

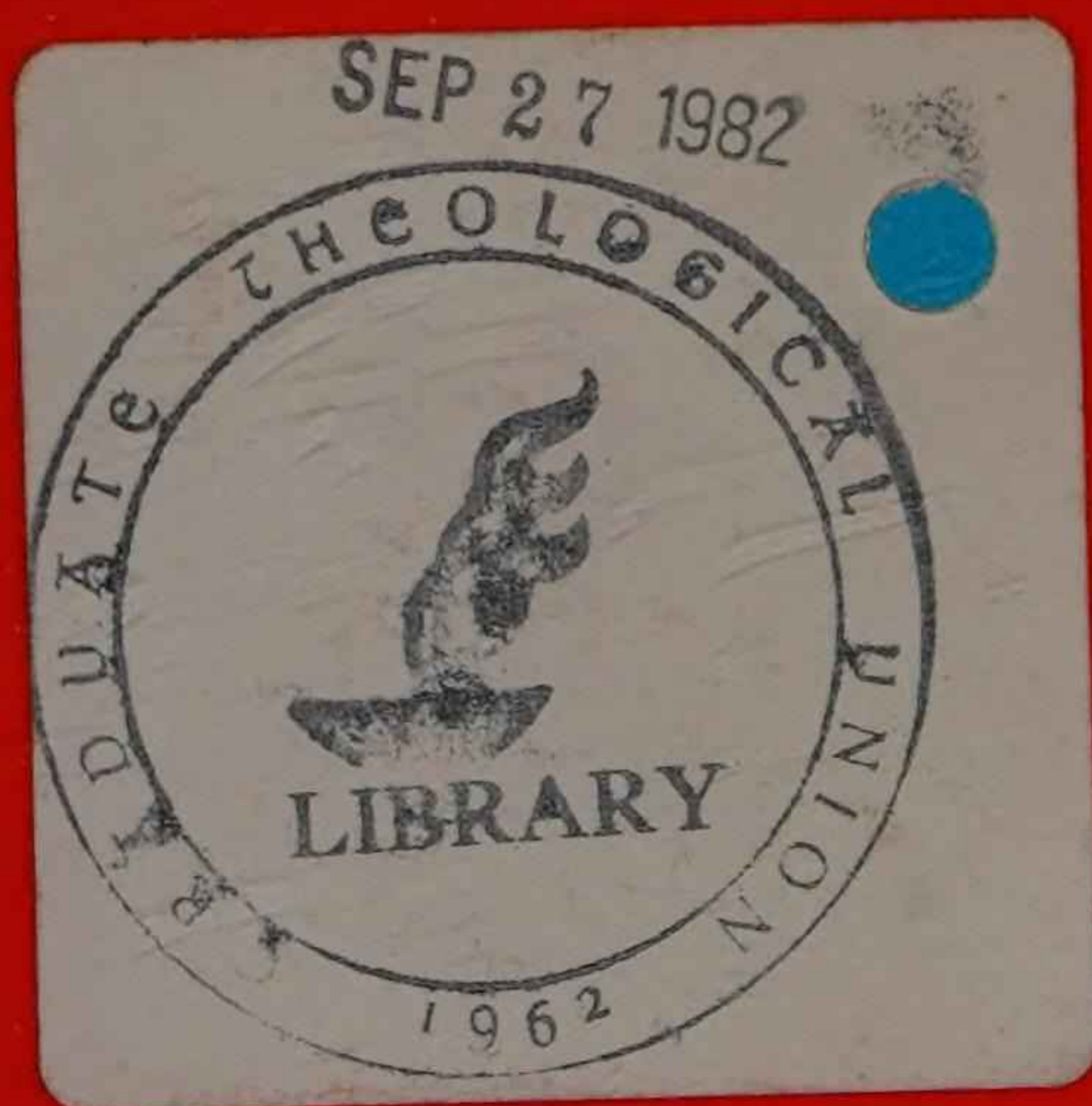
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Derrida

And Biblical Studies



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INTRODUCTION

The curiosity about Jacques Derrida's writing and the more than occasional cynicism and hostility expressed toward it by American academics, including biblical scholars and theologians, would be reason enough for offering a collection of essays on *Derrida and Biblical Studies*. But a more germane reason exists than that. Derrida's challenge to the whole tradition of western metaphysics, to what he calls the metaphysics of presence and the logocentric heritage, not only addresses the study of sacred texts among others but in significant ways focuses on them. The main characteristic of sacred texts has been their evocation and recollection of sacred presence—to the extent that the texts themselves, the very figures of writing, are said to be imbued with that divine immanence. But Derrida argues that such a notion of presence in writing is based on the false assumption of a prior and more unmediated presence in the spoken word; this spoken word in the religious context is taken to be none other than the utterance of deity, which utterance is then reduced to holy inscription in and as the text. For Derrida, however, written language is not derivative in this sense; it does not find its legitimacy as a sign of a "greater" presence, and the sacred text is not rendered sacred as an embodiment of an absolute presence but rather as the interplay of language signs to designate "sacred."

Hence biblical scholars who wish to take Derrida seriously (and it would seem willful not to, whether or not one agrees with him) must meet a double challenge at the heart of the act of interpretation. They must decide whether they are willing to view the religious texts that are the object of their study as systems of difference rather than privileged channels of an extra-textual transcendent, and whether these texts, then, retain any sort of privileged status at all. The essays in this issue, and especially Derrida's own, can serve as guides in one's response to this dual challenge.

It is characteristic of Derrida's attitude and strategy that he himself, who poses perhaps the greatest contemporary threat to traditional biblical scholarship, should be intensely interested in it. Derrida believes that the deconstruction of sacred texts as embodiments of sacred presence begins in the texts themselves, so that his own reading of biblical texts, particularly of *The Revelation to John*, in this issue develops an impulse already active in those texts.

The four essays presented here do not, one should warn, offer a program for deconstructive readings of biblical texts. Such an effort would run counter to the understanding and usefulness of Derrida's work, which

cannot be reduced to an exercise in practical or applied criticism. Rather, we offer three essays which, in their order of presentation, come increasingly closer to a critical approximation of Derrida's style and tactic and prepare for his own text. Herbert N. Schneidau's "The Word Against the Word: Derrida on Textuality" locates Derrida's work in the context of the expanding international debate on the nature and function of texts inspired in good part by Derrida himself. John Dominic Crossan in "Difference and Divinity" focuses on difference, the key term in Derrida's thought, and undertakes a deconstruction of Derrida's own writing in relation to transcendence in ways that bear on Derrida's challenge to the biblical scholar articulated above. John P. Leavey, Jr. in "Four Protocols: Derrida, His Deconstruction" writes deconstructively, in the Derrida mode, on deconstruction and thus explains via exemplification. Derrida's letter to Leavey, then, describes the relation of his essay, "Of an Apocalyptic Tone Recently Adopted in Philosophy," to the other three essays: he read them, did not respond to them as such, yet sent an essay for inclusion that is marvelously apt and possibly more useful than a direct response would have been. It includes, in any case, examples of Derrida engaging in the interpretation of biblical texts and as such suggests *one way* in which a deconstructive approach can be employed.

The plans for this issue began in conversations between John Leavey and myself, and (as is also clear from Derrida's letter) we are greatly indebted to Leavey for his central contributions to the issue. Along with composing an essay of his own, Leavey arranged for the Derrida essay and then translated it, with dispatch, into English.

We owe, finally, a debt of gratitude to Jacques Derrida himself for his genial and generous involvement in this endeavor. Es möge kein Holzweg sein!

Robert Detweiler
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PART I.

ON DERRIDA

THE WORD AGAINST THE WORD: DERRIDA ON TEXTUALITY

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ABSTRACT

The work of Jacques Derrida should be seen as the most extreme in a series of recent displacements among philosophy, literary criticism, and Biblical studies. Current reaction to Derrida in philosophy and literary criticism includes enthusiastic acceptance but also hostility and rejection from academic humanists who perceive him as a threat to their metaphysical assumptions. Reaction from Biblical scholars could be similarly negative, although much in Derrida's writing should stimulate them to a healthy rethinking of their positions. Derrida's insistence that meaning is an affair of language's systems of difference "without positive terms" and his proposition that writing is prior to speech are two main elements in his attack on the foundations of Western metaphysics and its "logocentric" conviction that we can experience meaning in "presences" removed from the play of differential systems. Derrida repudiates the classical *logos* behind this assumption but also the Christian *logos*, yet the Biblical insistence on our understanding ourselves in relation to a historical past, rather than in terms of a static cosmic system, breaks with the tendencies of logocentrism and allows us to align Derrida and the Bible. This radical way of appropriating history, without the possibility of reifications of various sorts, should lead Biblical scholars further into kerygmatic reflection. Derrida's deconstructions show the dubious status of "ordinary language," "literal meaning," and "common sense" thinking and invite us to see the illusory metaphysics behind these—a metaphysics that some Biblical structuralists seem to accept uncritically. Paul de Man and other "uncanny" critics influenced by Derrida interpret texts, in contrast, in ways that always unsettle the metaphysical foundations and strive toward heuristic impasses, an approach that has been applied fruitfully, for example, to New Testament parable analysis. Derrida should also guide Biblical scholars toward taking the concept of fiction much more seriously than they have. The "undecidability" that is characteristic of fiction needs to be seen as inhabiting all texts and as a challenge to interpretation to turn the complexity of language and thought to fruitful ends.

The most consistent activity in the whole appropriation of contemporary Continental thought for the interpretation of texts is that of *displacement*, though some regret that this is not accompanied by its Freudian companion *condensation*: diffusion is rather the dominant mode. By displacement here I mean the utilization of the methodologies of one field for

the problems of another; it would be small exaggeration to say that the whole "structuralist" phenomenon and all that has accompanied it would never have taken place had not Claude Lévi-Strauss shared exile in the New World with Roman Jakobson during World War II and learned from him a number of precepts from linguistics that could be applied to certain anthropological problems, such as kinship systems. Making an intriguing transposition, Lévi-Strauss treated kinship systems as if they were languages, and shored up his work with that of the earlier anthropologist Marcel Mauss, who had stressed the far-reaching implications of mechanisms of exchange: whereas in languages words and messages are exchanged, kinship appears to be a system for the exchange of women, at least in clan, moiety, and tribal forms. Mauss's *Essai sur le don* suggested the almost-metaphysical cohesive power of gift-giving relationships, and Jakobson's work on phonemes, together with his transmission of the whole corpus of Formalist and "structuralist" linguistics, enabled Lévi-Strauss to use exchange and reciprocity as the keys to hypotheses that soon began to ramify into contiguous fields. Once Lévi-Strauss tackled myth, that crucial form of linguistic exchange, it was inevitable that he in turn would be appropriated by literary critics, for it was and is widely assumed that the "roots" of literature must lie in myth. Thus, among other bizarre phenomena, even Northrop Frye came to be known as a structuralist in the uproar that followed. Suddenly everyone was trying out new methods in a variety of fields and some of the transpositions even produced results.

Thus in discussing the potential role of the thought of Jacques Derrida in Biblical hermeneutics one must begin from a context which is at least a triangulation among philosophy, literary criticism, and Biblical studies: each of these could be resolved, should we care to do so, into further triangulations or sets of transpositions, for the "philosophy" revelant here is a product or stage of that relationship between linguistics, anthropology, etc., that produced structuralism in the first place, and moved it into position to counteract and, in some ways, extend phenomenology and other rivals. Biblical studies in turn were already being prepared for innovation by the elaboration of so-called "hermeneutical" thought, deriving from a separate but related tradition involving Dilthey, Heidegger, et al., and some enthusiastic genealogists raced back to Hegel and did not stop there. The whole phenomenon became a self-fulfilling prophecy of the contemporary definition of a system, in which a change in one of the elements effects change in all the others, and there can be little doubt that as he becomes better known Derrida will have his day, even among the Biblical texts; he is one of the elements, and the first task for us is to make educated guesses about how his proposals will be deployed and what series of effects we can expect among the other elements.

But perhaps we should pause for a caution derived from the present situation in literary criticism, which after all is playing a mediating

role here: the results, or rather the controversies, may be sensationalistic. Derrida has been used directly and indirectly by a number of critics, and the reception has been mixed but loud. The academic establishment in literary criticism tends to sneer, and some even see Derrida as "immoral," corrupting young minds with nihilism, etc.: some phrases used are "the current critical scandal," "the failure of criticism," "literature against itself," and so forth. With some justice the older critics tend to look at young practitioners who show signs of "Continental influenza" as faddistic and terroristic; indeed there are certain frantic political overtones in the debate. As usual the young rebels accuse the establishment of defending vested interests, and the rancor has infected a number of prominent universities, notably Yale and Johns Hopkins. A noted classicist now at the latter found a work of Derrida in his mailroom; so incensed that he failed to note that the mailbox wasn't his own, he seized the book and tore it to pieces on the spot. But others, bringing Derrida himself to lecture within those hallowed precincts, try to accommodate his ideas to more traditional practices, and for their pains are accused (again with some justification—no charge is utterly baseless these days) of trying to encapsulate and domesticate Derrida's challenges to the older presuppositions of textual interpretation—which charge Joseph Riddel has brought against Hillis Miller (1974:56–65). This has the effect of making Derridaean critics look like Parisian intellectuals, competing to see who is truly Marxist—or as Richard Klein puts it, "out to prove in the shrillest tones that he has a product so far to the left of everything else that it makes everything else look like Fascism" (31). But the most threatened group appears to be that circle of critics who would qualify for the label of genteel humanists, those followers of Lionel Trilling, Reuben Brower, and the like who gravitate around Boston and New York as if those were enclaves of sanity in our plagued land. If, as I suspect, this group emerges as the most hostile, the potential confrontation between humanist and Biblical interpretations of the world could arise in a new form, with Derrida as the catalyst. The peculiar mutterings about his "immoral" influence and so on strongly imply that Derrida's real challenge is to the whole humanist tradition, whatever the varieties of mandarinism or nihilism among his followers, and thus that the writings of this Algerian Jew who appears totally godless but sometimes projects a rabbinical image, whose work consists mostly of penetrating critiques of other philosophers but who has become a source of furor in literary criticism, who would not even be given a job in many American philosophy departments but who poses the strongest indictment yet seen of the underpinnings of the Western philosophical enterprise, could most fitly cause to emerge, by whatever indirections necessary, a new view of what it means to have a "text" in and of the Bible. This would be the crowning displacement.

I must frankly confess that this potential clash between academic humanism and Derrida-fueled renewal of Biblical interests is one I long to

see, for although I happen not to be religious myself nor even a student of religions, and certainly not a member of the Moral Majority, I believe that the ascendancy of humanism—especially when manifested as gentility, against which Santayana's strictures are still totally relevant—has led to the trivialization and *méconnaissance* of the Biblical tradition in Western culture, which in turn has prevented us from grasping even a historical understanding of ourselves. How could it be otherwise? If the wholly laudable separation of church and state prescribed in the Bill of Rights has been twisted into a warrant for making all study of the Bible somewhat suspect, as it certainly is in urbane academic circles, this is a sign that the humanists have succeeded in reaching the goal implied in their name, i.e., to replace God with man as the authority and goal of culture. Now if there is one thing that "structuralists" agree on, it is that this replacement perpetuates the same illusions plus inordinate self-gratulation. Possibly the most scandalous aspect of their whole program is their hostility to theologizations and divinizations of man; such statements as "the ultimate goal of the human sciences [is] not to constitute but to dissolve man" are scattered through the writings of Lévi-Strauss, Foucault, Derrida, and the rest. And for all the nihilistic, faddistic or "absurdist" implications in some of their work, on the whole it seems to me a thoroughly healthy and undeniably heuristic attack on the academic traditions now ruled by humanism. For if the "history of ideas" in the old sense has faded, discredited by an atomistic conception of ideas as pebbles being washed along the brook of time, Derrida especially opens up for us the possibility of a new kind of historical analysis, a "desedimentation" or deconstruction of texts in order to reveal their presuppositions and the Protean ways in which these derive from or are "in complicity with" highly determinative influences of the Western metaphysical tradition—even though these include the notion of "history" itself. By his deconstructive method Derrida or some of his expounders could expose the metaphysical assumptions behind humanism, and it would be amusing to watch the denials and cover-ups.

Derrida seems sensible of the prospect of such an interpretation and confrontation when he compares his enterprise to "negative theology" (1973b:134). Of course he adds the proviso that he is not interested in the *via negativa* itself, since it is teleologically determined to find God, and thus participates in a metaphysics of *telos* which he has profoundly questioned. Nonetheless we must ask if this comparison is not an important clue. Not that we should all rush back to the Pseudo-Dionysius to explicate Derrida, but should we not at least take some account of Yahwist precepts as sources of inspiration for both writers? Derrida, as I have said, opposes and satirizes theologizations of all sorts, but there is a sense in which Yahwism does also. Certain remarks in the essays in *Writing and Difference* strongly hint at Derrida's awareness of this possibility, particularly the essay on Jabès, which is full of oracular remarks on "a certain Judaism as the birth and passion of

writing. . . . Perhaps the common root of a people and of writing.” “Writing is the moment of the desert as the moment of Separation,” he remarks on my favorite topic, alienation. And again aphoristically, on the relation of history to writing and Judaism: “The painful folding of itself which permits history to reflect itself as it ciphers itself. This reflection is its beginning. The only thing that begins by reflecting itself is history. And this fold, this furrow, is the Jew. The Jew who elects writing which elects the Jew . . .” (1978: 64,68,65).

The point here is what use we are to make of these thoughts. And I hold that by Derrida’s own logic we may make what adaptation we will; the usual anxiety about misrepresentation is less applicable here than it might be thought. Certainly I, as a non-philosopher and poor linguist (Derrida’s French is notoriously difficult: full of wordplay, allusion, and the tactic of announcing straightforwardly propositions he then overturns or satirizes) can neither desire nor accomplish an “expert’s” understanding of him, so my prejudice is in play here; like Chaucer’s Parson I “speke under correccioun”; but Derrida himself has exposed the logic of “property” in Western metaphysics, correlating it with his diagnosis of the ultimate error, the “myth of presence” that haunts us. He questions the “metaphysics of the proper [*le propre*: self-possession, propriety, property, cleanliness].” And indeed proclaims: “to make enigmatic what one thinks one understands by the words ‘proximity,’ ‘immediacy,’ ‘presence’ (the proximate [*proche*], the own [*propre*], and the pre- of presence), is my final intention in this book,” referring to *Of Grammatology* (1976:26,70). Many more passages could be cited in which he aligns the notion of property with our “logocentrism,” all of which invite me to adapt his thought to purposes not his “own.”

What follows here, then, is an adaptation that is guided by his project, or what I understand of it, but is not slavish and could not be, for I certainly do not have all his works *by heart*—an amusing locution full of a Platonic myth of presence. This adaptation is one of freeplay, to use his own idiom. In order to review his work, we might begin with two precepts, one from Saussure and one from Roman Jakobson. Saussure made the famous pronouncement that “in language there are only differences *without positive terms*” (120). What such an unthinkable proposition might mean led Derrida to his notion of “differance” (“neither a word nor a concept,” he insists), a neologism in which the aberrant spelling implies, among other things, a dichotomy between the writing and the sounding of words—for the point is that the change is “silent”—that can open provocative gaps (1973b: 130,135). The critique of Saussure in *Of Grammatology* takes off from Derrida’s perception that Saussure was forgetful of his own insight, and yielded to the substantialist seductions of traditional metaphysics when he elevated the spoken over the written; for that reinforces the hierarchically-shaped “myth of presence” (here, of meaning to the voice) traceable at least back to Plato. The Formalist work on the phoneme extended the Saussurean precept:

Jakobson's analysis of the phoneme into "distinctive features" in binary array implied that what one *hears* is not phonic "substance," but a pattern of presence/absence of certain oppositions, between "tenseness and laxness, gravity and acuteness, voiced and unvoiced," etc. (1971:72-73 and *passim*; cf. also Jakobson, Halle, and Fant). In other words, we hear no "sound" as such, or rather the sound is variable and almost arbitrary; in perceiving the phoneme what we grasp is a pattern: no "substance" enters the ear. The sound may be wildly distorted, as by a heavy foreign accent or the vagaries of electronic transmission, but if we can recognize the pattern we can hear the phoneme, even through a wall, whereas in a language of which we know nothing, all we hear is a blur. Surely it must be obvious by now that all perception is recognition of a pattern, not ingestion of "substance." Like the quest for the elementary particle in physics, the search for the constituents of the phoneme never reached a hard-rock "substantive" level; what one took for substance at each preliminary stage turns out to be a pattern of still more elementary tensions; everything turns out to be relationships (cf. Leonard Bernstein: "The interval, not the note, is the atomic particle of music"). But Derrida criticizes Jakobson, like Saussure, for deserting these implications and for failing to transcend substantialist thinking; and his brilliant dissection of Lévi-Strauss's *Tristes Tropiques* follows the same lines. The structuralists, it seems, are never structuralist enough.

Derrida himself proceeds, via what I call relationalism, to prepare his doctrine of grammatology, which consists of the superficially incredible proposition that writing is prior, not secondary, to speech, although he states it far more subtly: "language is not merely a sort of writing," but "a possibility founded on the general possibility of writing" (1976:52,14). Of course we are tempted to jump up with what used to seem a certainty, the historical priority of oral languages to writing: but this notion has been complicated by the work of André Leroi-Gourhan on the marks associated with cave paintings, of Alexander Marshack on the possibly calendrical markings on prehistoric bone and stone implements, by the discovery of the Tartaria tablets, and so on; Derrida amuses himself by invoking some of this evidence that destroys our neat scheme of assigning the invention of writing to Sumer, 3100 B. C., while he also drops discreet allusions to DNA and other "pro-grams" involved in all living substance. But his point, of course, has really nothing to do with historical priority; he wishes to show how a massive and systematic "reduction" of writing to derivative, secondary, parasitic status has been one of the vested interests of Western metaphysics, and how this reduction betrays and contradicts itself in the writing (n.b.) of all those who proclaim it, from Plato to Lévi-Strauss:

I would wish rather to suggest that the alleged derivativeness of writing, however real and massive, was possible only on one condition: that the "original," "natural," etc. language had never existed, never been intact and untouched by writing, that it had itself always been a writing. An arche-writing whose necessity and new concept

I wish to indicate and outline here; and which I continue to call writing only because it essentially communicates with the vulgar concept of writing. (1976:56)

All the stages of this argument cannot be rehearsed here, but must be summarized in the observation that writing as such most clearly exposes the differential character of all language, of all sign-systems, even in the "erasure" it carries within itself or the reduction it invites; it manifests the Saussurean principle that "the idea or phonic substance that a sign contains is of less importance than the other signs that surround it" (1976:53; cf. also 1977: 174, 181-82). In short, it gives away the secret that languages are "systems of difference," rather than revelations of or references to some "transcendental signified," some entity, meaning, or Absolute that *means something all by itself* beyond the play of differential systems. In another context Derrida remarks, "I believe that the condition for a true act of language is my being able to say 'I am dead.' . . . My language signifies, in spite of the lack of object. That means that the power of meaning of language is, to a point, independent of the possibility of its object" (Macksey and Donato: 156. Cf. Noam Chomsky's proof-text sentence: "Colorless green ideas sleep furiously."). Actually this is part of a vexed argument about the relation of a speaker to his speech, but it will serve to show Derrida's insistence that signifying, the producing of meanings in language, is a function of the language and not some outside object-world. The meaning of an object is always contingent, never "proper" to it or "present" in it. "Presence" in any form is never the truth of a sign: by which Derrida means something more than the fact that a footprint is not a footprint until the foot is out of it.

