing the old rationalist criterion that a position, method, or theory is intellectually and practically significant precisely to the extent that it is uncontestable. But he also seeks to explicate and defend deconstruction to show that it is fully capable of employing the protocols of reason and logic and hence crucial to the task of enlightened critique. He knows, of course, that in de Man and Derrida these protocols are undermined by what Norris characterizes as their relentlessly rigorous pursuit of the implications of these protocols. And he repeatedly, indeed repetitively, insists on the exemplary nature of the rigor with which they interpret texts and question the concepts those texts claim to articulate and establish. He never pauses to consider whether this form of relentless and seemingly logical inquiry would be taken to be rigorous analysis by those post-analytic philosophers whom he considers to some extent compatible with Derrida. Nor does he explain why such "rigor" should inevitably have nearly identical interpretative and philosophical conse-

quences everytime deconstructive critics read a text. It is here that Norris seems too committed to deconstruction to step back from it and see its unfolding in the shape of a clear and systematic analytic method, one that produces results specifiable in advance in nearly every case. Derrida's own extraordinary and sometimes extravagantly inventive strategies aren't so much a refutation of this charge as rather a confirmation of that inbuilt tendency which he seeks to obviate and overcome and which most of his followers cannot.

Neither the real or apparent similarities between deconstruction and analytic or post-analytic philosophy, nor a presumed convergence between them can overcome the long-standig mutual incomprehension between Anglo American and Continental philosophy which began with Hegel. If certain developments in analytic philosophy suggest change by either abandonment or dissolution of certain problems, deconstructive theory and practice do not advocate that recourse, but rather insist on the inevitability of their continuation and their problematical status. "There is no sense." Derrida insists, "in doing without the concepts of metaphysics in order to shake metaphysics. We have no language—no syntax and no lexicon—which is foreign to this history; we can pronounce not a single destructive proposition which has not already had to slip into the form, the logic, and the implicit postulations of precisely what it seeks to contest." For Derrida, then, as for Nietzsche, we cannot possibly do without language or logic; nor can we undermine the tradition by means of vocabulary that presumes to escape its assumptions and categories.

The later Wittgenstein, post-analytic philosophy, and pragmatism all assume that talk about language, logic, and context involves talk about everyday use of language and its relation to practical actions and decisions we are called upon to carry out in highly specific contexts. These things do not require dependence on classical metaphysical assumptions, nor do they require textual interpretative activity of the sort that makes the metaphysical tradition, for all its complexity and internal contradictions, inevitable for deconstructive analysis. For Wittgenstein, problems of language cannot be analyzed and resolved by a systematic analytic scheme; they require piecemeal analysis, in terms of specific contexts that bear on the meaning and use of particular words and concepts. And this is

the juncture at which deconstruction will appear profoundly alien to the later Wittgenstein and developments in post-analytic philosophy as well as pragmatism.

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BOOK REVIEWS

Irene E. Harvey, *Derrida and the Economy of Difference*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1986.

At first glance, Harvey's title seems misleading. The three terms—Derrida, economy, *differance*—suggest a work on textuality already associated with current trends in literary criticism. However, Harvey's interest (as her prefatory letters to literary critics and the philosophical community maintain) is to review Derrida's more traditional, "conservative," philosophical analyses. In short, she does not wish to place Derrida outside Continental philosophy's discussion of metaphysics, but to situate him firmly within it. Controversies among literary critics about deconstruction have rested mostly upon how Derrida's textual critiques dislodge or threaten traditional humanist assumptions. Harvey's book helps to alleviate some of the critical filibustering about Derrida. She argues that any claims that Derrida has radically departed from Continental philosophy are essentially misreadings of the function, rigor, and structure of deconstruction. Hers is not a study of influences upon Derrida, but an attempt to demonstrate his work

as an extension of philosophical movements already operating in the history of metaphysics. She often claims, and closely works out, ties between Derrida and philosophical speculations advanced by Kant, Hegel, Nietzsche, Husserl, Heidegger, Freud, and Levinas.

The general reader should be warned from the outset that this book offers specialized consideration of both Derrida's and these thinker's projects. Her analysis is also well-informed, sophisticated, and filled with the kind of rigor one would expect from a philosopher. She begins with Kant's "Critique" as a strategy for investigating the origins and possibilities of, as well as the limits to, metaphysics. For instance, Kant admits that the concept of Reason remains essentially contradictory, because it is "on the one hand *closed*, in terms of its operating principles, yet on the other, given to *transgressing* its own legitimate bounds." (17). This fundamental schism, abyss, in Kant's system parallels Derrida's initial discussions of Western logic, logocentrism, and metaphysics. Like Kant, Derrida's deconstruction "practicipates" in the ongoing history of metaphysics and

remains "an observer" to it without necessarily prohibiting or exhausting that history. This is a shrewd insight into Derrida, one often neglected by literary critics and philosophers alike.

But, she does not simplify deconstruction to a formulaic outgrowth of other philosophical systems. She views it as not wholly condemned to metaphysics, nor detachable from it; instead, Derrida admits to borrowing from the very metaphysics he deconstructs those tools which necessitate an attachment to a tradition of metaphysical language. Harvey defines "economy" in terms of apparent contradictions advanced by Derrida and by those texts he critiques. A "double-bind" within and beyond metaphysics characterizes "economy"—"as a play of presence and absence that, paradoxically to be sure, takes on a very definite, unfied, consistent, and indeed *repeating* and *repeatable form*" (67). *Differance*, then, operates within an economy, a movement, which unites and differentiates, includes and excludes. Metaphysics, as Harvey uses the term, is all of philosophy, the system of the sign, of language employed to designate and separate. Through very careful readings, she arrives at Derrida's indebtedness to Husserl's "internal time consciousness" for the notion of trace; to Levinas's depiction of

the Other for the movement of the trace; to Freud's phsychoanalytic models of memory and the unconscious for the imprinting, inscribing of the trace, to Heidegger's *Dasein*, for initiating causality without an origin; and to Nietzsche's imposed contradictions for the paradoxical character of *differance*, which makes possible the very object it forbids. Derrida does not disregard these essential contradictions in metaphysics, but proceeds from them. In a sense, he, as Harvey continually asserts, admits to his own entrapment within metaphysics.

One might well question Harvey's conclusion that Derrida's *differance* "admits to a certain structural identity" (213), because she seems to limit the very "economy," force and movement she grants his project. In fact, much of her analysis hinges upon Derrida's supposed structural hierarchical arrangement of metaphysics between paired oppositions—good/evil, outside/inside, presence/absence, origin/copy, nature/culture. This dominance, mastery, prescribes language for Derrida, who sees the representatives of hierarchical metaphysics, according to Harvey, as the very thinkers he relies upon. Here lies a problem with her text. To consider Derrida as inescapably aligned to these philosopher and simultaneously departing from them, a style of writing must inevitably

Produce contradictions in order to explicate this process.

Yet her analysis usually corrects its own stylistic deficiencies, by interjecting a series of questions anticipated by the reader about Derridean paradoxes, followed directly by systematic outlines of the movement and necessity of

these suppositions. And it is to her credit that she does not attempt the punning, jargonesque style so rampant among deconstructionists. Thanks to her efforts, the general reader of critical theory can now grasp not only Derrida's strategies and style, but also the fundamental, "metaphysical" quality of his thought,

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