The delusion that meaning is an affair of reference to or foundation in some intuitively understood extra-linguistic reality is not only wrong; it is part of the great dream of metaphysics that has bemused us: so that even the vulgar notions of how languages mean arise not from a flat-earth "common sense" but from a highly infectious philosophic heritage. Derrida demonstrates this at great length in conducting his analysis of the reduction or demotion of writing. An important clue, which he finds over and over again, is a strange moralistic tone infusing the denunciations of writing, audible from Socrates to Rousseau and his successors. Such inappropriate moral outrage is the sign of the threat that writing poses: it gives the game away, and the game is indeed a con (i.e., posing as something other than a game). Perhaps this phrasing suggests something also of why Derrida's detractors in literary criticism feel so threatened. In any case, writing is condemned by generations of thinkers not only as derivative but as dead, unnatural, artificial, excremental, exterior and alien, improper, accidental, and so forth: it is the scandal of the body, the *sōma/sēma* or body as tomb, as opposed to the pure soul of speech. Speech of course is substantial in the honorific as opposed to the materialistic sense, a spiritual reality: interior, spontaneous, primary, proper and above all natural and living: in recent writing in English, Father Walter

Ong has most eloquently voiced this position. But for a curious number of the attackers, writing is *passion*, in the bad sense, the mastery of the body over the soul; and ironically it is those who believe that they have transcended substantialism who are most outraged: Saussure condemns the effect of writing on speech as "vicieuse." "The contamination of writing, the fact or the threat of it, are denounced in the accents of the moralist or preacher by the linguist from Geneva," Derrida slyly writes (1976:38,34). There is indeed a Calvinist dualism in Saussure, the result no doubt of his consciousness of himself as revolutionary and thus of the need to elevate speech, the fundamental entity of his "synchronic" linguistics, to some revelatory status. Lévi-Strauss, on the other hand, follows the other Genevan or Rousseauist line that writing is an agent of violence, and in a celebrated passage of *Tristes Tropiques* tries to convince us that what little it does for the diffusion of useful knowledge or inventions is far outweighed by its utility for spreading economic exploitation and political regimentation; we are supposed to visualize great slave-labor armies toiling under the watchful eyes of scribes and bureaucrats (299). Derrida artfully turns this argument on its head: "Rousseau and Lévi-Strauss are not for a moment to be challenged when they relate the power of writing to the exercise of violence. But radicalizing this theme, no longer considering this violence as *derivative* with respect to a naturally innocent speech, one reverses the entire sense of a proposition . . ." (1976:106). Derrida, gleefully pouncing on Lévi-Strauss's Tartuffean confessions that anthropology is really "entropology" and that writing is self-defeating, shows how Lévi-Strauss makes himself the agent of violence among the Nambikwara (even a vile seducer in the case of the little girls and their "real" names, an episode which ties in to the whole theme of virginity and seduction as the dual goal of anthropologists: they seek to preserve "unspoiled" societies intact for study, yet know that the very study is a violation, disrupting them merely by observation, as in the indeterminacy function; and furthermore they practice seduction, cheap bribery, etc., to accomplish their studies, then seduce their audiences with the lore they bring back). Finally Lévi-Strauss appears as a sophisticated Jack Cade, and the villain of his own book (Lévi-Strauss, 1975:279 and *passim*; cf. Derrida, (1976:107-40).

Writing's scapegoat role underlines the threat it continually poses to the "logocentrism" of our epoch, the epoch of "full speech" and meaning as plenitude, the "great epoch covered by the history of metaphysics." For our "logocentrism . . . is also a phonocentrism"; it "merges with the historical determination of the meaning of being in general as *presence* . . . (presence of the thing to the sight as *eidos*, presence as substance/essence/existence [*ousia*], temporal presence as point [*stigmè*] of the now or of the moment [*nun*], the self-presence of the cogito, consciousness, subjectivity, the co-presence of the other and the self, intersubjectivity as the intentional phenomenon of the ego, and so forth)" (Derrida, 1976:11-13; cf. 1970:249). All we have had, in "the history of (the only) metaphysics," is the replacement of one version of

presence with another, and each revisionary thinker, failing to see how his attempt to destroy his predecessor drags him into the logocentrism he seeks to escape, elevates some principle to transcendent status (1976:3). Within this era of the "imperialism" or "privilege of the logos" writing is always a fall, with full theological overtones. For "within this logos, the original and essential link to the *phonè* has never been broken" (Derrida, 1976:3,15,13,11). Hence we congratulate ourselves on achieving "phonetic" writing, while hieroglyphic or ideogrammic forms bewilder and unsettle us: as with anything Oriental, they attract us but are "inscrutable" at the same time. And of course it is just those who try to repudiate metaphysics who betray phonocentric prejudices, from the logical positivists to the structuralists: Derrida shows that Austin's speech-act theory, the most useful and sane descendant of positivism, slips into these assumptions as unwarily as does Saussure's linguistics (1977).

All metaphysicians, covert or overt, grant privilege to some form of the "transcendental signified," whereas Derrida's analysis shows that "the secondarity that it seemed possible to ascribe to writing alone affects all signifieds in general, affects them always already": this last is Derrida's catchphrase for the paradoxical originlessness of "differance," that "deferral" hidden in the etymology of *différence* (1976:20,49,7; cf. 1973b:129,156) /1/. There is no "transcendental signified," no entity that means something by itself, not only because we are assured by modern linguistics that languages are differential systems "without positive terms" but because experience itself is "inseparable from the field of the mark, which is to say, from the network of effacement and of difference, of units of iterability, which are separable from their internal and external context and also from themselves, inasmuch as the very iterability which constituted their identity does not permit them ever to be a unity that is identical to itself; . . . there is no experience consisting of *pure* presence but only of chains of differential marks" (1977:182-83) /2/. In other words, all human experience is irreducibly linguistic, and freakish examples taken from neonates, etc., do not disprove it; to adapt a Lévi-Straussian motto, who says man says culture and who says culture says language. Derrida's role is to show that we can take far less for granted than we thought when we acknowledge the linguisticity of man; we admit thereby a tangle of paradoxes and problems, mostly turning on the access of oneself to one's speech, the author to his texts, and so on, but including the paradox of the non-presence of one's experience to oneself. For corroboration I quote some fragments by T. S. Eliot, as employed in J. Hillis Miller's provocative essay on him:

Immediate experience is nonrelational, but, since every experience of which we can be aware must be differentiated into terms and relations, it follows that "non-relational experience does not exist." Immediate experience is incompatible with consciousness, and, paradoxically, is not experience at all. Eliot returns again and again to formulations of this paradox: "no actual experience could be merely immediate, for if it were, we should certainly know nothing about it"; "in order that it should

be feeling at all, it must be conscious, but so far as it is conscious it ceases to be merely feeling." . . . "We must not confuse immediate experience with sensation, we must not think of it as a sort of panorama passing before a reviewer, and we must avoid thinking of it as the content or substance of a mind." (1966:131-32)

These quotations are all from Eliot's dissertation on the thought of F. H. Bradley; they chime curiously with contemporary philosophy, but all signs point to continued further questioning of what Derrida would call the "presence" of experience as the basis for an idea of language. Even the warning cry of a baboon troop at the approach of a leopard has this element of conventionality which makes signifying power; the baby baboons have to learn what the cry means. *A fortiori*, experience for humans becomes experience only when it has that iterability, that potential separation from context, that Derrida notes in "the field of the mark." Otherwise one cannot even speak of experience, but at best of unbounded, undistinguished sensation. As epigraph for his chapter, Miller chooses this from Eliot: "Immediate experience, at either the beginning or end of our journey, is annihilation and utter night." Derrida would agree, and hence would say that "immediate experience" is at best an occasionally useful fiction; and that therefore not only all language but all experience as such possesses that graphemic quality that is the nature of writing—marks on a field, interpretable only by the acknowledgement of the role of "differance."

Biblicists will note that in all of this the agent of persistent and recurrent illusion is logocentrism, the constant return, wittingly or not, to the metaphysics of the classical *logos*. This is, of course, the concept of a cosmic order with all things in ordered and proper places, accessible to privileged reason or science—to "logic" in its root form. Obviously this is not the Christian *logos*: but Derrida repudiates that too (being a disaffected disciple of Paul Ricoeur). Of "differance" he says that there is nothing "kerygmatic" about it, and that there "never has been and never will be a unique word, a master name" (1973b:159). Moreover he is fond of playfully linking *parousia* with *ousia*, millenarianism with substantialism; within our epoch, he says, all "histories" are those "whose origin may always be revealed or whose end may be anticipated in the form of presence" (1973b:138; 1970:248). We have no trouble recognizing this as a swipe at Christianity from *arché* to *telos*. But we must wonder if all of Derrida's work does not owe something to the *possibility* of the kerygmatic, understood not so much as the proclamation of a master name but as a decentering and deconstruction in itself—and not only of normative Judaism, but precisely of logocentrism. Whatever the metaphysical complicities of the way "history" has been used, the Bible's injunction that we must understand ourselves in relation to a historical past rather than to some changeless cosmic order is the crucial break with what became logocentrism. In thus aligning Derrida and the Bible, we open the possibility of reviving the Hebraic-Hellenic distinction, but not in a way that would please Matthew Arnold. Derrida himself hints

at this: his indictment of the "metaphysical epoch" includes the "narrower epoch of Christian creationism and infinitism when these appropriate the resources of Greek conceptuality" (1976:13).

It will not do, however, simply to say that from now on we'll be Hebrews instead of Greeks. We cannot, on religious or any other grounds, airily reject metaphysics: it is sedimented into our language, and we have no resources ("no syntax and no lexicon") for repudiation which have not "already slipped into the form, the logic, and the implicit postulations of precisely what it seeks to contest" (1970:250). No philosopher has ever been more aware than Derrida of the double bind implicit in revisionist or destructive philosophical critiques. The very language of any destructive discourse "drags along with it the whole of metaphysics. This is what allows these destroyers to destroy each other reciprocally—for example, Heidegger considering Nietzsche, with as much lucidity and rigor as bad faith and misconstruction, as the last metaphysician, the last 'Platonist.' One could do the same for Heidegger himself, for Freud . . ." (1970:251). All we can do is deconstruct instead of destroy, de-constitute or de-sediment the "metaphysico-theological" concepts and show the roots of their complicities. Constant vigilance is the price of liberty, in criticism as elsewhere.

"The age of the sign is essentially theological," Derrida warns. "Perhaps it will never *end*. Its historical *closure* is, however, outlined" (1976:14). We are, he suggests, in a position to become conscious of the determinants of our thought as never before, if we very carefully criticize, analyze, and work out this "closure" that will give us no fully rounded coherence, no knowledge in the "closed" sense, no reassuring revelation of full presence either historical or transcendent. Several implications for Biblical study would follow from this; perhaps, once and for all, we could free ourselves from all forms of dreaming how to reduce the text to a transparency mediating between two so-called "realities," ourselves and the authentic word, voice, event, face of God or even of the ancient Hebrews. But more than that: for those who think they have given up quests for "the historical Jesus," etc., usually compensate with reifications of various kinds: e.g. of "tradition" if not "history." All of us believe in some ground or Archimedean point of full presence somewhere—in "man," "nature," "reality," or even the methodologies of various schools. (The very making of an "-ology" out of "method" is an eloquent self-betrayal.) But if we grant Derrida's propositions about language and experience, then we cannot cheerfully continue to reduce the text because we realize that we ourselves are "texts" in a sense; this, presumably, is what Derrida means when he says that there is nothing outside texts. Therefore historical research and interpretation of the Bible must continue, but we must enter into the transactions of which they are constituted with much greater self-consciousness and a much deeper awareness of what we do when we interpret. All "experience" is interpretation by Derrida's compelling logic, and thus there are several fallacies involved in

our masterful setting-aside of a certain portion of our experience as “interpretation” of the Bible or any text; for one thing, it is not “live” minds dissecting an inert object. An enduring fallacy that results is the accepted notion of “meaning,” pursued as a “presence” that is the origin, referent, end, etc., of the text. Most of us know that meaning in this sense is a donkey’s carrot, but we have been conceptually unable to reach beyond it. We must become aware that we are naked, and more ingenious (and less ingenuous) about the uses of sewn leaves—with marks on them.

What is implied here is neither navel-gazing nor aestheticism. It is not bookishness; indeed Derrida sets writing against The Book, which is logocentrism’s way of *containing* writing. What we must do is rethink our whole ingrained heritage of representationalism; led on by the arts, we have been seeking to do this for some time now, but one of the testimonies to Derrida’s accuracy is the tenacity with which it holds on, and not only in the common mind. We cannot simply walk away from an epoch of logocentrism; we are not such free spirits. “The step ‘outside philosophy’ is much more difficult to conceive than is generally imagined by those who think they made it long ago with cavalier ease, and who are in general swallowed up in metaphysics by the whole body of the discourse that they claim to have disengaged from it” (1970:254). And one of the most basic forms of this entrapment is the inability to get past representationalism; so that all Plato’s sneers at “a copy of a copy” apply, and not only to art: we have, following Plato, developed the same unwarranted contempt for writing by treating it as the “sign of the sign.” This “logic of the parasite” as Derrida calls it is our major stumbling block, and it prevents us from seeing that all experience is open to this reduction to “representation” or “interpretation” (1976:54). When Derrida says, “I don’t believe that anything like perception exists. Perception is precisely a concept, a concept of an intuition or of a given originating from the thing itself, present itself in its meaning, independently from language. . . . I don’t believe that there is any perception,” he means that no privilege is to be accorded to the immediate, the intuitive, the supposedly “innocent eye” as E. H. Gombrich calls it (1960: *passim*). We all know now that what we call perception involves a tremendous amount of brain-processing, and that it is all interpretive.

Derrida goes further, but begins in accord with the important movement in art history and criticism that can be summed up in Wölfflin’s phrase that all paintings owe more to other paintings than to nature. The art of a painting is in its rendering, precisely in its representation, not in what it takes for a subject. We see this now as obvious, but have failed to think through all its implications, fearing perhaps that “art for art’s sake” is the only end we can come to. We would do better to attend to Derrida’s praise of Peirce for seeing that it is “only out of symbols that a new symbol can grow,” that there is no “ground of nonsignification” that we can find or use as “foundation under the play and the coming into being of signs” (1976:48) /3/.

In this sense, all is "text," and Wölfflin was even righter than he knew: art history shows it. Even painters who object to this conventional element in art cannot escape it, though they may seek to return to "primitive" images: "For that strange precinct we call 'art' is like a hall of mirrors or a whispering gallery. Each form conjures up a thousand memories and after-images. No sooner is an image presented as art than, by this very act, a new frame of reference is created which it cannot escape" (Gombrich, 1965: 422). This, I think, is a clue to Derrida's sense of texts and why neither they nor their "origins" can ever be "innocent." Harold Bloom, though in conflict with Derrida on many points, has appropriated this vein of thought by declaring that all poems are readings of predecessor poems under the "anxiety of influence." The common-sense rejoinder that this is not "all there is" to poems, or to paintings or texts, risks obscuring the force of this insight, for these are heuristic propositions rather than exhaustive definitions, and as such have an obvious validity: no one sits down to transpose an "event" into a text or painting or poem without being profoundly influenced and to some degree determined by other texts, etc. That is why there is such a thing as history of style in art and writing; as Gombrich reminds us in a memorable understatement, not every style is possible in every age: indeed until what he calls a "sacred discontent" enters the scene in the early Renaissance, most ages were bound by extremely restrictive models and paradigms (1960:173; cf. Schneidau, 1976:265).

The alternative to this line of thought is a retreat, even if it poses as something else, some sophisticated advance, to the Platonic encapsulation and reduction of representation via a quest for "origins" (cf. Bass: 346-47). This will always reveal itself by certain moves of nostalgic recovery, of legitimation of etymology or archaeology or purification of discourse, return to the mythic, or whatever. Not that we are to scorn what can be learned from these moves and disciplines; great feats of intellectual power and important discoveries, enduring and liberating, have been made in this mode. But if we sanctify this procedure we are simply privileging one more form of the transcendental signified, the outside foundation that lets us escape the vertigo of seeing meanings resolve endlessly into other meanings. Derrida brilliantly exposes just this nostalgia in Lévi-Strauss, and in doing so once again underlines the entrapment implicit in repudiation—for of course Romantic nostalgia is just what Lévi-Strauss thought he was escaping. In fact we could say that what Derrida is preternaturally alert to is the philosophic form of the Oedipus problem: the harder one flees from his fate the more he runs straight into it (which is not a cautionary tale warning you not to flee so hard). Equally illustrative and Oedipal: sons who hate their fathers tend to become just like them; childbeating runs in families. Derrida catches this everywhere: pressed by some literal-minded Marxists as to his underuse of the term "matter" (as in dialectical materialism) he replies that it tends to be idealized, to become just what it seeks not to be: "this concept has too often been reinvested with

'logocentric' values, associated with those of thing, of reality, of presence in general, perceptible presence for example, of substantial plenitude, of content, of referent, etc." (1973a:34). In short the idealization implicit in substantialism ("that other name of presence," 1976:26) swallows up many competing philosophies; even the innocuous word "thing" drags its metaphysical train behind—which comes as no surprise when we consider Kant, etc. If we want to be really rigorous we have to acknowledge two things: one, that the search for the *Ding-an-sich*, like all the other metaphysical searches, is open to the same critique: "The so-called 'thing itself' is always already a *representamen* shielded from the simplicity of intuitive evidence," and like the cogito, or consciousness, or any other supposedly primary or originary foundation, is always already an interpretation (1976:49). Two, we cannot simply repudiate the metaphysics involved, even by the tactic of "clarity" or "simplicity" or "plain-spokenness," which after all is just a vulgar form of logical positivism. Against the idea that we can avoid all these metaphysical tangles simply by "plain" talk, let me quote Hugh Kenner, who is anything but an admirer of Derrida: "any linguistic act, including a page of literary explication, is from some points of view as complicated as anything in *Finnegans Wake*. I think people who talk about putting things in plain language should be aware of that: There is no plain language" (12). This quest for a pure language, "plain" or whatever, is another nostalgia, but is far from innocent.

The very least that Derrida asks of us, therefore, is a really thorough tracing-out of the metaphysical filiations entangled in the metaphors we use as value-terms: "plain" language being a fiction akin to the "ordinary" language invented by linguistic philosophers (we should attend to Stanley Fish's question "how ordinary is ordinary language?") that subtly enjoins on us adherence to canons of "clarity," "structure," etc., all of which have themselves questionable metaphorical associations that are in complicity with logocentrism. These canons up until recently were almost ubiquitous in academic literary criticism, but most visible perhaps in the work of self-styled Aristotelian critics: for it was Aristotle who justified poetry (as a more "philosophic" art than history) by appeal to the *logos*: history was tied down to the recitation of what "in fact" happened in any given event, but poetry opened up all that might have happened and thus took a more direct route to the revelation of the *logos* that must necessarily be the *telos* of all analysis. For history can reveal the *logos*, the cosmic logic, but only tediously and troublesomely: whereas the poets, knowing the *telos* and availed of devices like "the probable impossible," could display in their works how all events manifest the *logos* in unmistakable form. This literary logocentrism, propagated relentlessly and unrepentantly until very recently, used the canons mentioned above together with corollaries like "unity" and "coherence" and "closure" to put forward the view that art has simply to tell us what we already know, but in clearer or more picturesque ways: "what oft was thought" (or at least experienced) "but ne'er so well expressed." Art

purveys the “great truths” of “human meaning”—i.e., is humanism in pure essence—and we thrill with recognition or perhaps Platonic recollection when we read *Hamlet*, etc. At the same time these canons enforced a peculiarly formalistic notion of literary value, formalistic in the sense that words like “order,” “unity,” and the like became powerfully honorific. Actually these canons are not of much use as touchstones for great literature: the *Iliad* is after all not an autonomous unity, but implies a much larger epic cycle; Shakespeare is so disorderly (how many children had Lady Macbeth? how old was Hamlet? does the action of *Othello* take three days or several months?) that eighteenth century critics thought he needed regularizing. But these canons are very useful for belaboring works or authors one doesn't like: George P. Elliott asks of Ezra Pound's *Cantos* if the work has “a stable, rational structure such as the highest excellence always builds and is always built upon? I think not,” though one wonders what “structure” he finds Chaucer building in the *Canterbury Tales*, Shakespeare in the Sonnets, etc. (161). No doubt one more reason why the Bible can be neglected by most literary critics is that it fails to fit formalist values.

I should explain that “formalism” is here a synecdoche, for in current discourse the word can mean several things, sometimes conflated: 1) concern with formal, almost geometrical values—symmetry, closure, etc.; 2) a quest for the essence of “literaryness,” as in Russian Formalism (emphasizing “form” over “content”); 3) the Anglo-American New Critical orthodoxy, belief in an “autonomous” literary text, possessing “ambiguity” but at some level univocal, needing no outside information to elucidate it, and opened up by a method that seeks only the “intrinsic” meaning of this autonomous work. This view, this concept of the “homogeneity” of texts, is what Derrida's thought most threatens. As Alan Bass puts it, Derrida sharply questions the belief that “a text's meaning is the truth that is present ‘behind’ or ‘under’ its textual surface that criticism makes fully present by placing it before us” (350). The notion is indeed ripe for debunking, for anomalies as T. S. Kuhn would call them in the formalist paradigm have long been visible; many have observed that New Critics, in their effort to eschew “extrinsic” matter, often throw biographical or historical information out the front door then smuggle it in at the back. Derrida sees formalism (including certain kinds of “structural” analysis) as symbiotic with its apparent opposite, “thematism”:

A criticism focused on simple content (thematic criticism, whether of a philosophic, sociological, or psychoanalytic style, which would take the theme, manifest or hidden, full or empty, to be the substance of the text, to be its object or *its illustrated truth*) can no more take the measure of certain texts (or rather the structure of certain textual states) than a purely formalist criticism which is concerned only with the code, with the pure play of the signifier. . . . These two insufficiencies are rigorously complementary. (1972:38)

If in our practice we have all tended to oscillate between these two modes, it is because we have no new paradigm: Derrida may be able to point us

toward one, though he questions the very notion of paradigms. Formalism has served its turn as a posture, however uneasy, in which to defend "aesthetic" values against partisan misappropriations, *ad hominem* judgments, and instrumentalist reductions, but it is itself partisan and has been used to enforce the proprieties of a literary-critical Establishment; repressive polemics masquerade as calls for "clarity" and the like. It is worth remembering that the history of Western arts and letters is dotted with instances of masterworks being initially rejected as "obscure," "incoherent," "unplayable" or otherwise scandalous. Feckless or irresponsible obscurantism, as in bureaucratic or social-scientific prose, is one thing, and new thought demanding new modes of discourse, so as not to fall back too easily into the old lexicon, is another.

In all of this it is obvious that Derrida carries forward the Nietzschean criticism of the notion of "truth": indeed quotation of the relevant passages has become so regular that I omit it here. The point is that Nietzsche asserts that most of our truths are solidified figures of speech, and that the concept itself is a theologization. Derrida expands this into an attack on the complicity of various philosophic definitions of truth with the logocentric "presence present-to-itself" that always insinuates itself into this form of discourse, and carries on with the aid of Freud, though of course his revisionary version of Freud is as startling as one might expect. In this connection he can be compared to Jacques Lacan, the "structuralist" Freudian, although he raises against Lacan the charge of phonocentrism: "even when he repeats Freud on rebus, hieroglyph, engravings, etc. . . . he always resorts ultimately to a writing sublated [*relevée, aufgehoben*] by the voice." ("Sublation" is a form of Hegelian reconciliation of opposites that Derrida strongly rejects.) For him, Lacan's concept of "castration-as-truth" is misleadingly logocentric and fails to understand the role of "*le propre*" (the threat to enforce propriety): "On the contrary, castration is what contracts (constriction of the ring) to bring the phallus, the signifier, the letter or the fetish back to their oikos, their familiar dwelling, their proper place" (1975:82,63) /4/. Castration is not dissemination but logocentric orderliness. The remark on the fetish is typical of Derrida's transposition of Freud's thought. "Paraphrasing Freud, who says it of the present/absent penis (but it is the same thing), one must recognize in truth 'the normal prototype of the fetish.' How could we get along without it?" (1972:43) How indeed. "Truth," and the positivist's "reality" and such terms, are our phallic fetishes—or security blankets, to use a more familiar vocabulary. So Freud underscores Nietzsche; it is noteworthy that Derrida achieves this displacement by once again being more structuralist than the structuralists.

Of course the usual "common sense" objections can be raised again here; if Derrida does not believe in truth, then how can he assert that anything is an error, or make any statements at all? The first part of the answer is simply implicit in a structuralist view of language: i.e., one may "mean

what he says" but meanwhile his statement will obey certain laws, and not only those of grammar; if the text is in English, and of sufficient length, the letter "e" will appear most frequently, unless there is some bizarre control. Moreover, the problem evaporates with sufficient study of the mode of discourse that Derrida employs; once one catches on to the aphoristic and, I would say, prophetic style, one realizes that Derrida is himself a supreme artificer of language and that his propositions are always heuristic, sometimes parabolic, rarely literal—the whole concept of "literal" meaning is part of the metaphysics of *le propre*. How literal is literal meaning? What does the *letter* have to do with it? The term "literal meaning" is itself a figure of speech. Meanings of words in general are tissues of etymological accidents, like most of our spellings; often they are dead metaphors or metonymies. Hence the frequent charge against Derrida or his expositors that they reject the concept of determinate meaning but employ it themselves to make their points smacks of more than a little "bad faith and misconstruction." Derrida obviously is not saying that any statement is as correct as any other, or that meaning is purely arbitrary. He is simply trying to call our attention to the immense problems involved in concepts we "take for granted," and to show that there is a metaphysical momentum behind these notions that makes them seem "natural" to us and prevents us from thinking critically about them until we are shaken by startling new propositions. We need the Cretan liar to make us think about truth—but what we do not need are those academic Cretan liars who aren't even conscious of their self-contradictions, who hold to a positivistic "truth."

But let us return to Derrida's relentless critique of structuralism, for it raises the timely question of structuralist work on the Bible and its validity. I have already delivered myself of the opinion that these methods as usually employed are misapplied to the Bible, and Lévi-Strauss has been evasive but I think wise in staying away from the Bible himself (1976:59–60). Most practitioners of Greimasian and other such forms of narrative analysis appear blithely unconcerned about their own metaphysical presuppositions, like any positivists; they belong to the class who believe they long ago made the step beyond philosophy with cavalier ease. Even the analysts of oral traditions and related matters seem blissfully unaware of Derrida's critique of the elevation of oralism and the reduction of writing. It seems to me that Derrida demands that we look at this whole question afresh—beginning with the elevation of oralism in the Bible; Werner Kelber has recently reminded us that Paul's hostility to the Law had much to do with the fact that it was written ("the letter killeth"). Many have already complained, about the structuralist forms of narrative analysis, that the amount of machinery they deploy is hardly justified by the results they achieve. Which puts me in mind of two things: one is Lewis Thomas's remark about technology in medicine, that the most costly and elaborate machineries are those used for diseases of which we have only "halfway" understanding;

where we really understand a disease mechanism, the treatment is usually simple and cheap (1974:36–40). The other relevant remark is that of Lévi-Strauss in his “Oedipus” essay, where he says he is not trying to achieve an interpretation “acceptable to the specialists,” but only to demonstrate, like a “street peddler,” the “functioning of the mechanical toy which he is trying to sell to the onlookers” (1967:209). I quote this not simply to be derogatory; the various forms of narrative analysis do need a kind of trying-out that will not be judged only in terms of immediate results, just as it was useful, up to a point, to have psychoanalytic interpretations of Biblical and literary matters.

But more serious criticism of these undertakings could be made from a Derridaean point of view, as for instance by Paul de Man:

One of the most striking characteristics of literary semiology as it is practiced today, in France and elsewhere, is the use of grammatical (especially syntactical) structures conjointly with rhetorical structures, without apparent awareness of a possible discrepancy between them. In their literary analyses, Barthes, Genette, Todorov, Greimas and their disciples all simplify and regress from Jakobson in letting grammar and rhetoric function in perfect continuity. . . . One can ask whether this reduction of figure to grammar is legitimate. . . . Rhetoric radically suspends logic and opens up vertiginous possibilities of referential aberration. (28,30)

Here is where the Derridaeans go beyond the other structuralists; they do not believe we can simply drop away the author (or “the subject”) implicit in the “figural” or rhetorical aspects of texts, to be replaced by “codes” or “functions.” Texts are not written by machines but by men—even if we badly need a probing re-examination of the concept of “man” /5/. Doing away with the figural is a variant of the other forms of too-easy repudiation. De Man himself is keenly interested in all forms of “misfit” between grammar and rhetoric—is “How can we know the dancer from the dance?” a rhetorical question or a real one (in Yeats’s “Among School Children”) (30)? Grammar cannot tell us. J. Hillis Miller nominates de Man, along with Derrida himself, as part of a group he calls the “uncanny” critics. These are distinguished from the “Socratic, theoretical, or canny critics,” the ones de Man names and others, who “believe in the possibility of a structuralist-inspired criticism as a rational and rationalizable activity,” who would lead us to “a happy positivism.” Of the “uncanny” critics Miller writes:

Though they have been inspired by the same climate of thought as the Socratic critics and though their work would be impossible without modern linguistics, the “feel” or atmosphere of their writing is quite different from that of a critic like [Jonathan] Culler, with his brisk common sense and his reassuring notions of “literary competence” and the acquisition of “conventions.” . . . [In the work of “uncanny” critics] sooner or later there is the encounter with an “aporia” or impasse. The bottom drops out, or there is an “abyssing,” an insight one can almost grasp or recognize as part of the familiar landscape of the mind, but not quite, as though the mental eye could not quite bring the material into lucid focus. (1976:335–38)

De Man and others are now vitally interested in exposing the aporiae in texts, not the "logic" of them. The canny structuralists dream of a machinery that will finally expose ultimate logic, thus putting an end to the freeplay of interpretation; the uncanny of the kind of insight that Miller's description points toward—not unified, final and coherent nor part of a systematizable knowledge or activity. This latter train of thought is surely not unfamiliar to Biblical critics; the ongoing work of John Dominic Crossan on parables, for instance, seems to me to be reaching toward similarly heuristic impasses. When he quotes from *Richard II* on setting "the word itself against the word," he catches something very like a Derridaean sense of texts (213). Only in such aporiae can we escape the net of the *logos*, or set the kerygma against it. Parables, especially the "problematic" ones, are I suggest dramatizations of just such escapes: as I have said elsewhere, a parable is always a parable; i.e., its very form of existence is a repudiation of the notion that "everything that can be expressed can be expressed clearly," without further need for interpretation (1978:84–85). Parables are inherently "about" interpretation. Derrida's contributions can be fruitfully used in the analysis of this and all other forms of Biblical rhetoric and figure.

Most immediately he should spur us on with his concept of fiction not as a separate category or compartment of writing but as a constitutive element in all writing, for all is figural to some extent, and all figures (e.g., metaphor) are "little fictions." His own work, in a sense, consists of reading philosophy and like texts as if they were fiction, and in breaking down our easy distinctions between fictional and other texts (1976:275–86,304). The texts of the Bible are from this new viewpoint most intriguing; their resistance to past categorizations is a sign that they are readier for Derridaean analysis than for the methods of those who derive their notions of genre from Propp, or from Northrop Frye. A consistent feature of Biblical criticism is the neglect or underestimation of the role of fiction, e.g., in prophetic rhetoric and vision. Fiction, even in the usual literary sense, gives us an important clue: in its most noteworthy quality, which is to seem to be straining with signification while at the same time presenting so many aporiae, so many "undecidable" readings, that we can never feel quite comfortable with the understandings we have, even of those texts on which we may spend a lifetime's effort. The whole literary-critical industry has been built on this discomfort. We all get tired of the mountains of commentary, but something more than the need to publish keeps them growing. This quality, the power of fiction to signify even though its objects are so unreal we can't say just *what* is being signified (cf. "I am dead") must have been enormously suggestive to Derrida, and can be so in Biblical studies. To me it seems far more than a coincidence that Gutenberg not only made the Bible available to all readers but also made possible the burgeoning of fiction. And cannot the growth of Bible—and fiction-reading—be correlated with the decline of metaphysics? In any case,

Derrida suggests that fiction and figural potentiality have as much to do with what language is as any utilitarian or positivist notions of "communication" of "determinate meanings." (The idea that we have determinate meanings which we then "put into words" is what I mean by entrapment in representationalism.)

Derrida is fascinated by all the possibilities for the "skidding" of meaning in language. Several years ago he said that his future projects would concern

undecidables, i.e. simulative units, "false" verbal, nominal, or semantic properties, which escape from inclusion in the philosophical (binary) opposition and which nonetheless inhabit it, resist and disorganize it, but *without ever* constituting a third term, without ever occasioning a solution in the form of speculative dialectics. (The *pharmakon* is neither the cure nor the poison, neither good nor evil, neither the inside nor the outside, neither speech nor writing; the *supplément* is neither a plus nor a minus, neither an outside nor the complement of an inside, neither an accident nor an essence, etc.; the *hymen* is neither confusion nor distinction, neither identity nor difference, neither consummation nor virginity, neither the veil nor the unveiling, neither the inside nor the outside, etc.; the *gramme* is neither a signifier nor a signified, neither a sign nor a thing, neither a presence nor an absence. . . . Neither/nor is at once *at once* or rather *or rather*.) (1972:36)

That last sentence especially ought to emblemize the complexity of thought and the "aphoristic energy of writing" that Derrida displays and demands; ironically it poses as a speech, the answer to a question.

Here, then, we have another deracinated Jew making good use of his prophetic heritage. As with Marx and Freud, his thought can be abused by literal-minded or humorless disciples, but he offers nothing so vulgar as "methodology" in the marketplace of ideas; indeed his most enduring lesson is that this consumerist analogy is insidiously misleading, since it reinforces our belief that we may pick and choose among intellectual heritages. What he shows us is that there is a metaphysical determinism as well as economic and psycho-biologic ones: if none of these forces are absolutely determining, that does not mean we can afford to ignore them. Our thought is always entwined, to some degree, with a discredited and supposedly abandoned metaphysical fundamentalism. We notice it no more than we do the atmospheric pressure: we need Derrida to help us feel and see it.

Bibliographical Note

Probably the most direct American use of Derrida is Joseph N. Riddel's study of William Carlos Williams, *The Inverted Bell*. Cf. the study of Joyce by Riddel's former pupil, Margot Norris: *The Decentered Universe of Finnegans Wake*; also a series of essays in various journals by

Fred G. See, Jerrold Hogle, and others. A survey of journals and serials like *Diacritics*, *Glyph*, *Yale French Studies*, *Sub-Stance*, *Boundary 2*, *New Literary History*, *Critical Inquiry*, *The Georgia Review*, *Modern Language Notes*, and the new *Structuralist Review* will turn up various applications of Derrida. See also *Velocities of Change: Critical Essays from MLN*, comp. Richard Macksey, which contains an excellent exposition of Alan Bass, "‘Literature’/Literature." Bass remarks that Derrida's texts "are ‘literary’ because they have attacked the fundamental notion of ‘scientific’ truth" (342). J. Hillis Miller, Geoffrey Hartman, and Paul de Man are probably the best known literary critics whose work has been powerfully informed by Derrida; Richard Macksey and Eugenio Donato have probably done the most to introduce his work here. Two "samplers" may prove helpful to the curious: *Deconstruction and Criticism*, with essays by Miller, de Man, Hartman, Harold Bloom, and Derrida; and *Textual Strategies*, ed. Josué Harari. Discussions of Derrida and literary criticism include those of Fredric Jameson in *The Prison-House of Language*, Johathan Culler in *Structuralist Poetics*, Terence Hawkes in *Structuralism and Semiotics*, David Hoy in *The Critical Circle*, Robert Detweiler in *Story, Sign, and Self*, and Hartman in *Saving the Text*. The antagonistic phrases come from Gerald Graff's *Literature Against Itself*, Eugene Goodheart's *The Failure of Criticism*, and others, including now *Newsweek*.

NOTES

/1/ Bass explains the point succinctly: "That a system of differences permits a sign to stand for a thing, to replace it, always implies a future relationship to an element from the past; . . . etymologically *defer* and *differ* are the same word: this temporal *interval*, which separates the thing present from itself in time, also irreducibly divides all ‘spatial’ presence; for the system of differential reference requires that each present element refers to an element *other* than itself, the perception of objects depending upon the perception of their differences" (344–45). Deferral is then what prevents presence from being present to itself. Cf. this passage from Jane Harrison: "Man is essentially an image-maker, but it is his human prerogative. In most animals, who act from what we call instinct, action follows on perception mechanically with almost chemical swiftness and certainty. In man the nervous system is more complicated, perception is not instantly transformed into reaction, there seems to be an interval for choice. It is just in this momentary pause between perception and reaction that our images, *i.e.*, our imaginations, our ideas, in fact our whole mental life, is built up. We do not immediately react, *i.e.*, we do not immediately get what we want, so we figure the want to ourselves, we create an image" (x). It is interesting that she says the image is of what we "want" rather than of a presence. Derrida's "interval" is of course logical rather than synaptic; it refers to an inability of "presence" in any form to be present to itself, to be simply "immediate," autonomous, or "proper."

/2/ This assertion depends on the idea that nothing is knowable simply in its "immediate" presence; it must be "iterable," and must therefore be part of some system of differences—for

relation is difference first of all (*systematic* difference) and nothing is perceived outside relationships, or in Bass's phrase, "the perception of objects [depends] upon the perception of their differences" (see /1/). Because identifiable as itself, it cannot be identical to itself. Bass again: "the sign is thus constituted by the *trace* of a past element that was never fully present, because it must always refer to something other than itself; and this trace refers to a future that will never become present, because the interval separating sign from thing must always reconstitute itself" (345).

/3/ These points do not imply that Derrida is urging what some Biblical scholars call "text-centricity," as in the notion that the Gospels must be modelled on some classical genres of writing (against which see the early chapters of Erich Auerbach's *Mimesis*), or simply in the habit of referring all texts to some specifically written source. What Derrida means by the notion that texts arise from other texts is far subtler and more complicated than in the older paradigms of textual evolution or redaction criticism. As Werner Kelber has pointed out, Biblical studies are only beginning to reap the harvest of studies of oral cultures, from Parry and Lord to Father Ong: Derrida's influence should qualify such studies but not short-circuit them.

/4/ The lengths to which Derrida believes he must go are mimed for us by the outlandishness, the apparent outrageousness of this essay, a commentary on Lacan's "Seminar on 'The Purloined Letter.'" Derrida erects, on top of Lacan's already topheavy edifice of oracle on top of allegory on top of pun (all laid over the text of Poe's short story), a baroque panoply of probing questions into so many aspects of the fiction-narration-interpretation problem that one can scarcely read the work, and never summarize it. The exercise is exhausting but instructive.

/5/ Derrida's own definition appears in the context of his choice of the Nietzschean version of interpretation, which is "no longer turned toward the origin, affirms freeplay and tries to pass beyond man and humanism, the name man being the name of that being who, throughout the history of metaphysics or of ontotheology—in other words, throughout the history of all history—has dreamed of full presence, the reassuring foundation, the origin and the end of the game" ("Structure, Sign, and Play," 264–65). And in the next sentence he repudiates the project of a "new humanism."

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DIFFERENCE AND DIVINITY

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ABSTRACT

The essay is an attempt to think *difference* from a triple viewpoint in history, anthropology, and philosophy.

From history, one can understand divinity either as order restraining chaos or as chaos threatening order (Eliade, Smith), but, in both cases, divinity confronts humanity as otherness, so that difference rules equally over either option.

From anthropology, one sees a religion such as Judaism which, from meal to sacrifice, from land to world, and from humanity to divinity, draws sharp lines of separation and completion, and then lives within such distinctions. One can also see the opposite in a religion such as Christianity, which accepts the hybrid, the mixture, the conjunction, and proclaims Christ precisely as God-Man (Douglas, Soler). But, once again, whether for separation or combination, for censorship or celebration, it is distinction that governs, it is difference which dominates.

From philosophy, it is Jacques Derrida's *différance*, which, beyond concept and word, beyond hearing and almost beyond understanding, raises most explicitly the problem glimpsed on the horizon of the two preceding cases. How might one meditate divinity or transcendence, beyond ontotheology, and within a thematics of *différance*, even, presumably, by deconstructing Derrida?

in naming have we divided what
unnaming will not undivide:
(Ammons: 26)

This paper is essay in the sense both of article and attempt. Its *point* has been articulated most explicitly by Jacques Derrida when, in discussion with Jean Hyppolite at the 1966 Johns Hopkins University symposium on "The Languages of Criticism and the Sciences of Man," he admitted concerning his own thought that, "I am trying, precisely, to put myself at a point so that I do not know any longer where I am going" (Derrida, 1970:267). Such a *point*, either as location or as meaning, might seem too lonely for human inhabitation, but a little earlier, in 1964, Derrida had written of it as a *community* (Derrida, 1978:80):

A community of the question, therefore, within that fragile moment when the question is not yet determined enough for the hypocrisy of an answer to have already initiated itself beneath the mask of the question, and not yet determined enough for its voice to have been already fraudulently articulated within the very syntax of the question. A community of decision, of initiative, of absolute initiality, but also a threatened community, in which the question has not yet found the language it has decided to seek, is not yet sure of its own possibility within the community. The community of the question about the possibility of the question.

1. First Essay: Order and Chaos

This first essay will probe the question in the area of history. My basis is the paper on Mircea Eliade's work delivered by Jonathan Z. Smith at the University of Notre Dame, February 12, 1971.

Smith proposes four "queries and applications" to Eliade's corpus. All of them are formulated as dichotomies or differences and each is concerned with the basic distinction of the sacred and the profane.

The first question concerns *chaos and order*: "Is chaos best understood as the equivalent of the profane, that which is neutral, that which is unreal?" And he answers: "It is that which is opposed to order, which threatens the paradigms and archetypes but which is, nevertheless, profoundly necessary for the very creativity that is characteristic of Eliade's notion of the Sacred" (Smith: 143). The second question concerns *center and periphery*: "Has not the illuminating category of the 'Center' been too narrowly discussed in literalistic terms of geographical symbolism?" And he replies: "I would query whether one can pay such attention to the 'Center' without giving equal attention to the periphery" (Smith: 144, 145). The third question compares *rehearsal and reversal*: "Are all mythic first times paradigmatic and to be ritually repeated . . . ? He answers: "In other traditions there are even more daring mythologies in which the whole of creation, the world, the gods, and the structures of order and destiny are judged to be evil or confining and must be reversed or destroyed" (Smith: 145). Finally, the fourth question concerns *archaicism and modernism* (Smith: 146-47):

Is the material Eliade describes best organized under the categories 'archaic' and 'modern'? If one accepts the basic dualism just described between those cultures which affirm the structures of the cosmos and seek to repeat them; which affirm the necessity of dwelling within a limited world in which each being has its given place and role to fulfill, a centrifugal view of the world which emphasizes the importance of the 'Center' as opposed to those cultures which express a more 'open' view in which the categories of rebellion and freedom are to the fore; in which beings are called upon to challenge their limits, break them, or create new possibilities, a centripetal world which emphasizes the importance of periphery and transcendence . . . ought one to suggest the periodization implied by the terms 'archaic' and 'modern'?

Smith's own reply is that those twin options "remain coeval existential possibilities" and that we must presume "the basic availability of both at any time, in any place" (Smith: 147).

Behind all these queries and answers, and especially in the series of dichotomies in which they appear (sacred/profane: order/chaos, center/periphery, rehearsal/reversal, archaicism/modernism), one begins to glimpse a far more basic problem, one which is vertiginously difficult to articulate. If divinity imposes order upon chaos or if divinity overturns order through chaos, it is already clear that we are dealing with alternative options within the same dichotomy. Indeed, Smith concludes his paper by saying that, "The alteration, the discoveries and choices of and between these two views is, as again I have learned from Eliade, the history of man and the history of religions" (Smith: 148-49). But there is still a more difficult question behind this happy election or alternation of the twin options. Whether one experiences divinity as order regulating a chaotic environment or as chaos threatening an orderly one, it is profoundly clear that sacrality is otherness, divinity is different. If this intuition is correct, the discussion has been escalated to a higher level of debate. We are no longer talking of order against chaos or of chaos against order, or any other option within any other dichotomy, *but about difference itself*, about that without which no dichotomy and no alternative would ever be possible. And the invocation of identity/difference is not too helpful here since we are still involved with differentiation.

Even at this point questions begin to multiply. Are all those theophantic peoples, places, and things which fill the history of religions, revelatory of divinity *in their substances or in their differences*? Is any specific sacred phenomenon epiphantic *as itself or as different from some other*? Is the mountain, for example, sacred precisely as mountain or as different-from-the-plain?

But would it not be necessary to escalate the discussion yet one more level? What, then, is different from difference? What is the opposite of differentiation? One might answer: the undifferentiated. Or: that which is beyond all distinctions and all differences. But then one begins to hear the laughter in the background. It is possibly the laughter of God, probably the laughter of Godot, but certainly the laughter of Gödel (Crossan, Hofstadter).

2. Second Essay: Judaism and Christianity

This second essay probes the same question from a base in anthropology, with special dependence on the work of Mary Douglas and Jean Soler.

Mary Douglas has returned repeatedly to the dichotomy of pure/impure, clean/unclean, or holy/abominable, in the biblical tradition (Lev 11; Deut 14). For my present purpose I shall indicate only certain aspects of this discussion since fuller details are available elsewhere (Isenberg & Owen).

A first stage in her discussion is established by the thesis that, "Defilement is never an isolated event. It cannot occur except in view of a

systematic ordering of ideas. Hence any piecemeal interpretation of the pollution rules of another culture is bound to fail. For the only way in which pollution ideas make sense is in reference to a *total structure of thought* whose key-stone, boundaries, markings and internal lines are held in relation by rituals of separation" (Douglas, 1966:41; my italics). In order "to illustrate" this thesis Douglas turns to "the abominations of Leviticus, and particularly the dietary rules" (1966:41), and has some well-justified fun with interpretations ranging from allegorical moralism to medical materialism (1966:43-49). She concludes: "There must be contrariness between holiness and abomination which will make over-all sense of all the particular restrictions" (1966:49). This is the same challenge she repeats years later in discussion with Jacob Neusner. Neusner admitted that "none of the data we have surveyed will decisively affect her main theses" (Neusner: 119). But Douglas still presses her claim that, "Until Philo or J. N. can say what constitutes the uncleanness of the unclean animals, they both remain outside the symbolic system under study" (Neusner:139-40). Her own answer is that holy, clean, or pure is characterized, externally, by *separateness*, so that there are no confusions and hybrids of individuals or classes, and, internally, by *completeness*, so that there are no diseased or dismembered individuals or classes. Thus, on the wider level, "We have now laid a good basis for approaching the laws about clean and unclean meats. To be holy is to be whole, to be one; holiness is unity, integrity, perfection of the individual and the kind. The dietary rules merely develop the metaphor of holiness on the same lines" (1966:54). Hence, on the narrower level, she can conclude that, "the underlying principle of cleanness in animals is that they shall conform fully to their class. Those species are unclean which are imperfect members of their class, or whose class itself confounds the general scheme of the world" (1966:55).

A second stage in this analysis is reached in responding to critics of her explanation and in absorbing their own comments into its restatement. This appears in two articles from 1972 (1975:249-318). The restatement is along two main lines. First, if the *system* of distinctions is what counts, why is there so much emphasis on the *pig* among all the other unclean animals? An earlier answer that the pig became important only after and because of the persecution of Antiochus IV Epiphanes, for example in 2 Mac 6-7 (1970: 38-41), is not entirely satisfactory since it does not explain why it was so important in and for that persecution. Later she argues, more basically, that, "It carries the odium of multiple pollution. First, it pollutes because it defies the classification of ungulates. Second, it pollutes because it is reared as food (and presumably as prime pork) by non-Israelites" (1975:272). Indeed, "The pig, with the right mode of locomotion to get into the same class as sheep, goats, and cattle, does not chew the cud. It is the only non-cud-chewing hoof-cleaver in the whole of creation. a monster with no other judgment possible of its improper, law-defying existence than outright abomination" (1975:284, see also 305-306).

A second objection raises far more important issues and leads to the major development in this second stage of the discussion. Douglas admits that, "It was even against the whole spirit of my book to offer an account of an ordered system of thought which did not show the context of social relations in which the categories had meaning" (1975:261). This recalls the words in her opening thesis which I had italicized above: "*total structure of thought*" (1966:41). She now finds layers of isomorphic structuration which together form such a total structure of thought: "At the level of the individual living being impurity is the imperfect, broken, bleeding specimen. The sanctity of cognitive boundaries is made known by valuing the integrity of the physical forms. The perfect physical specimens point to the perfectly bounded temple, altar, and sanctuary. And these in turn point to the hard-won and hard-to-defend territorial boundaries of the Promised Land" (1975:269). Separation and distinction characterize not only meal, sacrifice, territory, and people, but even or especially, God as well (1975:283):

The Christian doctrine of the Incarnation insists that god-man belongs fully to two contrasted sets. For centuries the Israelites were in contact with Egyptian religion which venerated man-gods and god-beasts, and with the Assyrians likewise. But to the Israelites all hybrids and most mixtures were abominable. I have argued and believe that their abomination of creeping things was part of a larger habit of abominating beings which did not tidily conform to their established criteria of air, water and land creatures. And this was part again of a still larger pattern of social behavior which used very clear, tight defining lines to distinguish two classes of human beings, the Israelites and the rest.

A third stage of the discussion has now been reached once these isomorphic differentiations have moved all the way from food to God. It was implicitly present in the distinction between man/god and man-god religions just mentioned. It is explicitly proposed when Douglas says that the "next challenge is to go beyond the translation job to examining the properties of classification systems as such" (1975:296). How, in other words, does one classify the classification? Douglas suggests the following (1975:306-307):

Three social types, the Israelites, the Karam and the Lele, provide us with three types of classification system. In the first, exchange is not desired; all anomalies are bad and classed in a special sub-set expected to unleash disastrous chains of cause and effect. In the next, exchange is necessary but risky; anomalies are ambivalent, the rules that hedge them prevent dangerous effects. In the third, some exchange is reckoned clearly good, some is bad; anomalies likewise; the rules for approaching and avoiding them are the means for triggering off good effects.

This third and final stage has shown that there are not only different differences but also different understandings of difference itself. It has also drawn attention, even if only in passing, to the man/God dichotomy in Judaism and the man-God harmony in Christianity (1975:283).

In 1973, Jean Soler, Counselor for Cultural Affairs at the French Embassy in Israel between 1968 and 1973, published a study of Israel's

dietary laws which is remarkably similar to that of Mary Douglas although he had not read her work before he wrote his own (Soler: 138, n. 8). Although most of the study could serve as a summary of Douglas's more detailed analyses from 1966 to 1972, there are two aspects of Soler's work worth underlining. "There is a link between a people's dietary habits and its perception of the world" (Soler: 126), and Soler begins, even earlier than Leviticus or Deuteronomy, with the prohibitions and permissions concerning food in Genesis itself. Second, and more important, is the very explicit comparison Soler makes between Judaism and Christianity. Knowing the Jewish horror of the hybrid "would seem to make it very understandable that the Hebrews did not accept the divine nature of Jesus. A God-man, or a God become man, was bound to offend their logic more than anything else. Christ is the absolute hybrid" (Soler: 136). Thus Soler concludes (137-38):

From this starting point, Christianity could begin its expansion, grafting itself onto the Greco-Roman civilization, which, unlike the Hebrew civilization, was ready to welcome all blends, and most notably a God-man. A new system was to come into being, based on new structures. This is why the materials it took from the older system assume a different value. Blood, for instance, is consumed by the priest in the sacrifice of the Mass in the form of its signifier: 'the blood of the grape.' This is because the fusion between man and God is henceforth possible, thanks to the intermediate term, which is Christ. Blood, which had acted as an isolator between two poles, now becomes a conductor. In this manner, everything that Christianity has borrowed from Judaism, every citation of the Biblical text in the text of Western civilization (in French literature, for example), must in some way be 'tinkered with,' to use Lévi-Strauss's comparison.

By contrast, whatever variations the Mosaic system may have undergone in the course of history, they do not seem to have shaken its fundamental structures. This logic, which sets up its terms in contrasting pairs and lives by the rule of refusing all that is hybrid, mixed, or arrived at by synthesis and compromise, can be seen in action to this day in Israel, and not only in its cuisine.

What strikes me most profoundly in that comparison is not the superiority of either religion over the other but the extent to which *the Judeo-Christian tradition* becomes a valid description for this dualism of separation as against mixture, isolation as against combination, and segregation as against integration. I do not deny that *it makes a difference* whether a religion opts for the separation of humanity/divinity or for the combination of humanity-divinity. But if humanity and divinity must be separated, they are combined by that very disjunction itself; and if humanity and divinity are to be joined, they are separated as well by that necessity. Whether a hybrid is to be censored or celebrated, the difference that establishes it, be it for separation or for combination, rules alike over both those options and is much more fundamental than either of them. The difference is itself a relationship that binds more firmly than any other could. Of course, *it makes a difference* which way a religion goes. Precisely, *it makes a difference* which way a tradition grows. But what is *it* which *makes that difference*?

3. Third Essay: Difference and *Differance*.

This third essay continues and specifies the two preceding essays in terms of philosophy, with special dependence on the thought of Jacques Derrida.

Whether divinity confronts humanity as chaos threatening order or as order dominating chaos, it does so, fundamentally, as the different, that is, through difference. And whether Judaism negates the hybrid or Christianity affirms it, once again it is difference. unmediated or mediated, censored or celebrated, that rules the bifurcated options. Maria Ruegg has posed the basic problem as follows: "In the concordia of a discors, or in the discordia of a concors, what remains—however deconstructed—is the same 'cor': a core that cannot be questioned, moreover, in terms of the opposition, since to put the value of the 'cor' into question is to *destroy* the opposition" (207). What, then, can be said about the fundamental *cor*, this ultimate heart of the matter, difference itself?

3.1 *Differance* and Philosophy

The French verb *différer* "seems to differ from itself" (Derrida, 1973:129) in combining the English senses of *to differ* and *to defer*. Accordingly, as he addressed the *Société française de philosophie* in the Amphithéâtre Michelet of the Sorbonne on January 27, 1968, Jacques Derrida suggested that, "We provisionally give the name *differance* to this *sameness* which is not *identical*; by the silent writing of its *a*, it has the desired advantage of referring to differing, *both* as spacing/temporalizing and as the movement that structures every dissociation" (Derrida, 1973:129–30, see also Ruegg: 209, n. 28).

That initial statement contains four points which will intertwine through Derrida's lecture. My present interest is primarily with the fourth one.

First, there is the letter *a* which distinguishes the word difference from the neographism *differance*. Derrida says that, "I shall speak, then, of a letter—the *first one*, if we are to believe the alphabet and most of the speculations that have concerned themselves with it. I shall speak then of the letter *a*, *this first letter* which it seemed necessary to introduce" (1973:131; my italics; the first sentence is a complete paragraph to itself). There is obviously gain in this accidental primordially of *a* being the start of our alphabet but, of course, those thinking Derrida's thoughts in English might prefer to combine *differ* and *defer* into *defference* and thus receive the double meaning of *defer* (postponement, submission) as an even more interesting phenomenon.

Second, there is the "silent writing" (1973:129) of *a* instead of *e* which "remains purely graphic: it is written or read, but it is not heard" (1973:132). Put together, these first two points mean that *differance* "is put

forward by a silent mark, by a tacit monument, or, one might even say, by a pyramid—keeping in mind not only the capital form of the printed letter but also that passage from Hegel's *encyclopedia* where he compares the body of the sign to an Egyptian pyramid. The *a* of differance, therefore, is not heard; it remains silent, secret, and discreet, like a tomb. It is a tomb that (provided one knows how to decipher its legend) is not far from signaling the death of the king" (1973:132; the last sentence is a complete paragraph to itself).

Third, there is the combination of *to differ* and *to defer* in this newly created *differance*. Thus *différer* (*to differ*), in space, and *différer* (*to defer*), in time, are combined in *differance*. "But the word 'difference' (with an *e*) could never refer to differing as temporalizing or to difference as *polemos*. It is this loss of sense that the word differance (with an *a*) will have to schematically compensate for. Differance can refer to the whole complex of its meanings at once, for it is immediately and irreducibly multivalent" (1973:137).

These three points are all of importance to Derrida's lecture but for now I wish to focus on the fourth item in his initial proposal of the neographism *differance* "as the movement that structures every dissociation" (1973:130). Derrida insists repeatedly that *differance* is "neither a word nor a concept" (1973:130, 131, 135, 136) and, in underlining the radical implications of Saussure's thesis that the "principle of difference affects the *whole sign*, that is, both the signified and the signifying aspects" (1973:139), he reiterates this claim in reverse. "Every concept is necessarily and essentially inscribed in a chain or a system, within which it refers to another and to other concepts, by the systematic play of differences. Such a play then—*differance*—is no longer simply a concept, but the possibility of conceptuality, of the conceptual system and process in general. For the same reason, differance, which is not a concept, is not a mere word" (1973:140). *Differance*, then, is already beyond the order of hearing and "we shall see in what respects it is also beyond the order of understanding" (1973:132). Therefore, "in marking out differance, everything is a matter of strategy and risk" (1973:135).

One could take the *risk* of saying that, "With its *a*, differance more properly refers to what in classical language would be called the origin or production of differences and the differences between differences, the *play* [*jeu*] of differences. Its locus and operation will therefore be seen wherever speech appeals to difference" (1973:130). But then, as *strategy*, that classical formulation would have to be placed under erasure with another statement (1973:141):

What we note as *differance* will thus be the movement of the play that "produces" (and not by something that is simply an activity) these differences, these effects of difference. This does not mean that the differance which produces differences is before them in a simple and in itself unmodified and indifferent present. Differance is the nonfull, nonsimple "origin"; it is the structured and differing origin of differences.

Since language (which Saussure says is a classification) has not fallen from the sky it is clear that the differences have been produced; they are the effects produced, but effects that do not have as their cause a subject or substance, a thing in general, or a being that is somewhere present and itself escapes the play of difference. If such a presence were implied (quite classically) in the general concept of cause, we would therefore have to talk about an effect without a cause, something that would very quickly lead to no longer talking about effects. I have tried to indicate a way out of the closure imposed by this system, namely, by means of the "trace." No more an effect than a cause, the "trace" cannot of itself, taken outside its context, suffice to bring about the required transgression.

Derrida's lecture unfolds in dialogue with Saussure (1973:139-42, 145-47), Hegel (143-145), Nietzsche (148-49), Freud (149-52), and especially Heidegger, with whom it concludes (153-60). But what is at risk here is even more basic than attempting a breakout from Western metaphysics using Western metaphysical transportation. That is difficult enough, to be sure: "How, for example, do we conceive of what stands opposed to the text of Western metaphysics?" (1973:158). But what is ultimately at risk is presumably the attempted breakout from relational language and differential semiotics, and that is presumably no easier in Western than in Eastern tradition. If one attempts to take "differance as the difference between Being and beings" one must realize that, "'Older' than Being itself, our language has no name for such a difference. But we 'already' know that if it is unnamable, this is not simply provisional; it is not because our language has still not found or received this *name*, or because we would have to look for it in another language, outside the finite system of our language. It is because there is no *name* for this, not even essence or Being—not even the name 'differance,' which is not a name, which is not a pure nominal entity, and continually breaks up in a chain of different substitutions" (1973:159).

3.2 *Differance* and Theology

Derrida has opposed his own thought to theology, both to positive theology in terms of *trace* and even to negative theology in terms of *differance*.

In an article from 1966 he had said that, "The trace is the erasure of selfhood, of one's own presence, and is constituted by the threat or anguish of its irremediable disappearance, of the disappearance of its disappearance. An unerasable trace is not a trace, it is a full presence, an immobile and uncorruptible substance, a son of God, a sign of parousia and not a seed, that is, mortal germ" (1978:230). And in a book published in 1967, the year before the Sorbonne lecture on *differance*, he opposed *trace* to the classical God of positive theology (1976:71):

The subordination of the trace to the full presence summed up in the logos, the humbling of writing beneath a speech dreaming its plenitude, such are the gestures

required by an onto-theology determining the archeological and eschatological meaning of being as presence, as parousia, as life without difference; another name for death, historical metonymy where God's name holds death in check. That is why, if this movement begins its era in the form of Platonism, it ends in infinitist metaphysics. Only infinite being can reduce the difference in presence. In that sense, the name of God, at least as it is pronounced within classical rationalism, is the name of indifference itself.

The attack is clearly against the tandem thought of classical philosophy and its concomitant onto-theology: "From Descartes to Hegel and in spite of all the differences that separate the different places and moments in the structure of that epoch, God's infinite understanding is the other name for the logos as self-presence" (1976:98).

But in the *differance* lecture he is openly and emphatically clear that what he is saying is just as opposed to negative theology (1973:134-35):

Thus, the detours, phrases, and syntax that I shall often have to resort to will resemble—will sometimes be practically indiscernible from—those of negative theology. Already we had to note *that differance is not*, does not exist, and is not any sort of being-present (*on*). And we will have to point out everything *that it is not*, and, consequently, that it has neither existence nor essence. It belongs to no category of being, present or absent. And yet what is thus denoted as differance is not theological, not even in the most negative order of negative theology. The latter, as we know, is always occupied with letting a supraessential reality go beyond the finite categories of essence and existence, that is, of presence, and always hastens to remind us that, if we deny the predicate of existence to God, it is in order to recognize him as a superior, inconceivable, and ineffable mode of being. Here there is no question of such a move, as will be confirmed as we go along. Not only is differance irreducible to every ontological or theological—onto-theological—reappropriation, but it opens up the very space in which onto-theology—philosophy—produces its system and its history. It thus encompasses and irrevocably surpasses onto-theology or philosophy.

There seems, however, to be much more of a problem with negative or mystical theology than with positive or rational theology. And those theologians who believe, as I do, in the necessity of a breakout from ontotheology and who have been researching the foundations of our tradition, as I have been, to locate the best place for its deconstruction, may be much more willing to accept Derrida's comments on positive than on negative theology. It is clear, at least, that it does not suffice simply to lump the two theologies together (see the Translator's Preface in Derrida, 1976: lxxi, lxxviii).

On the one hand, there can certainly be little communication between Derrida and negative theology if that is conceived as a simple alternative strategy within onto-theology. If negative theology means no more than slaying the Minotaur by creeping up on it backwards while waving goodbye, it is hardly worth distinguishing it from an open and frontal assault. But surely the fact that negative theology has usually been held on the fringes of our tradition and has normally been suspect of

unorthodoxy at best and of atheism at worst, may well indicate that something more profound is going on within that marginal but magnificent strand of our tradition. This is even indicated, I would argue, by the fact that Derrida must admit that the syntactics of *differance* “will sometimes be practically indiscernible from—those of negative theology” (1973:134). Why, then, are the syntactics so similar if the semantics are so different?

If this article were to end with questions, it would end with these ones. What is the relationship between *differance* and divinity? What is the possibility of a Christian meditation breaking out of onto-theology by building, no doubt with deconstruction, upon Derrida’s thematics of *differance*, *trace*, and especially *play*? But such an ending is almost too glib and hints that all this can be handled within the simple rhetorics of question and answer, the questions now and the answers later. Derrida’s lecture already warned us to be careful about our questions (1973:145):

Differences are thus “produced”—differed—by differance. But *what* differs, or *who* differs? In other words, *what is* differance? With this question we attain another stage and another source of the problem.

What differs? Who differs? What is differance?

If we answered these questions even before examining them as questions, even before going back over them and questioning their form (even what seems to be the most natural and necessary about them), we would fall below the level we have now reached. For if we accepted the form of the question in its own sense and syntax (“What?,” “What is?,” “Who is?”), we would have to admit that differance is derived, supervenient, controlled, and ordered from the starting point of a being-present, one capable of being something, a force, a state, or power in the world, to which we could give all kinds of names: “a *what*, or being-present as a *subject*, and a *who*.”

In refusing to accept “the form of the question in its own sense and syntax,” I am also returning and submitting to the syntax of my epigraph from A. R. Ammons. In that poem, “Two Motions,” Ammons has a series of questions each of which concludes, like the one in my epigraph, not with a question-mark but with a colon. Certain questions beget not so much answers as different ways of phrasing themselves. What, then is *differance*:

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... Gr. *prōtokoll-on* the first leaf of a volume, a fly-leaf glued to the case and containing an account of the MS, f. *prōto-* . . . first + *kolla* glue. . . . 1. The original note or minute of a transaction, negotiation, agreement or the like, drawn up by a recognized public official, notary, etc. and duly attested, which forms the legal authority for any subsequent deed, agreement, or the like based on it. . . . An original authority. . . . 2. An original draught, minute, or record of a dispatch, declaration, negotiation, treaty, stipulation or other diplomatic document or instrument; *esp.* a record of the propositions agreed to in a conference, signed by the parties, to be embodied in a formal treaty. . . . A preamble, a preliminary. . . . 5. In France, the formulary of the etiquette to be observed by the Head of the State in official ceremonies, relations with ambassadors, foreign sovereigns, etc. . . . 6. *Diplomatics*. The official formulas used at the beginning and end of a chapter, papal bull, or other similar instrument, as distinct from the *text*, which contains its subject-matter.

—Oxford English Dictionary

FOUR PROTOCOLS: DERRIDA, HIS DECONSTRUCTION

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for Carol . . .

ABSTRACT

In four protocols, this essay approximates how Jacques Derrida's deconstruction works. Each protocol approaches from a different direction the strategies Derrida uses in deconstruction: 1) *In a certain way* and *strategy* define part of Derrida's close readings of Western tradition. 2) According to Paul de Man, Derrida is an Archi-Debunker. 3) *Reversal* and many forms of *reinscription* constitute the twofold "process" of deconstruction. 4) *Double invagination* defines the *narrative* structure of deconstruction's double science.

Official Formula

1.1 In its most general sense, Derrida's deconstruction can be reduced to a simple phrase: *d'une certaine manière*, in a certain way. As a protocol, it doubles for two significant citations, the first from *Writing and Difference* (288), the second from *Of Grammatology* (24):

- 1) What I want to emphasize is simply that the passage beyond philosophy does not consist in turning the page of philosophy (which usually amounts to philosophizing badly), but in continuing to read philosophers *in a certain way*.
- 2) The movements of deconstruction do not destroy [*sollicitent*] structures from the outside. They are not possible and effective, nor can they take accurate aim, except by inhabiting those structures. Inhabiting them *in a certain way*, because one always inhabits, and all the more when one does not suspect it. Operating necessarily from the inside, borrowing all the strategies and economic resources of subversion from the old structure, borrowing them structurally, that is to say without being able to isolate their elements and atoms, the enterprise of deconstruction always *in a certain way* [my emphasis] falls prey to its own work.

1.11 The first citation stresses that deconstruction, even as "the passage beyond philosophy," remains behind to reread philosophy. Deconstruction does not permit itself the luxury of turning the page; it continues to read the

same page (or pages) *in a certain way*. According to the fourth protocol below, that certain way allows the infinite folding and refolding, the superimposing of the various pages one upon another. We may fold the pages, form them into a pocket or glove to hold our sense, but only so long as we do not proceed onto another page, the non-ontotheological page. In other words, the "story" may be jumbled, shifted, split, even delayed, but the folded pages (and possibly the book) remain. The ramifications for biblical scholars become manifold, considering the texts, fragments, and traditions of the Bible.

1.12 In the second citation, deconstruction is inhabiting, again *in a certain way*. By continuing to read the page, our reading works a change in position and living quarters. The folding of the page in citation 1 is so that cohabitation may take place in citation 2. In staying on that page, by folding, refolding, and superimposing, all *in a certain way*, deconstruction takes a position in such a way that it "falls prey to its own work," to its own inhabiting or folding. Deconstruction, we could say, cohabits with itself.

1.13 However, deconstruction's cohabiting with itself in the fold or glove of the page presents a dilemma. The second citation stresses that deconstruction "necessarily" works from within, from the inside of its habitat and *in a certain way* forces that habitation into a cohabiting with itself. In other words, the position of deconstruction splits, in order that the position becomes the co-position of deconstruction with itself. Does this mean, then, that deconstruction is an internalist criticism bound to the internal play of internal differences? In one sense, yes. Deconstruction refuses the Kantian intuition of the *Prolegomena to Any Future Metaphysics*. There Kant states that "the difference between similar and equal things which are not congruent (for instance, two symmetric helices) cannot be made intelligible by any concept, but only by the relation to the right and the left hands which immediately refers to intuition" (34). (Kant's second example of similar and equal but incongruent things is the glove: "the glove of one hand cannot be used for the other" (33).) Kant reasons that "the internal determination of every space is possible only by the determination of its external relation to the whole of space, of which it is a part (in other words, by its relation to the outer sense). That is to say, the part is possible only through the whole . . ." (34). Deconstruction does not ground its new science on the paradigm of inner/outer and substitutability that Kant so painstakingly constructs. Deconstruction cohabits, "because one always inhabits, and all the more when one does not suspect it." In fact, deconstruction questions the availability of the whole that gives rise for Kant to the part.

1.14 Yet deconstruction does not make the *inside* a self-standing substance or fulfilled concept. Derrida is precisely trying to determine how to conceive an inside that has no outside, an inside that is not inside, since its

outside is not out there. Citation 2 states that this new determination of the inside is derived by “borrowing all the strategies and economic resources of subversion from the old structure, borrowing them structurally.” Derrida restates this concern again in “Structure, Sign, and Play”: “It is a question of explicitly and systematically posing the problem of the status of a discourse which borrows from a heritage the resources necessary for the deconstruction of that heritage itself. A problem of *economy* and *strategy*” (1978b: 282). Thus the *in a certain way* becomes an economic strategy for deconstructing the inner/outer opposition.

1.2 In his “Critical Factions/Critical Fictions,” Harari begins his discussion of Derrida with the following epigraphy (32):

Strategy [fr. Gr. *strategia*. See STRATEGEM] 1. The science and art of employing the armed strength of a belligerent to secure the objects of a war. 2. Use of strategem, or artifice. . . .

Stratagem [fr. Gr. *stratos* army and *agein* to lead] 1a. An artifice or trick in war for deceiving and outwitting the enemy. 1b. A cleverly contrived trick or scheme for gaining an end. 1c. Ability to devise cunning plans to gain an end. 2. obs. A violent and bloody act. [Slaughter; execution.]

—*Webster's International Dictionary*

We could say that *in a certain way* deconstruction leads to war, that it is a violent science utilizing others' strength against themselves. At the least, deconstruction concerns our interrelating with the enemy, in deceiving and outwitting trickery, in chicanery. At most, deconstruction as a strategy of reading is, adapting the words of Greisch (157), “a fight to the death.” The *in a certain way* slaughters the text, executes it. (Harari generalizes this to all criticism (72): “all criticism *is* strategic. To the question: how should the critic approach knowledge? I know of only one answer: *strategically*. The power and productivity, the gains and losses, the advances and retrenchments of criticism are inscribed in this term: strategy, reminding us of its obsolete—obsolete?—definition: ‘A violent and bloody act.’ In the game of knowledge, method has become a strategy: the ‘violent and bloody’ agent by which criticism *executes* the work and in so doing, paradoxically, canonizes it.”)

1.21 Two examples of this strategy, not so much at work as just beginning to work:

1.22 Derrida dismantles the inside/outside opposition by internally working on external affairs. In his recent “preface” (1977a:65) to a text by Abraham and Torok on the Wolf-Man, Derrida gets stuck on the “outer partition” of the work, its title, *Cryptonomie*.

What is a crypt?

What if I were writing on one now? In other words on the *title* of the book alone, on the outer partition of its very first and entirely obvious readability?

Less still: on the first detachable fragment of a title, on its broken symbol or its truncated column—cryptonymy, still minus a name? What if I vaulted to a stop, immobilizing myself and you, reader, in front of a word or a thing, or rather in front of the place of a word-thing, as Nicolas Abraham and Maria Torok present it for us to decipher: the crypt of cryptonymy?

For I shall not engage myself further.

In order to continue reading the page, Derrida vaults to a stop (*tombe en arrêt*), energetically, violently refusing to go on, even up to the end of the one word title, cutting that word in two, and “engaging” himself no further. All in order to call attention to the certain way we inhabit our reading, to call attention to certain habits in our reading. Derrida is willing to be paralyzed by one word, the title which forms the edge and the trap of the text, if that word-title somehow allows us to fold the page in a certain way, allows us to cohabit, to stay within and without at once. Much of Derrida’s *in a certain way* works on border lines.

1.23 The second example is taken from Derrida’s *Archeology of the Frivolous*, an introduction to his reading of Condillac. Therein Derrida argues that deconstruction cannot say “anything about” the text, “about what we would want to find there as its own proper and ventral content.” Rather, we must “busy ourselves round about” the text, round about the margins and ribs and borders. Deconstruction does not saturate the text “with reading.” In fact, deconstruction seduces the text, deviates “the text from itself, but just enough to surprise it again very close to its content, which can always open out as nothing: as a central void, an alarming superficiality, a rigorous ‘abyss.’ Because of that, to busy ourselves round about: lines, grating, borders, ribs, architecture, after-cuts.” Not a formalist reading, deconstruction analyzes “the great machine of oppositions (including that of form and content) wherein a text displaces its program: what the text programs, what programs the text, and what on all sides *breaches* the program, limits it in its very own opening, and defeats in advance its teleology, undecides its circle” (1980:108). Here the *in a certain way* as introductory strategy takes up the edge once again, because now *the inside is missing*. The text is placed in intertextual relation with other texts, all of which become superimposed on the edges, leading to the abyss, the placing in the abyss (*la mise en abyme*), the story within the story, since all the texts “can always open out as . . . a rigorous ‘abyss.’”

II

Archie Debunker

2.1 In an instructive article on “Semiology and Rhetoric,” Paul de Man provides an invaluable clue for understanding Derrida. De Man is trying to “illustrate the tension between grammar and rhetoric in a few specific

textual examples," more specifically the example here of the rhetorical question. His first example is taken from "the subliterate of the mass media"; it concerns Archie Bunker and the tying of shoes. De Man writes (128-29):

asked by his wife whether he wants to have his bowling shoes laced over or laced under, Archie Bunker answers with a question. He asks, "What's the difference?" Being a reader of sublime simplicity, his wife replies by patiently explaining the difference between lacing over and lacing under, whatever this may be, but provokes only ire. "What's the difference?" did not ask for difference but meant instead "I don't give a damn what the difference is." The same grammatical pattern engenders two meanings that are mutually exclusive: the literal meaning asks for the concept (difference) whose existence is denied by the figurative meaning. As long as we are talking about bowling shoes, the consequences are relatively trivial; Archie Bunker, who is a great believer in the authority of origins (as long, of course, as they are the right origins), muddles along in a world where literal and figurative meanings get in each other's way, though not without discomforts.

The instructive comparison enters here. De Man calls Derrida, like Nietzsche, a great de-bunker of origins or *archai*: "But if a *de*-Bunker rather than a Bunker, a de-bunker of the *archē* (origin), an 'Archie Debunker' such as Nietzsche or Jacques Derrida, asks the question 'What is the Difference?' we cannot even tell from his grammar whether he 'really' wants to know 'what' difference is or is merely telling us that we should not even try to find out" (129). So Derrida is the Archie Debunker of philosophy and criticism. His questioning reflects Archie Bunker's questioning, and the innocence of Edith, contemporary readers.

2.2 But the dilemma and comparison go deeper. De Man asks, "For what is the use of asking, I ask, when we cannot even authoritatively decide whether a question asks or doesn't ask?" That dilemma provides de Man with sufficient ambiguity to make his point, that the rhetorical question "suspends logic and opens up vertiginous possibilities of referential aberration." The anger Archie Bunker displays concerning his wife's question indicates

more than impatience: it reveals his despair when confronted with a structure of linguistic meaning that he cannot control and that holds the discouraging prospect of an infinity of similar future confusions, all of them potentially catastrophic in their consequences. . . . I follow the usage of common speech in calling this semiological enigma "rhetorical." The grammatical model of the question becomes rhetorical not when we have, on the one hand, a literal meaning and, on the other hand, a figural meaning, but when it is impossible to decide by grammatical or other linguistic devices which of the two meanings (that can be entirely contradictory) prevails. Rhetoric radically suspends logic and opens up vertiginous possibilities of referential aberration. (129)

So Derrida asks those rhetorical questions that suspend logic and give rise to the infinite possibilities of textual aberration. Derrida debunks criticism and the ontotheological presumptions making it possible.

2.3 (On another level, the following charge can be given: *On a touché à l'écriture (sainte)*. Possibly, the verb should be in the future perfect, *on aura touché*, when understanding and including the parentheses: *(sainte)*. Derrida has already tampered with the language, with writing, and his work *will have had* ramifications for (Holy) Scripture, for Scripture in general, *l'Écriture*. Deconstruction debunks the wholeness of god's writing (Scripture in the doctrine of inspiration) and of man's writing (more recent biblical criticism).)

III

An Original Draft

We need to interpret interpretations more than
to interpret things. (Montaigne)

—*Writing and Difference*, 278

3.0 Deconstruction has been around sufficiently long to produce warnings of poor imitations or shortcomings in current use. Two citations will suffice to serve as needed examples.

3.01 First, Rodolphe Gasché's recent "Deconstruction as Criticism" warns about the mistaken and too easy assimilation of deconstruction as thematic or formalist literary criticism (180):

The major evidence [guiding] deconstructive criticism, also shared by its opponents, is its understanding of the operation of deconstruction. . . . Derrida's philosophical work can be turned into a theory to be applied to the regional science of literary criticism as well as to the literature it deals with, without the categories of literature and criticism (and the institutions supporting them) being put into question. This naive and intuitive reception of Derrida's debate with philosophy, its reduction to a few sturdy devices for the critic's use, represents nothing less than an extraordinary blurring and toning-down of the critical implications of this philosopher's work.

And three pages later: "deconstruction in the first place represents a critique of reflexivity and specularity. It is the unawareness of this essential feature of deconstruction that has caused the easy accommodation of deconstruction by contemporary American criticism" (183).

3.02 The second citation is drawn from Christopher Fynsk's "A Decelebration of Philosophy" (86–87), in which he discusses the political aspects of deconstruction:

As deconstruction becomes a reading technique, the kind of questioning undertaken by Derrida is rigorously circumscribed. Most noticeably, there is a disregard of many of the philosophical problems addressed by him (I term them "philosophical" only to allude to the texts from which they emerge—in particular, the text of Heidegger). . . . This lack of interest in some of the philosophical elements of deconstructive thought is coupled with a failure to appreciate the socio-political aspects of deconstruction. . . . This is to say that [American "deconstructive"] criticism remains critical in a traditional sense—it is not itself carried into the movement of its own deconstructive process.

3.03 Thus we have been warned not to take deconstruction too lightly in either criticism or politics; i.e., deconstruction is not a technique for reading or a tool for criticism's use and requires intensive "philosophical" work. In fact, both essays point out the need to understand Derrida's confrontation with Husserl, Heidegger, and contemporary philosophy.

3.04 With these two warnings in hand, I shall begin a protocol directly addressing deconstruction. As a protocol, this address will be "distinct from the *text*, which contains its subject-matter." The subject-matter of deconstruction is the intertextuality produced by Derrida's readings.

3.1 *The Inside-Out "Origin" of Deconstruction*

3.11 In his 1967 interview with Henri Ronse, Derrida concludes: "to 'deconstruct' philosophy, thus, would be to think—in the most faithful, interior way—the structured genealogy of philosophy's concepts, but at the same time to determine—from a certain outside that is beyond the words or names of philosophy itself—what this history has been able to dissimulate or forbid . . ." (1972:15; 1981:6 [modified]). Deconstruction works within and without; it thinks most faithfully and intimately. Yet that thinking is never just internal. It works from an outside it does not know or name.

3.12 In *The Archeology of the Frivolous*, Derrida specifically states that the origin (as the possibility) of philosophy's deconstruction arises within or from philosophy itself (1980:132): "Philosophy deviates from itself and gives rise to the blows that will strike it nonetheless from the outside. On this condition alone, at once internal and external, is deconstruction *possible*." Once again, deconstruction originates within the matter under deconstruction, but that within always generates an outside. Thus this internal generation always already at once operates from an outside.

3.13 We begin to deconstruct in reading, but our reading must implicate itself in the reading. Our reading has displaced the text and its context inside out, has placed the field suppressed, prohibited, dissembled by the text into the text, thereby reversing and displacing the resulting intertextuality. However, in deconstruction we do not step beyond philosophy or metaphysics. There is no transgression outside the closure of metaphysics, of ontotheology, "if we understand by that the pure and simple installation in a beyond of metaphysics, at a point which also would be, let us not forget, first of all a point of language or writing" (Derrida, 1972:21; 1981:12 [mod.]). The limit or fold, according to Derrida, is "always at work."

3.2 *Deconstruction: Positions*

3.21 In his 1967 "Implications," Derrida states a first context for his interrogation of the Western tradition. He indicates the contours of what four years later he will call his "*general strategy of deconstruction*" (1981:41):

I am trying to *write* (in) the space wherein the question of saying and wanting-to-say (meaning) is posed. I am trying to write the question: (what is) wanting-to-say? (what is) meaning? Thus in such a space and guided by such a question, writing according to the letter [*à la lettre*] necessarily wants-to-say-nothing, means-nothing. Not that this writing is absurd, like that absurdity which has always formed a system with metaphysical meaning. Simply, this writing tests itself, strains itself, tries to hold itself at the point where meaning runs out of breath. To risk wanting-to-say-nothing, meaning-nothing, is to enter into the play, first of all into the play of *differance*, with the result that no word, no concept, no major statement comes to resume and command (from the theological presence of a center) the movement and textual spacing of differences. (1972:23; my translation, but see 1981:14)

Deconstruction will be caught between wanting (desire) and saying, i.e., in the web of meaning. Not just a technique for reading, deconstruction orients the act of reading, makes an orientation possible, and implicates one's own desire and saying, one's own meaning, in the meaning of the text.

3.22 More specifically, in his 1971 interview with Jean Louis Houdebine and Guy Scarpetta, Derrida speaks directly and in detail of his "*general strategy of deconstruction*." That general strategy consisted of a double science, what crudely can be described as a two-step process. The first moment or phase is called *reversal*. In reversal, the hierarchy of the text and its intertexts is overthrown, turned upside down, overturned, reversed. In other words, the term that was suppressed in the opposition, such as writing in the speech/writing opposition, becomes powerful. However, the second moment or phase is to displace or reinscribe the newly reversed hierarchy, such that the new hierarchy does not function as the old one did. This second moment is called displacement, transgression, or reinscription. The second step uses a variety of means to achieve displacement, and this openness is precisely what has allowed Derrida's work to continue so fruitfully these many years. For example, undecidability, erasure, paleonymics, and decelebration express the actions of Derrida in reinscription. Each will be discussed as needed.

3.23 In *Positions*, Derrida describes the first phase of his double science (1972:56-57; 1981:41-42 [second sentence of this citation omitted in Bass's translation]):

On the [one] hand, we must traverse a phase of *overturning* [renversement]. I insist constantly and strongly on the necessity of this phase of overturning. . . . To do justice to this necessity is to recognize that in a classical philosophical opposition we are . . . dealing . . . with a violent hierarchy. One of the two terms governs the other . . . has the upper hand. To deconstruct the opposition, first of all, is to overturn the hierarchy at a given moment. To overlook this phase of overturning is to . . . proceed too quickly to a *neutralization* that *in practice* would leave the previous field untouched . . . The necessity of this phase is structural: it is the necessity of an interminable analysis: the hierarchy of dual oppositions always reestablishes itself.

Thus the first phase is *continually* being done and needing to be done; it is never done once and for all. In fact, the second phase is the various strategies Derrida uses to keep the old (as well as the new) hierarchy off balance or dislodged.

3.24 Derrida describes reinscription as follows: "That being said—and on the other hand . . . By means of this double, and precisely stratified, dislodged and dislodging, writing, we must also mark the gap between inversion, which brings low what was high, in deconstructing its sublimating or idealizing genealogy, and the irruptive emergence of a new 'concept,' a concept that can no longer be, and never could be, included or understood in the previous regime" (1972:57; 1981:42 [modified; also phrase "in deconstructing . . . genealogy" omitted]). Thus the second phase of Derrida's *double* writing, which means the second phase occurs at the same time as the first phase, marks or reinscribes the gap between the old and new concepts and their hierarchies.

3.3 *Reinscriptions*

3.31 Deconstructive reinscription takes many forms. With the undecidables, we find some of Derrida's most comprehensible work. His philosophical discussions of *differance* and supplement fall under this category. Derrida calls these terms undecidables *by analogy*, and he emphasizes this analogy. He states (1981:42–43):

it has been necessary to analyze, to set to work, *within* the text of the history of philosophy, as well as *within* the so-called "literary" text . . . certain marks . . . that *by analogy* (I underline) I have called undecidables, that is, unities of simulacrum, "false" verbal properties (nominal or semantic) that can no longer be included within philosophical (binary) opposition, but which, however, inhabit philosophical opposition, resisting and disorganizing it, *without ever* constituting a third term, without ever leaving room for a solution in the form of speculative dialectics.

Derrida then parenthetically lists short examples and summarizes a few of these terms derived from his readings in the Western tradition: the *pharmakon* of Plato, the *supplément* of Rousseau, the *hymen* of Mallarmé, as well as more general undecidables.

(The *pharmakon* is neither remedy nor poison, neither good nor evil, neither the inside nor the outside, neither speech nor writing; the *supplément* is neither a plus nor a minus, neither an outside nor the complement of an inside, neither accident nor essence, etc.; the *hymen* is neither confusion nor distinction, neither identity nor difference, neither consummation nor virginity, neither the veil nor unveiling, neither the inside nor the outside, etc.; the *gram* is neither a signifier nor a signified, neither a sign nor a thing, neither a presence nor an absence, neither a position nor a negation, etc.; *spacing* is neither space nor time; the *incision* [entame] is neither the (incised) integrity of a beginning, or of a simple cutting into, nor simple secondarity. Neither/nor, that is, *simultaneously* or *or*; the *mark* is also the *marginal* limit, the march, etc.) [modified]

Thus the undecidables recall Derrida's deconstructions of Plato, Mallarmé, Rousseau, Hegel, Heidegger, and so many other figures in his texts. His scrupulous readings isolate these undecidables that mark so vividly the difference between the old hierarchy and the newly emerging one.

3.32 Another writing "technique" Derrida uses to mark this vital gap that must always be kept open by force, that must always work to keep the old oppositions inverted or reversed, is called *paleonymy* or *paleonymics*, the science of old names. This operation can be stated simply as retaining the old concept's old name for the emerging new concept in order to communicate. Paleonymy presupposes that the old name is read under erasure (*sous rature*). That means the old conceptual or metaphysical opposition or situation which gives the old name meaning no longer operates. The opposition is overturned in the erasure that retains the old name and its erasure (either physically marked or crossed out, such as ~~being~~ or ~~thing~~, or marked out in the style of "quotation marks," *emphasis*, or usage in Derrida's style), in order to communicate. This very process of old names and erasures is, as Derrida himself points out, the process of *l'écriture*, writing.

3.33 Two citations elaborate, clarify, and give Derrida's positions on this strategy of reinscription:

what, then, is the "strategic" necessity that requires the occasional maintenance of an *old name* in order to launch a new concept? With all the reservations imposed by this classical distinction between the name and the concept, one might begin to describe this operation. Taking into account the fact that a name does not name the punctual simplicity of a concept, but rather a system of predicates defining a concept, a conceptual structure *centered* on a given predicate, we proceed: (1) to the extraction [*prélèvement*, setting-apart] of a reduced predicative trait that is held in reserve, limited in a given conceptual structure (limited for motivations and relations of force to be analyzed), *named X*; (2) to the de-limitation, the grafting and regulated extension of the extracted [set-apart] predicate, the name *X* being maintained as a kind of *lever of intervention*, in order to maintain a grasp on the previous organization, which is to be transformed effectively. Therefore, extraction [setting-apart], graft, extension: you know that this is what I call, according to the process I have just described, *writing*. (1972:96; 1981:71)

The second citation is taken from "Signature Event Context," which was written around the time of the interview "Positions," from which the above is taken. Here Derrida stresses the problem of communication and the strategic solution of paleonymics. In fact, this citation serves as a quick summary of deconstruction (195):

despite the general displacement of the classical, "philosophical," occidental concept of writing, it seems necessary to retain, provisionally and strategically, *the old name*. This entails an entire logic of *paleonymics*. . . . Very schematically: an opposition of metaphysical concepts (e.g., speech/writing, presence/absence, etc.) is never the confrontation of two terms, but a hierarchy and the order of a subordination. Deconstruction cannot be restricted or immediately pass to a neutralization: it must,

through a double gesture, a double science, a double writing—put into practice a *reversal* of the classical opposition *and* a general *displacement* of the system. It is on that condition alone that deconstruction will provide the means of *intervening* in the field of oppositions it criticizes and that is also a field of non-discursive forces. . . . Deconstruction does not consist in moving from one concept to another, but in reversing and displacing a conceptual order as well as the non-conceptual order with which it is articulated. . . . To leave to this new concept the old name of writing is tantamount to maintaining the structure of the *graft*, the transition and indispensable adherence to an effective *intervention* in the constituted historical field. It is to give to everything at stake in the operations of deconstruction the chance and the force, the power of *communication*.

3.4 A Parenthesis

3.41 (Two parenthetical remarks intervene in this discussion of deconstruction, remarks on decelebration and de-sedimentation.

3.42 In Derrida's early work on Husserl and grammatology, Derrida equates the terms de-sedimentation and deconstruction. Roger Laporte and Josué Harari find this first term more suitable to Derrida's actual praxis. Harari states (37):

Deconstruction implies an operation involving the dismantling of something into discrete component parts and suggests the ever-present possibility of putting the object back together in its original form. This is clearly not the case with, nor the aim of, Derridean deconstruction, which consists more of the tracing of a path among textual strata in order to stir up and expose forgotten and dormant sediments of meaning which have accumulated and settled into the text's fabric. ("A text always has several epochs and reading must resign itself to this fact.") Thus, deconstruction is really more of a technique of *de-sedimentation* (the word was first used by Derrida in *Of Grammatology* and later abandoned), a technique of de-sedimenting the text in order to allow what was *always already* inscribed in its texture to resurface.

Harari incorrectly states that de-sedimentation was first used in *Of Grammatology*. In fact, de-sedimentation derives from Derrida's 1962 reading and translation of Husserl's *Origin of Geometry*. There de-sedimentation is caught up in the problems of reactivating dormant senses, of the historical reduction (and thereby all the reductions in phenomenology), and of translation and ideality, language and meaning. Both times the word occurs in this early work, Derrida is speaking of the pregeometrical world that gives rise to geometry and how that upsurge occurs.

3.43 First the two passages from Derrida's *Husserl's Origin of Geometry: An Introduction* (50, 119), then the one from *Of Grammatology* (10).

- 1) whatever in fact the first produced or discovered geometrical idealities were, it is *a priori* necessary that they followed from a sort of non-geometry, that they sprang from the soil of pregeometrical experience. A phenomenology of the experience is possible thanks to a reduction and to an appropriate de-sedimentation.

- 2) Therefore, it is proper to reduce the ideal sedimentations of science, in order to discover the nakedness of the pregeometrical world. This new “*epochē*” of the objective sciences . . . is difficult for several reasons: 1. The first difficulty is that of every reduction: it must be kept from being a forgetfulness and a negation, a subtraction or devaluation of what it methodically de-sediments or neutralizes.
- 3) “rationality” . . . inaugurates the destruction, not the demolition but the de-sedimentation, the de-construction, of all the significations that have their source in that of the logos. Particularly the signification of *truth*.

Derrida might agree with Laporte’s and Harari’s preference for the term de-sedimentation over deconstruction, especially given the centrality of the problems of phenomenology within Derrida’s work, as Gasché points out. And de-sedimentation would be a strong tool for recalling that centrality. However, Derrida seems to feel (by abandoning the term) that de-sedimentation is too closely associated with *neutralization* and the Husserlian activity of reactivation, “the active reliving of the past intention of an *other* mind and the reawakening of a production of meaning—in question here is the very possibility of a science of the mind [*une science de l’esprit*]” (Derrida, 1978b:160). Although de-sedimentation can be used under erasure, deconstruction seems, at least within Derrida’s usage, able to express that violent overthrow of the hierarchy which de-sedimentation only implies.

3.44 The second remark concerns decelebration. This recent term in Derrida seems to delimit a variant of deconstruction (Fynsk, 85). In “Entre crochets,” Derrida speaks of decelebration as desacralization. And it should be noted that he once again defines this within parentheses: “This (let’s call this a *decelebration*: what desacralizes in laying blame on the head, slows down or blocks the capitalizing acceleration of a buzzing matrix [*d’une programmatrice ronronnante*] in a hurry or pressing to confuse absolute knowledge and the avant-garde, in order to accumulate all their surplus values . . .” (112). He continues (Fynsk, 80, cites this in part):

The decelebration of a great-philosopher, for example, must treat rigorously his great-philosophemes in their strongest internal ordering—otherwise one loses all effective grasp and annuls all the effects of the analysis, one leaves the dynamic or extent of jurisdiction [*ressort*] intact, no doubt the result obscurely sought—and must reinscribe this most powerful internal dynamic within the general activity or conflict: for example, the *Sa* [siglum for *savoir absolu*, absolute knowledge] of Hegel and his political philosophy, his philosophy of religion or of the family, all reinscribed in the family of Hegel, the university institution, the editorial haggling, the trafficking in decorations, the fascination with political power, etc. And this as much as possible in a parody that does not allow itself the ease of collage or empirical juxtaposition, and determines, as gayly and as scientifically as possible, the necessary relation between this so-called “internal” systematic and its outside, or rather an outside that it fails to make *its* outside . . .) this. . . .

3.45 Thus decelebration adds the touch of parody to a more serious deconstruction. And de-sedimentation concentrates more on meaning and its

genealogy than the term deconstruction implies on its own. These two remarks then help delimit how the hierarchy is displaced, so vital to deconstruction.)

IV

Protokollon: Collage

- 4.0 Deconstruction should lead to an understanding of the critic's *implication* in reading and writing—of the inscription of the critical act (both as it is written into and as it writes) in a literary or philosophical text, and in the broader text of society and history. Knowledge, and the quest for—or will to—knowledge, are indeed displaced by deconstruction, but it is this displacement that requires attention and that deconstruction attempts to account for (while moving with or through it) with notions like that of *différance*. (Fynsk, 89)
- 4.01 *Glas* proposes a deconstruction (as much as possible—as always, but this must be repeated it seems—*affirmative*) of the opposition arbitrary/motivation. . . . (but deconstruction is not a critical operation, the critical [le critique] is its object; deconstruction always bears at one moment or other on the trust put in the critical instance, the critico-theoretical, i.e., deciding, instance, in the ultimate possibility of the decidable; deconstruction is deconstruction of critical dogmatics). . . . (Derrida, 1977b:103)
- 4.1 Deconstruction implicates itself in its deconstructing. This implication, however, is not by chance or without any “structure.” The implication, for Derrida, is a *narrative* one. In a very recent text, “Living On,” Derrida names this narrative structure *double invagination*: “Even before it ‘concerns’ a text in narrative form, double invagination constitutes the story of stories, the narrative of narrative, the *narrative of deconstruction in deconstruction* . . .” (100). Earlier, invagination was defined as the “inverted reapplication of the outer edge to the inside of a form where the outside then opens a pocket” (97); it is a sheathing which forms an inner surface into an outer one: “to fold in so that an outer becomes an inner surface” (*Webster's*). *Double* invagination is “the place where the invagination of the upper edge on its outer face . . . which is folded back ‘inside’ to form a pocket and an inner edge, comes to extend beyond (or encroach on) the invagination of the lower edge, on its inner face . . . which is folded back ‘inside’ to form a pocket and an outer edge” (98).
- 4.2 These foldings of double invagination invade deconstruction itself. Derrida describes this action as follows: “the apparently outer edge of an enclosure [*clôture*], far from being simple, simply external and circular, in accordance with the philosophical representation of philosophy, makes no sign beyond itself, toward what is utterly *other*, without becoming double or dual, without making itself be ‘represented,’ refolded, superposed, *re-marked* within the enclosure, at least in what the structure produces as an effect of interiority. But it is precisely this structure-effect that is being

deconstructed here" (100–101). So double invagination as the narrative structure-effect of deconstruction itself is the narrated effect of the reversal and displacement wrought in the folding and refolding, inside out, outside in, of deconstruction. Deconstruction narrates its own deconstruction.

4.3 A final parenthetical remark. In "Living On" (94), Derrida indicates a desire:

(There are writings entitled, for example, *Entête* [Genesis], the Gospels, Revelation [Apocalypse], and so forth. I would like to speak of them here, to attempt to read them, to move to them from, for example, *The Triumph of Life*, *La folie du jour*, *L'arrêt de mort . . .* and the story, the narrative, of "Living On" as differance, with an *a*, between archeology and eschatology, as difference *in* apocalypse. *That will be a while in coming.*) (My emphasis last sentence.)

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PART II.

BY DERRIDA

2 January 1981

Dear John,

Despite the delays generously granted me, I could not write the text requested, whether it be a question of an essay or a response to the studies that are to appear in *Semeia*. There are, of course, the usual, let us say, circumstantial, problems (fatigue, lack of force and time, etc.). But there is a more serious, perhaps, or more essential one. I am without voice, without response in any case, before *the* question that seems to me to cut across the three essays you have given me to read: your "Four Protocols: Derrida, His Deconstruction," Schneidau's "The Word Against the Word: Derrida on Textuality," and Crossan's "Difference and Divinity." I have nothing to say in addition or afresh. I found these texts lucid and rigorous; and in any case, I believe I have no objection to make to them, not even against some reservation or other regarding what I could say very insufficiently in the direction of negative theology. I am aware of this insufficiency and am quite convinced of the need for a rigorous and differentiated reading of everything advanced under this title (negative theology). My fascination at least testifies to this, right through my incompetence: in effect I believe that what is called "negative theology" (a rich and very diverse corpus) does not let itself be easily assembled under the general category of "onto-theology-to-be-deconstructed." Undoubtedly there are also the places of "positive" theology, about which as much could be said—and the very unity, in any case the assembled homogeneity, of an onto-theology always seems to me problematic and today more than ever. The concept of onto-theology, if it be admissible, still depends on a unity or an assemblage of the destination (or of the *sending*, the *envoi* of Being (*Geschick des Seins*)) that seems to me to situate the urgency of a question (in Heidegger, with or without Heidegger, I don't know). What I call "Envois" in the plural in *La Carte postale* lets itself be worked (over) by these questions, as do other essays uncompleted or to appear. Modestly and in my own way, I try to translate (or to let myself be involved, carried along, perhaps elsewhere, by and perhaps without) a thought of Heidegger that says: "If I were still writing a theology—I am sometimes tempted to do that—the expression 'Being' should not figure in it. . . . There is nothing to be done here with Being. I believe Being can never be thought as the essence and the bottoming of god. . . ."° On this point the most diverse consequences and adventures can await us—from completely other routes, completely other writings . . .

I am simultaneously sending you the text of the lecture I gave this summer at Cerisy-la-Salle. If you yourself and the editors of *Semeia* judge that it can, in whole or in the form of fragments, figure in the collection in

preparation, you naturally have my agreement. The same would go for the publication of this letter.

Believe, dear John, in my true friendship,
Jacques D.

°“Dialogue avec Martin Heidegger,” 6 November 1951 (Comité des conférences des étudiants de l'Université de Zurich), tr. J. Greisch, in *Heidegger et la question de Dieu*, ed. R. Kearney and J. S. O'Leary (Paris: Grasset, 1980).

OF AN APOCALYPTIC TONE RECENTLY ADOPTED IN PHILOSOPHY

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I shall speak then of (with) an apocalyptic tone in philosophy.

The Seventy have bequeathed us a translation of *gala*. It is called the apocalypse. In Greek, *apokalupsis* would translate words derived from the Hebrew word *gala*. I am referring to some indications of André Chouraqui to which I shall return, but I must give notice of them already: I believe the histories or enigmas of translation I would like to speak about are without solution or conclusion (I shall get myself entangled in them for reasons more serious than my incompetence). In a certain way that will be my theme, and more or less than a theme, a task (*Aufgabe des Übersetzers*) I shall not discharge. The other day Jean Ricardou asked me, at the time we were speaking about translation, to say a little more about what could be a grace beyond the work, owing to [*grâce au*] the work but without it, a gift given there (*il y a, es gibt*), but above all given there without meriting any responsibility for it. Well, pursuing the beginning [*l'amorce*] of the other day in the

°This text was presented the last full day of the conference at Cerisy-la-Salle, France, on the work of Jacques Derrida, or rather, starting from his work: "‘Les Fins de l’homme’ (A partir du travail de Jacques Derrida)." Convened from 23 July to 2 August 1980, the conference consisted of lectures, discussions, and seminars concerning Derrida's effects within diverse perspectives and disciplines. This format explains the references in the text to the organizers and some participants in the conference: Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe, Jean-Luc Nancy, and Jean Ricardou, as well as the references to questions left open for consideration in the discussion following the presentation of the paper. The proceedings of the conference have just been published as *Les Fins de l’homme*, Editions Galilée.

In translating this text, I have cited all available English translations. When that was not possible, I have provided my own translations. There is one exception. Since Derrida has taken up Chouraqui's new translation of the Biblical texts (see the notes by Derrida to his text), I have followed Chouraqui's renderings. At times, however, I have been helped by Richard Lattimore's *Four Gospels and the Revelation* (New York: Farrar, 1979). Finally, all bibliographic references within brackets are my additions. Those in parentheses are Derrida's.

I would like to thank Barbara Fletcher for her help in preparing this translation. And once again I want to thank Jacques Derrida for his gracious help, friendship, and patience with my many questions.

direction of the *double-bind* of YHWH affording (with the name of his choice, with his name, we could say, Babel) *translation and no translation*, I shall say this in the form of an elliptical thanks for what I am given here, given to think and simply given (beyond the thinkable, as is said in German, beyond thanks or memory), given by our hosts at Cerisy, by Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe and by Jean-Luc Nancy, by all of you with so much work and grace, so much grace in the work: as regards translation, grace would perhaps be when the writing of the other absolves you, at times, from the infinite *double bind*. And first of all (such is the condition of the gift) when it absolves itself from, unbinds itself from, unburdens or clears itself of this double bind—it, the language of writing and what it represents, a given trace that always comes from some other, even if no (or some)one. To clear oneself of the gift, of the given gift, of giving itself, that is the grace I now know you have and in any case I wish for you. Grace is always improbable; it can never be proved. But must we not believe that it comes [*ça arrive*]? That perhaps is belief itself. In other words: for what you have given me during these ten days I not only thank you, I pardon you. But who can be authorized to pardon? Let us say that I ask pardon for you, I ask this of you yourselves even for you yourselves.

Apokaluptō no doubt was a good word, a witticism [*bon mot*] for *gala*. *Apokaluptō*, I disclose, I uncover, I unveil, I reveal the thing that can be a part of the body, the head or the eyes, a secret part, the genitals or whatever might be hidden, a secret, the thing to be dissembled, a thing that does not show itself or say itself, that perhaps signifies itself but cannot or must not first be handed over to its self-evidence. *Apokekalummenoi logoi* are indecent remarks. So it is a matter of the secret and the *pudenda*. The Greek language shows itself hospitable here to the Hebrew *gala*. As André Chouraqui recalls in his short “Liminaire pour l’Apocalypse” of John (of which he recently offered a new translation),/1/ the word *gala* recurs more than a hundred times in the Hebrew Bible. And it seems in effect to say *apokalupsis*, disclosure, discovery, uncovering, unveiling, the veil lifted from, the truth revealed about the thing: first of all, if we can say this, men’s or women’s genitals, but also their eyes or ears. Chouraqui specifies that

Someone’s ear is discovered in lifting up the hair or the veil that covers it in order to whisper a secret into it, a word [*parole*] as hidden as a person’s genitals. YHWH can be the agent of this disclosure, this uncovering. The arm or the glory of YHWH can also be disclosed in man’s gaze or ear. So nowhere does the word *apocalypse* [concludes the translator referring here as well to the Greek as the Hebrew] have the sense it finally takes in French and other languages, of fearsome catastrophe. Thus the Apocalypse is essentially a contemplation (*hazôn*) [and in fact Chouraqui translates what we are accustomed to call the *Apocalypse of John* by *Contemplation of Yohanân*] or an inspiration (*neboua*) at the sight, the uncovering or disclosure of YHWH and, here, of Yeshoua’ the Messiah. [157]

Perhaps it would be necessary, and I dreamed such for a moment, to collect [*lever*] or relieve [*relever*] all the senses pressing around this Hebrew *gala*, in front of the columns and colossi of Greece, in front of the galactic under all the *milky ways* whose constellation had recently fascinated me. Curiously, there again we would have found significations like those of stone [*pierre*], of stone or cylindrical rolls, of parchment rolls and books, of rolls that envelop or furnish, but above all (and this is what I retain of these for the moment) the idea of laying bare [*mise à nu*], of specifically apocalyptic unveiling, of the disclosure that lets be seen what up to then remained enveloped, secluded, held back, for example, the body when the clothes are removed or the glans when the foreskin is removed in circumcision. And what seems the most remarkable in all the Biblical examples I was able to remember and must forgo exposing here is that the gesture of denuding or of affording sight—the *apocalyptic* movement—is more serious here, sometimes more guilty and dangerous than what follows and what it can give rise to, for example copulation. Thus when, in Genesis 9:21, Noah gets drunk and uncovers himself in his tent, Ham sees his father's genitals, and his two brothers to whom he reports this come to cover Noah again but turn away from him in order not to see his genitals. Even there the unveiling is not the most guilty moment of a copulation. But when YHWH, speaking to Moses, declares a certain number of sexual prohibitions, the fault indeed seems to consist essentially in the unveiling that affords seeing [*donne à voir*]. Thus, in Leviticus 20:11, 17:

The man who lies with his father's wife
has uncovered his father's genitals.
Both of them are put to death. . . .

The man who takes his sister,
his father's daughter or his mother's daughter,
he sees her genitals,
she sees his genitals:
it is incest.

But the terrifying and holy gravity of this apocalyptic disclosure or uncovering is no less, of course, when the question concerns the arm of YHWH, his glory, or ears open to his revelation. And the disclosure not only opens to vision or contemplation, not only affords seeing but also affords hearing/understanding.

For the moment I forgo interpreting all the accords between *gala* and the *apocalyptic*, the Hebrew and the Greek. These accords are numerous and powerful; they support a great concert of translations, even if they do not exclude dissonances, gaps, deviations, or inadequations.

Preferring to let them resound all alone, I have chosen to speak to you rather of (with) an apocalyptic tone recently adopted in philosophy. No doubt I wanted thus to mime in citation but also to transform in kind or

genre, and then parody, depart, deform the well-known title of a perhaps less well-known lampoon of Kant, *Von einem neuerdings erhobenen Vornehmen Ton in der Philosophie* (1796). The established French translation: *D'un ton grand seigneur adopté naguère en philosophie* (tr. L. Guillermit, Vrin 1975). ["Of an Overlordly Tone Recently Adopted in Philosophy."] While asking myself what happens to a title when made to undergo this treatment and when it begins thus to resemble the category of a genre (here a genre that comes down to making fun of those who give themselves a genre), I wished to go meet those who, in one of the seminars these ten days, have precisely organized their work in privileging the reference to such a Kantian caesura in the time [*temps*, beat, tempo] of philosophy. But I also let myself be seduced by another thing. The attention to tone, which is not just style, seems rather rare to me. Tone has been little studied for itself, if we suppose that such is possible or has ever been done. A tone's distinctive signs are difficult to isolate, if they even exist in complete purity, which I doubt, above all in a written discourse. With what is a tone, a change or rupture of tone marked? And how do we recognize a tonal difference within the same corpus? What traits are to be trusted for analyzing this, what set of signals [*signalisation*] neither stylistic, nor rhetorical nor evidently thematic or semantic? The extreme difficulty of this question, indeed of this task, stands out more when dealing with philosophy. Isn't the dream or the ideal of philosophic discourse, of philosophical address [*allocution*], and of the writing supposed to represent that address, isn't it to make the tonal difference inaudible—and with it a whole desire, affect, or scene that works (over) the concept as contraband? Through what is called neutrality of tone, philosophical discourse must also guarantee the neutrality or at least the imperturbable serenity that should accompany the relation to the true and the universal. Consequently, will it be possible to hear or detect the tone of a philosopher, or rather (this precision is important) the *soi-disant* or alleged philosopher? And what if we are promised that one will not undertake to relieve [*relever*, Derrida's translation of Hegel's *aufheben*] all those traits that in the corpus are not yet or no longer philosophical, all the regrettable deviations or gaps in relation to the atonal norm of philosophical address? In fact, if Kant did have the audacity, very singular in history, to concern himself systematically with a certain tone in philosophy, we must immediately moderate the praise we would like to give him on this. First, it is not certain that he is bent on or succeeds in analyzing the pure phenomenon of a tonality—we are going to verify this. Next, less does he analyze a tone in philosophy than denounce a *manner* of giving oneself airs; now, as a matter of fact, to him a manner or mannerism does not appear to be a very good tone in philosophy and so marks already a gap in relation to the norm of philosophical discourse. More seriously, he attacks a tone that announces something like *the death of philosophy*. The words are Kant's, and they appear twice in this short lampoon of twenty pages;

each time, this death is associated with the idea of a supernatural revelation, of a vision provoking a mystic exaltation or at least a visionary's pose. The first time it is a question of a "supernatural communication" or a "mystical illumination" (*übernatürliche Mitteilung (mystische Erleuchtung)*) that promises a substitute or a supplement, a surrogate of a knowable object, "what is thus the death of all philosophy (*der Tod aller Philosophie*)" [487]. And quite near the end, Kant warns against the danger of an "exalted vision (*schwärmerische Vision*)" "that is the death of all philosophy" (once more "*der Tod aller Philosophie*") [495]. Kant's comments are also marked with the tone he gives himself, with the effects he searches for, with his satiric or polemical verve. It is a social critique, and its premises have a properly political character. But if he derides a tone announcing the death of all philosophy, the tone in itself is not what is being mocked. Besides, the tone itself, what is it? Is it something other than a distinction, a tonal difference that no longer refers except by figure to a social code, to group or caste mores, to class behaviors, by a great number of relays that no longer have anything to do with the pitch or loftiness of the voice or timbre? Although, as I suggested just a moment ago, the tonal difference does not pass for the essentially philosophic, for Kant that is not the fact that there is any tone, any tonal mark, announcing to him alone the death of all philosophy. It is just a tone, a certain inflection socially coded to say such and such a determined thing. The tonal loftiness [*hauteur*] he overwhelms with his sarcasm remains a metaphoric pitch [*hauteur*]. These people speak in a lofty pitch [or loudly]; these lofty speakers raise their voices, but this is only said by figure and by reference to social signs. Kant never disregards [*fait abstraction*] the content. Nevertheless—this fact is far from insignificant—the first time a philosopher comes to speak of the tone of self-styled philosophers, when he comes to inaugurate this theme and names it in his very title, it is to be frightened or indignant faced with the death of philosophy. He brings to judgment those who, by the tone they take and the air they give themselves when saying certain things, place philosophy in danger of death and tell philosophy or philosophers the imminence of their end. The imminence matters here less than the end. The end is near, they seem to say, which does not exclude that the end has already taken place, a little as in John's Apocalypse the imminence of the end or of the Last Judgment does not exclude a certain "you are dead./Stay awake!" [3:1–2], whose dictation follows close on the allusion to a "second death" that will never overtake the victor.

Kant is sure that those who speak in this tone expect some benefit from it, and that is what will first interest me. What benefit? What seductive or intimidating bonus? What social or political advantage? Do they want to cause fear? Do they want to cause pleasure? To whom and how? Do they want to terrify? To make one sing? To blackmail? [*Faire chanter?*] To lure into a going-one-better in enjoyment? Is this contradictory? With a view to what interests, *to what ends* do they wish to come with these inflamed

proclamations on the end to come or the end already accomplished? That is a little of what I was wanting to speak to you about today, a certain tone and what comes to philosophy as its death, the relation between this tone, this death, and the apparently calculated benefit of this eschatological mystagogy. The eschatological tells the *eskhaton*, the end, or rather the extreme, the limit, the term, the last, what comes *in extremis* to close a history, a genealogy, or very simply a countable series.

Mystagogues, that is Kant's word and chief accusation. Before coming to my topic [*propos*], I shall set apart some paradigmatic traits in Kant's indictment, paradigmatic and contraparamigmatic, for I am perhaps, in repeating what he does, going to come to the point of doing the contrary—or preferably something else.

The mystagogues make a scene, that is what interests Kant. But at what moment do the mystagogues come on stage and at times go into a trance? At what moment do they begin to create the mysterious?

The instant philosophy, more precisely the name philosophy, lost its first signification, "seine erste Bedeutung" [477]. And this primitive signification—Kant does not doubt this for a single instant—is "rational knowing-living," literally a wisdom of life regulating itself according to a knowledge or science (*wissenschaftlichen Lebensweisheit*) [ibid.]. The mystagogues get hold of it the instant the name philosophy loses its signification or its original reference, that name from then on empty or usurped, that pseudonym or that cryptonym, which is first a homonym. And that does not fail to occur in a regular, recurrent way, ever since the sense had been lost. This is not the first time. To be sure, Kant is more closely interested in some recent examples of this mystagogic and psychagogic imposture, but he supposes at the outset that the usurpation is recurrent and obeys a law. There had been and will always be philosophic mystification, speculation on the end and the ends of philosophy. This results from an event that Kant himself does not date and that he seems to situate nearest the origin, namely that the name philosophy can circulate without its original *reference*, let us understand that as without its *Bedeutung* and without the guarantee of its value. While still remaining in the Kantian axiomatic, as it were, we can already infer from this that nothing would have happened [*arrivé*], no mystagogic speculation would have been credible or efficient, nothing or no one would have untuned [*détoné*] in philosophy without this errance of the name far from the thing, and if the relation of the name philosophy to its primordial sense had been insured against every accident. Some slackness or despicableness was indeed necessary in this relation of sign to thing in order to arrange and economize the space of sense's rerouting or the grasp for a perversion. An unduly slack reference, then, there where it should be more exact, tighter, closer, more rigorous. Here I hand you an association that will perhaps seem verbal, but since the lack of rigor or tension in the verbalization is already our concern, it occurred to me

that *tonos*, tone, first signified the tight ligament [*le ligament tendu*], the cord, rope when it is woven or braided, the cable, the strap, briefly the privileged figure of everything that is subject to stricture. *Tonion* is the ligament as band and surgical bandage. In short, the same tension runs across the tonic difference (that which under the word stricture norms both the theme and the instrument or cord of *Glas*) and the tonal difference, the gap or deviation, the changes or the mutation of tones (Hölderlin's *Wechsel der Töne* constituting one of the most obsessive motifs of *La Carte postale*). From this value of tension, or of elasticity (for example in a ballistic machine), we pass to the idea of tonic accent, of rhythm, of mode (Dorian, Phrygian, etc.). The tone's pitch is tied to tension; it has a bond to the bond, to the bond's more or less tight tension. This is not sufficient for determining the sense of the word *tone* when it is a matter of the voice. Even less when, through a great number of figures and tropical displacements, the tone of a discourse or a piece of writing is analyzed in terms of content, manners of speaking, connotations, rhetorical staging, and pose taken, in semantic terms, in pragmatic ones, scenographic ones, and so on; in short, rarely or not at all, in tuning in to the pitch of a voice or the quality of timbre. I close this parenthesis.

So the bond fastening the name philosophy to its signification really had to be slackened, in order that the philosophical title regularly be at one's disposal like a simple ornament or grace note, a decoration, a costume, or attire for show (*Ausschmückung*) [ibid.], a signifier usurped and treated as intellectual travesty or transvestism by those Kant nonetheless calls thinkers, and thinkers self-styled out of the ordinary. These people place themselves out of the common, but they have this in common: they are all in immediate and intuitive relation with the mystery. And they wish to lure, seduce, lead toward the mystery and by the mystery. *Mystagogein* is indeed this: to lead, initiate into the mystery; that is the mystagogue's or the initiatory priest's function. This *agogic* function of the leader of men, *il Duce*, the *Führer*, the *leader* places him above the crowd he manipulates through the intermediary of a small number of initiates gathered into a sect with a "crypted" language, a band, a clique or a small party with its ritualized practices. The mystagogues claim to possess as it were in private the privilege of a mysterious secret (*Geheimnis* is the word that recurs most often). The revelation or unveiling of the secret is reserved to them: they jealously protect it. Jealousy here is a major trait. They never transmit the secret to others in the current language, only by initiation or inspiration. The mystagogue is *philosophus per initiationem* or *per inspirationem*. Kant envisages a whole differential list and a historic typology of these mystagogues, but he recognizes in all of them one common trait: they never fail to take themselves for lords (*sich für Vornehme halten*) [478], elite beings, distinguished subjects, superior and apart in society. Whence a series of value oppositions I am content to indicate very quickly: they react indignantly to

[*prennent de haut*] the work, the concept, the course of study; to what is given they believe they have access effortlessly, gracefully, intuitively or through genius, outside of school. They are partisans of intellectual intuition, and the whole Kantian systematic could be recognized, what I shall not do, in this lampoon or libel. The hierarchized opposition of gift to work, of intuition to concept, of genius's mode to scholar's mode (*genie-mässig/schulmässig* [ibid]) is homologous to the opposition between aristocracy and democracy, possibly between demagogic oligarchy and authentic rational democracy. Masters and slaves: the overlord reaches with a leap and through feeling what is immediately given him; the people work, work out, conceive. And there we approach the more acute problem of tone. Kant does not find fault with the true aristocrats, with persons truly "vornehme," with authentic distinction, only with those who give or take themselves for distinguished beings, with the grand air of those pretentious people who elevate their voice, with those who raise the tone in philosophy. Kant does not indict the pitch or loftiness of the overlordly tone when it is just, natural, or legitimate. He takes aim at raising the tone when an upstart [*parvenu*] authorizes himself in this by giving himself airs and by erecting usurped signs of social membership. So his satire aims at the mimicry and not the tone itself. For a tone can be mimicked, feigned, faked. I shall go so far as to say *synthesized*. But what does the fiction of the tone presuppose? Up to where can that fiction go? Here I am going to force and accelerate a bit the interpretation beyond commentary. A tone can be taken, and taken to the other. To change voice or mimic the intonation of the other, we must be able to confuse or induce a confusion between two voices, two voices of the other and, necessarily, of the other in itself, in oneself. How do we distinguish the voices from the other in itself, in oneself? Instead of entering directly into this immense problem, I return to the Kantian text and to a figure which seems to belong to the current rhetoric and to so-called hackneyed metaphors. The question concerns the distinction between the voice of reason and the voice of the oracle. (Perhaps here I shall echo, without being sure I am responding to, the questioning, the injunction, or the request of Jean-Luc Nancy.)

Kant is lenient with highly placed persons who devote themselves to philosophy, even if they do so badly, multiply the faults against the School, and believe they reach the peaks of metaphysics. They have a certain merit; they have condescended to mingle with the others and to philosophize "on the foot of civil equality" (bourgeois, *bürgerlichen* equality) [482]. On the other hand, philosophers by profession are unpardonable when they play the overlord and take on grand airs. Their crime is properly political; it is a matter for [*releve d'*] a kind of police. Farther on Kant will speak of the "police in the realm of the sciences (*die Polizei im Reiche der Wissenschaften*)" [493]. The police will have to stay awake to suppress—symbolically—not only the individuals who unduly adorn themselves with the title of

philosopher, who take hold of and adorn themselves with the overlordly tone in philosophy, but also those who flock around them; for that haughtiness [*morgue*] with which one settles on the peaks of metaphysics, that wordy arrogance is contagious; it gives rise to aggregates, congregations, and chapels. We could put this dream of a police of knowledge in harmony with the plan for a university tribunal presented in [Kant's] *Der Streit der Fakultäten*. The tribunal was intended to arbitrate the conflicts between the provisionally inferior faculty (the faculty of philosophy) and the higher faculties, so called because they represent the power whose official instrument they are (theology, law, and medicine). This tribunal is also a parliament of knowledge. And philosophy, which has the right to look over everything touching on the truth of theoretical (constative) propositions but no power to give any orders, occupies in the parliament the bench on the left; and in the conflicts concerning practical reason it has the authority only to treat formal questions. The other questions, the most serious for existence, are a matter for the higher faculties, singularly theology. In the indictment occupying us, philosophers by profession are not pardoned when they take on an overlordly air because, in raising thus the tone, they hoist themselves above their colleagues or fellows (*Zunftgenossen*) [483], they wrong them in their inalienable right to freedom and equality regarding everything touching on reason alone. And they do this precisely—this is where I was wanting to come to—by perverting the voice of reason, by mixing the two voices of the other in us, the voice of reason and the voice of the oracle. Those people believe work to be useless in philosophy: it would suffice to “lend an ear to the oracle within oneself (*nur das Orakel in sich selbst anhören*)” [478]. These are Kant's first words. Since this voice speaks to them in private, through what is properly their idiomatic feeling, their desire or their pleasure, they make it say what they want; they send it word of what they want. On the other hand, the voice of reason is not made to say anything; no word is sent it. These are the lampoon's last words: the voice of an oracle (*die Stimme eines Orakels*) always lends itself to all kinds of interpretations (*Auslegungen*) [495]. The priest mystagogues are also interpreters; the element of their agogic power is the hermeneutic or hermetic seduction (and here we are thinking of what Warburton said about the political power in ancient Egypt of the scribes and of the priests as decipherers of hieroglyphs). The overlordly tone dominates and is dominated by the oracular voice that covers over the voice of reason, rather parasitizes it, causes it to derail or become delirious. To raise or set the tone higher, in this case, is to make it jump, make the inner voice delirious, the inner voice that is the voice of the other in us. The word delirium appears once in Latin, in citing the verse of a monk of the Middle Ages (“*Quaerit delirus quod non respondet Homerus*” [481]), and one other time in the French translation (here I find it a little forced but interesting) for a word that interests me even more, for *Verstimmung*. Guillermit translates

“Verstimmung der Köpfe zur Schwärmerei” [486] as “*délire de têtes qui s’exaltent*” [99], as “delirium in the heads of those who exalt themselves,” and he is right. The overlordly tone acts on the authority of a *salto mortale* (which is also Kant’s expression), a leap from concepts to the unthinkable or the irrepresentable, an obscure anticipation of the mysterious secret come from the beyond. This leap toward the imminence of a vision without concept, this impatience turned toward the most “crypted” secret sets free a poetico-metaphorical overabundance. To that extent this overabundance has indeed an apocalyptic affinity, but Kant never mentions the word for reasons we shall catch a glimpse of in a moment. *Verstimmen*, which Guillermit translates not without reason by *délirer*, to be delirious, is first of all to put out of tune [*désaccorder*], when we speak of a stringed instrument [*instrument à cordes*], or yet, for example, a voice. This is currently said of a piano. Less strictly this signifies to derange, to put out of order, to jumble. One is delirious when one is deranged in the head. *Verstimmung* can come to spoil a *Stimmung*: the bathos [*pathos*], or the humor that then becomes testy. The *Verstimmung* of which we are speaking here is indeed a social disorder and a derangement, an out-of-tune-ness [*désaccordement*] of cords [*cordes*] and voices in the head. The tone leaps and is raised higher when the voice of the oracle takes you aside, speaks to you in a private code, and whispers secrets to you in uncovering your ear for you, jumbling, covering, or parasitizing the voice of reason that speaks equally in each and maintains the same language for all. The voice of reason, Kant says, “die Stimme der Vernunft” [491], speaks to each without equivocation (*deutlich*), and it gives access to scientific cognition. But it is essentially for giving orders and prescribing. For if we had the time to reconstitute the whole internal and properly Kantian necessity of this address, we would have to go as far as the extreme subtlety of the objection made to the mystagogues. Not only do they confuse the voice of the oracle with that of reason. They do not distinguish either between pure speculative reason and pure practical reason; they believe they know what is solely thinkable and reach through feeling alone the universal laws of practical reason. So there is a voice of practical reason; it describes nothing; it says nothing of the describable [*de descriptible*]; it dictates, prescribes, orders. Kant also names it in Latin: *dictamen rationis* [491]. Although it gives rise to autonomy, the law it dictates is as little flexible, as little subject to free interpretation as if it came from the completely other in me. It is a “brazen voice” [*ibid.*], Kant says. It resounds in every man, for every man has in him the idea of duty. And it resounds rather loud in him; it strikes in him in a rather percussive and repercussive way; it almost thunders in him, since man trembles (*zittert*) [*ibid.*] to hear this brazen voice that, from the height of its majesty, orders him to sacrifice his drives to resist seductions, to forgo his desires. And the voice promises me nothing in return; it assures me of no compensation. It is sublime in this; it orders, mandates, demands, commands without giving anything in exchange;

it thunders in me to the point of making me tremble; it thus provokes the greatest questions and the greatest astonishment (*Erstaunen*) [492]. That is the *true* mystery—Kant also calls it *Geheimnis* [ibid.], but it is no longer the false mystery of the mystagogues. It is the mystery at once domestic, intimate, and transcendent, the *Geheimnis* of practical reason, the sublimity of moral law and moral voice. The mystagogues fail to recognize that *Geheimnis*; they confuse it with a mystery of vision and contact, whereas moral law never gives itself to be seen or touched. In this sense, the *Geheimnis* of moral law is more in tune with the essence of the voice that hears/understands itself but neither touches nor sees itself, thus seeming to hide itself from every external intuition. But in its very transcendence the moral voice is nearer, and thus more auto-affective, more autonomous. Moral law then is more auditory, more audible than the mystagogic oracle still contaminated with feeling, illumination, or intuitive vision, contact and mystical tact (“ein . . . mystischer Takt,” Kant says [486]). The overlordly tone untunes because it is also not as near the voice’s essence.

Why did I feel inclined, at this moment of my reading of an overlordly tone, to add this document to the dossier (if I can say that) of *La Carte postale*? Or yet to arrange it in what is called *dossier* therein, between the word and the thing, the word *dossier* packed with all the backs [*dos*] with which the note and the syllable punctuate the “Envois” on each page, at Socrates’s back and on the back of the postcard, with all the words in *do* and with the back [*dossier*] of the chair, of the partition between Socrates and Plato? This is not only on account of the question of tone, of the mixing or changing of tones (*Wechsel der Töne*) that would form in this book at once a theme and a practice. Nor is this on account of the word and the thing “apocalypse” that regularly recur there, with the numerological obsession and the insistence of the number seven that also puts rhythm into John’s Apocalypse. The signer of the “Envois” mocks at one moment what he calls our “little, library apocalypse” [16]. Nor is this a satire of philosophy and the academy. No, at this point of my reading of “an overlordly tone,” what I did feel inclined to add to *La Carte postale*’s dossier is the difficulty Plato gives to Kant, the devilish job Kant is given with Plato, the untiring rhetoric for distinguishing between the good Plato and the bad Plato, the true and the false, his authentic writings and his more or less reliable or apocryphal ones. That is to say, his Letters. Kant wants at once to accuse and excuse Plato for/of this continuous catastrophe that has corrupted philosophy, the strict relation between the name and the thing “philosophy,” in order to end in this untuning *Verstimmung*. He wants to accuse *and* excuse him for/of the delirium in philosophy, one would say, in the same movement of a double postulation. The *double bind* again of filiation: Plato is the father of the delirium, of all exaltation in philosophy (“der Vater aller Schwärmerei mit der Philosophie” [487]), but without it having been his fault (“ohne seine Schuld” [ibid.]). So we must divide Plato; we must distinguish between the

Academician and the presumed author of the Letters, the teacher and the sender [*envoyeur*].

Thus Plato the Academician was, without it being his fault (for he made of his intellectual intuitions only a *regressive* use, in order to *explain* the possibility of a synthetic *a priori* cognition, and not a *progressive* use in order to *extend* this knowledge thanks to that Idea readable (*lesbare*) in the divine understanding [the innocent Plato is Kant's father, as well as the postcard of a self-portrait by Kant; the innocent Plato is not the father of the delirium]), the father of all exaltation *in philosophy*. But I am hardly disposed to confuse with this Plato that of the *Letters* (*Plato den Briefsteller*) just translated into German. [487]

Kant's pamphlet, which came out in the *Berliner Monatschrift*, is dead set against a certain Schlosser who had just translated the Letters of Plato, in a work entitled *Plato's Letters on the Syracuse Revolution, With an Introduction and some Remarks* (1795). Kant seems to denounce Schlosser *directly* when he appeals to Plato and certain of his so-called esoteric doctrines; but *indirectly*, we know he wants to overtake Jacobi. And the intolerable, in this letter-writer Plato, is aristocratic esotericism—Kant cites that Letter recommending not divulging secrets to the crowd—a cryptophilness added to a mystical interpretation of mathematics. The great stake between Plato and Kant is evidently the philosophical interpretation of mathematics. Plato, amazed by geometric figures, as Pythagoras was by numbers, would have done nothing but have a presentiment of the problematic of the *a priori* synthesis and would too quickly have taken refuge in a mysticism of geometry, as Pythagoras in the mysticism of numbers. And this mathematizing mysticism, this idolatry of figures and numbers always goes hand in hand with phenomena of sect, cryptopolitics, indeed superstitious theophany that Kant opposes to rational theology. Numerology, mystic illumination, theophanic vision, and so on, all these do belong to the apocalyptic world. And here I note in passing that, in the vast and overabundant corpus of the apocalyptic "genre," from the Persian and Zoroastrian heritage up to the very numerous Jewish and Christian apocalypses, the experts often inscribe this or that text of Plato, especially the myth of Er in the *Republic*. This apocalyptic corpus has been collected, identified, and studied as such only in the nineteenth century. Kant never names the Apocalypse in this text, but he does make, three years earlier, a brief allusion to it, between parentheses, in *Religion Within the Limits of Reason Alone*—which is one of the most indispensable contextual surroundings for understanding the essay "Of an Overlordly Tone. . . ." In this parenthesis, the Apocalypse is invoked in order to designate the punishment of the guilty ones at the end of the world as the end of history (Book Three, Division Two, "Historical Account of the Gradual Establishment of the Sovereignty of the Good Principle on Earth") [125].

This cryptopolitics is also a cryptopoetics, a poetic perversion of philosophy.

It is still a matter of the veil and of castration.

Eight years ago, right here in fact, I had spoken of veil and castration, about interpreters, hermeneutics and hermetics [1973]. *I have forgotten my umbrella* is a statement at once hermetic and totally open, as secret and superficial as the apocalypse of the postcard it announces and protects against. And elsewhere, in *Glas* and in "Economimesis," I indicated the intrigue of a certain veil of Isis near which Kant and Hegel more than once busied themselves. I am going to expose (and explain) myself in taking (and tying) up again with the threads of this intrigue and with the treatment of castration taking Isis into account.

About the veil of Isis and about castration Kant says nothing that visibly refers them to one another within the same demonstrative argument. I observe only a kind of tropical continuity, but the tropical transfer(ence), the metaphorical, and the analogical, that is exactly our problem.

The mystagogues of modernity, according to Kant, do not simply tell us what they see, touch, or feel. They have a presentiment of, they anticipate, they approach, they smell out, they are the men of imminence and the trace. For example, they say they have a presentiment of the sun and cite Plato. They say that every philosophy of humankind can point out or designate the dawn, but that we can have only a presentiment of the sun. Kant is ironical about this presentiment of the sun; he multiplies his sarcastic remarks. These new Platonists give us through sentiment or presentiment (*Gefühl, Ahnung* [488]) only a theatrical sun (*Theatersonne*) [ibid.], a chandelier in sum [*un lustre en somme*]. And then these people abuse the metaphors, the figurative expressions (*bildlichen Ausdrücken*) [ibid.], in order to sensitize us, to make us presensitive to this presentiment. Here is an example of this—Kant cites his adversaries: "to approach so near the divine wisdom that one can perceive the rustle of its garment," its rustling (*Rauschen*), rather than its light touch (*frôlement*) as the French translation says [101]. Or yet: "since one cannot raise the veil of Isis, at least it can be made so thin (*so dünne*) that one can have a presentiment of the goddess under it (*unter ihm*)" [ibid.]. To raise the veil of Isis here is *aufheben* ("da er den Schleier der Isis nicht aufheben kann"), and one can still dream between the *gala* of this *Aufhebung* and that apocalyptic unveiling. Kant fires off his dart [*son trait*]: thin to what point, he asks; we are not told that. Probably not thin enough, still too thick so that we cannot do what we want with the phantom (*Gespens*t) behind its veil or cloth. For otherwise, if the veil was absolutely thin or transparent, this would be a vision, a seeing (*Sehen*), and, Kant notes while mercilessly taking aim, that must be avoided (*vermieden*) [488]. Above all we must not see; we must have only a presentiment under the veil. Then our mystagogues bring into play the phantom and the veil; they replace the evidences and proofs with "analogies," "versimilitudes" ("*Analogien, Wahrscheinlichkeiten*") [ibid.]. These are their words. Kant cites them and calls us to witness: you see, they are not true philosophers; they resort to poetic schemas. All that [*ça*] is from

literature. We certainly know this scene today, and it is, among other things, to this repetition that I would like to draw your attention. Not to take sides or come to a decision—I shall do no such thing—between metaphor and concept, literary mystagogy and true philosophy, but for a start to recognize the ancient interdependence of these antagonists or protagonists.

Now let us consider that Kant first puts forward the word or the image of castration, or more rigorously of “emasculatation (*Entmannung*)” [488], as one example of those “analogies” or “verisimilitudes” abused by, with its conjuring ends, this “new mystico-Platonic language (*in der neueren mystisch-platonischen Sprache*)” [487]. He first takes [*prélève*] them from a sentence of that Schlosser who just translated and introduced Plato’s Letters. Nietzsche had made something of this name Schlosser, as he did of a Schleiermacher, the first maker of hermeneutic veils. Schlosser is the locksmith, the man who makes or holds the keys, the true or the false ones, but also the officer of locking [*le préposé à la fermeture*], the one who closes and is an expert on closure, skilled as he is in speaking of it, in producing it, or in being right about it. This Schlosser then had spoken, by figure, of the “emasculatation of reason (*Entmannung der . . . Vernunft*),” and he had accused “metaphysical sublimation (*metaphysische Sublimation*)” [488] of this emasculatation. An inadmissible analogy in Kant’s eyes, abusive because it takes the place of proof by coming to the place where the demonstration leaves a “lack (*Mangel*),” but also scandalous because in truth there are those who adorn themselves with this new tone in philosophy, who emasculate and make a corpse of, empty [*cadavérisent*] reason. “To this very end,” he says, “for want of rigorous proofs, some ‘analogies, verisimilitudes’ are enlisted as argument (it had been a question of this above), thus ‘the fear of the emasculatation [the French translation [101–2] says castration for emasculatation] of reason made so enervated by metaphysical sublimation that it has trouble bearing the shock in its fight against vice.’” And Kant immediately turns the argument inside out, I would say like a glove: “whereas, nevertheless,” he says, “precisely in these *a priori* principles does practical reason find an exact sentiment that it never otherwise had a presentiment of, and indeed rather by the empirical that is falsely attributed to it (this very fact is what makes it improper for a universal legislation) is it emasculated and paralyzed (*entmannt und gelähmt*)” [488–91].

If castration is a metaphor or a simulacrum—and it must be such, it seems, in order to concern the phallus, not the penis or the clitoris—then the metaphorical stake is clear between the two opposing parties encamped by a Kant who is no less a receiving party from this. The stake for this *Kampfplatz* of metaphysics is the castration of reason. Which of the two parties facing each other most surely castrates reason? Or more seriously: which of the two unmans, *entmannt*, this descendant of *logos* that is *ratio*? Each of the two, we just heard them without the least equivocation, would accuse the other of castrating the *logos* and of taking off its phallus. And

into this phallogocentric debate on both parts, then throughout all parts, we could put Freud on the scene as a third robber procuring the key, true or false, the "sexual theory," namely that for this stage of reason wherein there is only male reason, only a masculine or castrated organ or canon of reason, everything proceeds in this just as for that stage of infantile genital organization wherein there is definitely a masculine but no feminine. Perhaps he would speak of a *phallic stage* of reason. "The antithesis here," Freud says at the end of "The Infantile Genital Organization," "is between having a *male genital* and being *castrated*" [145]. No sexual difference [*pas de différence*] as antithesis, but only the masculine! This strange logic (reason since Freud, Lacan would say) could be followed far enough into the details of the text, above all in the moments when the veil of Isis unleashes what Freud calls *Bemächtigungstrieb*, the drive for mastery. Kant for example accuses the mystagogic metaphysicians of behaving like "musclemen (*Kraftmännern*)" [490n] who lately preach with enthusiasm a wisdom that costs them nothing, since they claim they have caught this goddess by the end of her robe and thus have made themselves her masters and lords; they would have "mastered (*bemächtigt*)" [ibid.] her, and so on.

The castration or not of *logos* as *ratio* is a central form of this debate around metaphysics. It is also a fight around poetics (between poetry and philosophy), around the death or the future of philosophy. It is the same stake. Kant does not doubt this: the new preachers need to pervert philosophy into poetry in order to give themselves grand airs, to occupy through simulacrum and mimicry the place of the great, to usurp thus a power of symbolic essence. Schlosser, the locksmith, we could also say the man of the castle, not only abuses poetic metaphors. He accuses his century of being prosaic; and he dares to write to Plato, appeals to him, invokes him, apostrophizes him, calls him to witness: "'Armer Plato, poor Plato, if you were not marked with the seal of Antiquity . . . who would still read you in this *prosaic* century in which the highest wisdom consists in seeing only what is at our feet and in admitting only what can be grasped with the hands?'" [495n]. Fighting against this Schlosser who thrashes the new sons of the earth, Kant plays Aristotle against Plato: "But unfortunately this reasoning is not *conclusive*; it proves too much. For *Aristotle*, a manifestly prosaic philosopher, also clearly has the seal (*Siegel*) of Antiquity and could on this account lay claim, he too, to being read!—At bottom, all philosophy is indeed prosaic, and to propose today to go back to philosophizing poetically (*wiederum poetisch zu philosophieren*) could well pass for proposing to the shopkeeper (*Kaufmann*) no longer henceforth to write his account books in prose but in verse" [ibid.].

But the strategy on both sides is more twisted still. The analogist and anagogist mystagogues, they too play the Aristotle card. And at this moment of play it is a matter of the ends and the end of philosophy. The watch [*La veillée*] over the death or the end of philosophy, the vigil [*la veille*] by the

corpse of philosophy is not just an ancient (hi)story because it would date back to Kant. For it was already said that if philosophy were finished, that was not a deferred action [*un après-coup*] of the Kantian limitation or of the bounds [*termes*] placed on the empire of metaphysics; it was “already for two thousand years” [482n]. Already for two thousand years have we finished with philosophy, said a disciple of Schlosser, a true count, the former, Count Leopold Stolberg, since “the Stagirite has made so many conquests for science that he left to his successors just so few notable things for which they can lie in wait” [482–83n]. Kant’s rejoinder is that of a decided progressive; he believes in philosophy’s finally open and unveiled future. It is also the response of an egalitarian democrat: you want to put an end to philosophy through obscurantism (*durch Obskurieren*) [483n], and you are disguised monarchists; you want all to be equal among themselves, but with the exception of one single individual all are nothing. Sometimes the individual is Plato, sometimes Aristotle, but in truth you play the philosophers through this monarchism, and you elevate yourselves by proclaiming the end of philosophy with an overlordly tone.

Naturally, even when he fights like this, Kant declares that he does not like warfare. As in *Der Streit der Fakultäten* (wherein he distinguished moreover between natural warfare and the conflict arbitrated by a law), he ends by proposing to the castrating adversary a kind of concordat, a deal, a peace treaty, or a contract, in short the solution of a conflict that is not an antinomy. As perhaps you have foreseen, this contract is more important to me than the whole combinative strategy, the play, and the exchange of places. What can deeply bind the two adversary parties and procure for them a neutral ground of reconciliation for yet speaking together about the suitable tone? In other words, what do they together exclude as the inadmissible itself? What is the *inadmissible*?

Kant speaks of modernity, and of the mystagogues of his time, but you will have quickly perceived in passing, without my even having to designate explicitly, name, or pull out all the threads, how many transpositions we could surrender to on the side of our so-called modernity. Not that today anybody can be recognized on this or that side, purely and simply, but I am sure it could be shown that today every slightly organized discourse is found or claims to be found on both sides, alternately or simultaneously, even if this emplacement exhausts nothing, does not go round the turn or the contour [*ne fait pas le tour ou le contour*] of the place and the sustained discourse. And this inadequation, always limited itself, no doubt indicates the thickest of difficulties. Each of us is the mystagogue and the *Aufklärer* of another. I leave to you to try some of these transpositions; we could return to them in the discussion.

What, then, is the contract? What condition does Kant lay down for those, like himself, who declare their concern to speak or say the truth, to *reveal* without emasculating the *logos*? For they agree on this together,

this is the place of consensus where they can meet and come together, their synagogue. Kant first asks them to get rid of the veiled goddess before which they both tend to kneel. He asks them no longer to personify the moral law or the voice that incarnates it. No longer, he says to the mystagogues, should we personify the law speaking in us, above all not under the "esthetic," sensible, and beautiful form of this veiled Isis. Such will be the condition for understanding/hearing the moral law itself, the unconditioned, and for understanding/hearing ourselves. In other words, and this is a trenchant motif for thought of the law and of the ethical today, Kant calls for placing the law above and beyond, not the person, but personification and the body, as it were the sensible voice speaking in us, the singular voice speaking to us in private, the voice that could be said in its language to be "pathological" in opposition to the voice of reason. The law above the body, above this body found here to be represented by a veiled goddess. Even if you do not want to grant some *signifiance* or significance to the fact that what the concordat excludes is precisely the body of a veiled Isis, the universal principle of femininity, murderess of Osiris all of whose pieces she later recovers, except for the phallus. Even if you also think that is a personification too analogical or metaphorical, grant me at least that the truce proposed between the two declared defenders of a non-emasculated *logos* supposes some exclusion. It supposes some *inadmissible*. There is an excluded middle and that will be enough for me. Will be enough for me in view of what? Before pursuing this question, I shall read the proposition of peace or alliance addressed by Kant to his adversaries of the day, but perhaps to his accomplices of all times:

But what is the good of all this conflict between two parties that at bottom share the same good intention: to make men wise and honest? It is noise about nothing, a discord founded on a misunderstanding, which calls less for reconciliation than for reciprocal explanation in order to conclude an accord, an accord that makes a still more profound harmony for the future.

The veiled goddess before which we on both sides bend our knees is the moral law in us in its invulnerable majesty. We certainly perceive its voice, and we understand very clearly its commandments. But in hearing it we doubt whether it comes from man and whether it originates from the all-powerfulness of his very own reason, or whether it emanates from some other being, whose nature is unknown to man and who speaks to him through his own proper reason. At bottom we would perhaps do better to exempt ourselves entirely from this research, for it is simply speculative, and what (objectively) devolves upon us to do remains the same, let one find it on one or the other principle. The only difference is that the didactic procedure of leading the moral law in us back to distinct concepts according to a logical method is alone properly *philosophical*, whereas the procedure consisting in personifying this law and in making of the reason that morally commands a veiled Isis (even when we attribute no other properties to it than those the first method discovers in it) is an *esthetic* manner of representing (*eine ästhetische Vorstellungssart*) exactly the same object. It is indeed permitted to rely on this manner, since one has already started by leading the principles back to their pure state, in order to give life to this idea thanks to a sensible, though only analogical, presentation

(*Darstellung*), but not without always running some risk of falling into an exalted vision, which is the death of all philosophy. [494-95]

Among the numerous traits characterizing an apocalyptic type of document [*écrit*], let us provisionally isolate prediction and eschatological predication, the fact of telling, foretelling, or preaching the end, the extreme limit, the imminence of the last. Can't we say then that all the receiving parties of such a concordat are the subjects of eschatological discourses? No doubt, with other contextual elements, this situation is older than the Copernican revolution; the numerous prototypes of apocalyptic discourses would suffice to attest to this, as would so many others in the meantime. But if Kant denounces those who proclaim that philosophy is at an end for two thousand years, he has himself, in marking a limit, indeed the end of a certain type of metaphysics, freed another wave of eschatological discourses in philosophy. His progressivism, his belief in the future of a certain philosophy, indeed of another metaphysics, is not contradictory to this proclamation of ends and of the end. And I shall now start again from this fact: from then on and with multiple and profound differences, indeed mutations, being taken into account, the West has been dominated by a powerful program that was also an untransgressible contract among discourses of the end. The themes of history's end and of philosophy's death represent [*figurent*] only the most comprehensive, massive, and assembled forms of this. To be sure there are obvious differences between Hegelian eschatology, that Marxist eschatology one too quickly wanted to forget these last years in France (and perhaps this was another eschatology of *Marxism*, its eschatology and its death knell [*glas*]), Nietzschean eschatology (between the last man, the higher man, and the overman), and so many other more recent varieties. But aren't these differences measured as gaps or deviations in relation to the fundamental tonality of this *Stimmung* audible across so many thematic variations? Haven't all the differences [*différends*] taken the form of a going-one-better in eschatological eloquence, each newcomer, more lucid than the other, more vigilant and more prodigal too than the other, coming to add more to it: I tell you this in truth; this is not only the end of this here but also and first of that there, the end of history, the end of the class struggle, the end of philosophy, the death of God, the end of religions, the end of Christianity and morals (that [*ça*], that was the most serious naïveté), the end of the subject, the end of man, the end of the West, the end of Oedipus, the end of the earth, *Apocalypse now*, I tell you, in the cataclysm, the fire, the blood, the fundamental earthquake, the napalm descending from the sky by helicopters, like prostitutes, the nuclear thunder and the great whoring, and also the end of literature, the end of painting, art as a thing of the past, the end of psychoanalysis, the end of the university, the end of phallogocentrism and phallogocentrism, and I don't know what else? And whoever would

come to refine, to tell the extreme of the extreme [*le fin du fin*], namely the end of the end, the end of ends, that the end has always already begun, that we must still distinguish between closure and end, that person would, whether wanting to or not, participate in the concert. For that is also the end of the metalanguage concerning eschatological language. And so we can ask ourselves if eschatology is a tone, or even the voice itself. Isn't the voice always that of the last man? The voice or the tongue itself, the singing or the tone of voice [*l'accent*] in the tongue itself. Hölderlin closes his second version of *Patmos*, the poem bearing as its title the name of the apocalyptic island, that of John, by invoking the poem of the German tongue ("*Dem folgt deutscher Gesang.*" ["This German song observes."] [476-77]). Heidegger often cites the first lines of this poem ("Nah ist / Und schwer zu fassen der Gott. / Wo aber Gefahr ist, wächst / Das Rettende auch." "Near is / And difficult to grasp, the God. / But where danger threatens / That which saves from it also grows." [Hölderlin, 462-63; Heidegger, 28, 34]). And if Heidegger thinks the *Überwindung* of metaphysics or of onto-theology like that of eschatology which is inseparable from it, he does so in the name of [*au nom de*] another eschatology. Several times he says of thought, here distinct from philosophy, that it is essentially eschatological. That is his word.

Isn't the voice of the tongue, I was asking, always that of the last man? Forgoing reading with you Blanchot's *Le Dernier Homme*, I recall, since I spoke of the voice and of Oedipus, this fragment from the *Philosophenbuch*. Nietzsche, under the title "Oedipus" and in an absolute soliloquy, made the last philosopher speak with himself who is also the last man. He speaks with his own voice; he converses [*s'entretient*] and maintains [*entretient*] what life remains for him with the phantom of his own voice; and he calls on himself, he calls himself Oedipus: "The last philosopher, that thus is what I name myself, for I am the last man. No one speaks to me except myself alone, and my voice reaches me like that of a dying person. With you, beloved voice, with you, last breath of the memory of all human happiness, allow me still this commerce of a single hour. Thanks to you I delude my solitude, and I penetrate into the lie of a multiplicity and a love, for my heart loathes believing that love is dead; it does not support the shudder of the most solitary of solitudes, and it obliges me to speak as if I were two." "As if I were two": for the moment he thus sends himself this message by acting *as if* he could still really appeal to it. This impossible destination signs, stamps the death of the last man, inside and outside him. He knows him beyond the *as if*: "And yet! I still hear you, beloved voice! He still dies *someone* outside me, the last man, in this universe: the last sigh, *your* sigh dies with me, this long alas! alas! breathed out on me, the last of the miserable ones, Oedipus!" [1922:36-37; 1978:48-49].

Then if eschatology surprises us at the first word, at the first as at the last, always at the last but one, what are we to say? What are we to do?

The response to this question is perhaps impossible, because it never lets itself be expected. For the question is that of the response, and of an appeal promising and responding before the question.

Clarity is necessary, Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe said yesterday. Yes. But there is light, and there are the lights, daylight, and also the madness of the day [*la folie du jour*]. "The end is beginning," we read in *La Folie du jour* [1973:18; 1977:171]. Without even referring to the Zoroastrian type of apocalypses (there was more than one of them), we know that every apocalyptic eschatology is promised in the name of light, of seeing and vision, and of a light of light, of a light brighter than all the lights it makes possible. John's apocalypse, which dominates all the Western apocalyptic, is lit by the light of El, of Elohim:

the glory of Elohim illuminates it.

...

the kings of the earth bring their glory into it.

Its gates are never closed for the day:

no, there is no night there.

They bring the glory. . . .

(21:23-26)

And there is no night any more,
they have no need of the lamp's light
or of the sun's light:

Adônai Elohim illuminates them, and they rule forever and
ever.

(22:5)

There is light, and there are the lights, the lights of reason or of the *logos*, that are not, for all that, some other thing. And it is in the name of [*au nom d'*] an *Aufklärung* that Kant, for example, undertakes to demystify the overlordly tone. In light of today we cannot not have become the heirs of these *Lumières*. We cannot and we must not—this is a law and a destiny—forgo the *Aufklärung*. In other words, we cannot and we must not forgo what compels recognition as the enigmatic desire for vigilance, for the lucid vigil [*veille*], for clarification, for critique and truth, but for a truth that at the same time keeps within itself enough apocalyptic desire, this time as desire for clarity and revelation, to demystify, or if you prefer, to deconstruct the apocalyptic discourse itself and with it everything that speculates on vision, the imminence of the end, theophany, the parousia, the Last Judgment, and so on. Then each time we intractably ask ourselves: where do they want to come to, and to what ends, those who declare the end of this or that, of man or the subject, of consciousness, of history, of the West or of literature, and according to the latest news of progress itself, the idea of which never went so badly one way or the other, to the right or the left? What effect do these noble, gentile [*gentils*] prophets or eloquent visionaries want to produce? With a view to what immediate or postponed

[*ajourné*] benefit? What do they do, what do we do in saying this? For whom do we seduce or subjugate, intimidate or cause to enjoy, to come? These effects and these benefits can be related to an individual or collective, conscious or unconscious speculation. They can be analyzed in terms of libidinal or political mastery, with all the differential relays and thus all the economic paradoxes overdetermining the idea of power or mastery and sometimes carrying them along into the abyss. The lucid analysis of these interests or of these calculi should mobilize a very great number and a great diversity of interpretative devices available today. It must and can do this, for our epoch would rather be superarmed in this regard. And a deconstruction, if it does not come to a stop there, nonetheless never works without some secondary work concerning the system joining up this superarmament to itself, articulating, as is said, psychoanalysis to Marxism or to some Nietzscheanism; to the resources of linguistics, rhetoric, or pragmatics; to the theory of *speech acts*; to the Heideggerian thought on the history of metaphysics, the essence of science or of technics [*technique*]; and so on. Such a demystification must give in [*se plier*] to the subtlest diversity of apocalyptic ruses. The interest or the calculus of these ruses can be so dissembled under the desire for light, well hidden (*eukalyptus*, as is said of the tree whose calycine limb remains closed after flowering), well hidden under the avowed desire for revelation. And a dissembling can hide another of these desires. The most serious (for then it is without end), the most fascinating, results from this: the subject of eschatological discourse can have an interest in forgoing its own interest; it can forgo everything in order to place yet its death on your shoulders and to make you inherit in advance its corpse, that is, its soul, hoping thus to arrive at its ends through the end, to seduce you immediately in promising you to keep watch over your watching in its own absence. I am not sure that there is just *one* fundamental *scene*, *one* great paradigm on which, except for some gaps or deviations, all the eschatological strategies would model themselves. It would still be a philosophical, onto-eschato-teleological interpretation to say: the apocalyptic strategy is fundamentally one, its diversity is only of ways of proceeding [*procédés*], masks, appearances, or simulacra. This caution being taken, let us yield for a short time to the temptation of a fiction, and let us imagine this fundamental scene. Let us imagine that there is *an* apocalyptic tone, a unity of the apocalyptic tone, and that *the* apocalyptic tone is not the effect of a generalized derailment, of a *Verstimmung* multiplying the voices and making the tones shift [*sauter*], opening each word to the haunting memory [*hantise*] of the other in an uncontrollable polytonality, with grafts, intrusions, interferences [*parasitages*]. Generalized *Verstimmung* is the possibility for the other tone, or the tone of another, to come at no matter what moment to interrupt a familiar tonality. (Just as I suppose this is readily produced in analysis, but also elsewhere, when suddenly a tone come from one knows not where cuts off the word of—if that can be said—interrupts what tranquilly seemed to

determine (*bestimmen*) the voice and thus insure the unity of destination, the self-identity of some addressee [*destinataire*] or sender [*destinateur*]. If, from then on, *Verstimmung* is called the derailment, the sudden change [*saute*] of tone as one would say the sudden change of mood, it is the disorder or the delirium of the destination (*Bestimmung*), but also the possibility of all emission or utterance. The unity of tone, if there was such, would certainly be the assurance of the destination, but also death, another apocalypse.) So let us imagine that there is *an* apocalyptic tone and *a* fundamental scene. Then whoever takes on the apocalyptic tone comes to tell you or itself something, but what? I say "whoever takes," "whosoever takes," in order not to say "he who," "she who," "those men who," "those women who," and I definitely say the tone that must be distinguishable from all articulated discursive content. Which means the tone is not perforce what the discourse says, and either one can always contradict, deny, make drift, derive, or derail the other. Whoever takes on the apocalyptic tone comes to signify to, if not tell, you something. What? The truth, of course, and to signify to you that it reveals the truth to you; the tone is the revelator of some unveiling in process. Unveiling or truth, apophantics of the imminence of the end, of whatever returns at the limit, at the end of the world. Not only truth as the revealed truth of a secret on the end or of the secret of the end. Truth itself is the end, the destination, and that truth unveils itself is the advent of the end. Truth is the end and the instance of the Last Judgment. The structure of truth here would be apocalyptic. And that is why there would not be any truth of the apocalypse that is not the truth of truth.

Then whoever takes on the apocalyptic tone will be asked: with a view to what and to what ends? In order to lead where, right now or in a few minutes? The end is beginning, signifies the apocalyptic tone. But to what ends does the tone signify this? The apocalyptic tone naturally wants to attract, to get to come or arrive at itself, to seduce in order to lead to itself, or to the place where the first vibration of the tone is heard, which is called, as will be one's want, subject, person, sex, desire (I think rather of a pure differential vibration, without support, unbearable). The end is soon, it is imminent, signifies the tone. I see it, I know it, I tell you it, now you know it, come. We are all going to die, we are going to disappear. And this death sentence, this stopping of death [*cet arrêt de mort*] can only judge us. We are going to die, you and I, the others too, the goyim, the gentiles, and all the others, all those who do not share this secret with us, but they do not know it. It is as if they were already dead. We are the only ones in the world. I am the only one able to reveal to you the truth or the destination. I tell you it, I give it to you; come, let us be an instant, we who do not yet know who we are, an instant before the end the sole survivors, the only ones to stay awake—that will be ever stronger. We shall be a sect; we shall form a species, a sex or gender, a race (*Geschlecht*) by ourselves alone; we shall

give ourselves a name. (That is just a bit the Babel scene, of which we can speak again, but there is also a Babel in John's Apocalypse that will lead us to think, not on the side of the confusion of tongues or tones, but on prostitution, if we suppose distinctions can be made.) The great Babel is the mother of whores: "Come. I shall show you the judgment/of the great whore" (17:1). They sleep, we stay awake.

This discourse, or rather this tone I translate into discourse, this tone of the vigil at the moment of the end, which is also that of the funeral watch, of the *Wake*, it always cites or reflects back [*répercute*] in a certain way John's Apocalypse or at least the fundamental scene that already programs the Johannine document. Thus, for example:

"I know your works:
you are reputed to be alive
but you are dead.

Stay awake! [*Esto vigilans* says the Latin translation.]
Strengthen what is left, so near death.

...
If you do not stay awake,
I shall come like a thief:
you will not know at what hour I shall come to you."

(3:1-3)

I shall come: the coming is always to come. The *Adôn*, named as the aleph and the tau, the alpha and the omega, is the one who has been, who is, and who comes, not who shall be, but who comes, which is the present of a to-come, a future [*à-venir*]. *I come* means: I am going to come, I am to-come in the imminence of an "I am going to come," "I am in the process of coming," "I am on the point of going to come." "Who comes" (*o erkhomenos*) is translated here in Latin by *venturus est*.

Jesus says, "Stay awake." But it would be necessary, perhaps beyond or before a narratology, to unfold a detailed analysis of the narrative voice in the Apocalypse. I use the expression "narrative voice" in order to distinguish it, as Blanchot does, from the narratorial voice, that of the identifiable subject, of the narrator or determinable sender in a narrative, a *récit*. In addition, I believe that all the "come"'s resounding in the *récits* or *non-récits* of Blanchot also resound, harmonize with a certain "come" (*erkhou, veni*) of the Johannine Apocalypse. Jesus says, "Be wakeful . . . I shall come to you." But John speaks by citing Jesus, or rather writes, appears to transcribe what he says by recounting that he cites Jesus the moment Jesus dictates to him to write—which he does right now and which we read—to the seven communities, to the seven churches of Asia. Jesus is cited as the one who dictates without himself writing and says, "write, *grapson*." But even before John writes while saying right then that he writes, he hears as a dictation the great voice of Jesus—

I, Yohanân . . .

I am in the island called Patmos
because of the word of Elohim and the testimony of Yéshoua'.
I am in the breath (*en pneumatī, in spiritu*), on the
day of the Adôn.
I hear behind me a great voice,
like that of a shofar. It says:
"What you see, write it into a book,
send it to the seven communities. . . ."

[1:9-11]

Write and send, dictates the voice come from behind, in the back of John, like a shofar, *grapson eis biblion kai pempson, scribe in libro: et mitte septem Ecclesiis*. *I see* and *I hear*, in the present tense in Chouraqui's translation, are in the past in the Greek and the Latin, which does not simplify the premises of an analysis./2/ Now even before this narrative scene citing a dictation or literally a present inspiration, there was a preamble without narrative, or in any case narratorial, voice, a kind of title or name tag [*médaille*] come from one knows not where and binding the apocalyptic disclosure to the sending or dispatch [*envoi*]. These lines are properly the apocalypse as sending, as *envoi*, and of the *envoi* as apocalypse, the apocalypse that sends itself:

Disclosure of Yéshoua the messiah (*Apokalupsis Jesou Khristou*):
Elohim gives it to him
to show to his servants
what will come soon.

He indicates it by sending it through his messenger
(*esemanen aposteilas dia tou angelou autou,*
significavit, mittens per angelum suum)
to his servant Yohanân.

[1:1-2]

So John is the one who already receives some letters [*courrier*] through the medium yet of a bearer who is an angel, a pure messenger. And John transmits a message already transmitted, testifies to a testimony that will be yet that of another testimony, that of Jesus; so many sendings, *envois*, so many voices, and this puts so many people on the telephone line.

He indicates it by sending it through his messenger
to his servant Yohanân.

He reports the testimony of the word of Elohim
and the testimony of Yéshoua' the messiah,
all he has seen.

The joys of the reader, of the hearer
of the words of the inspiration
for those who keep what is written:

yes, the time approaches, *o gar kairos engus, tempus
enim prope est.*

[1:2-3]

If, in a very insufficient and only just preliminary way, I draw your attention to the narrative sending [*envoi*], the interlacing of voices and *envois* in the dictated or addressed writing, I do so because great attention no doubt would have to be given this differential reduction or gearing down of voices and tones that perhaps divides them beyond a distinct and calculable plurality—at least in the hypothesis or the program of an intractable demystification of the apocalyptic tone, in the style of the *Lumières* or of an *Aufklärung* of the twentieth century, and if we wanted to unmask the ruses, traps, trickeries, seductions, the engines of war and pleasure, in short, all the interests of the apocalyptic tone today. We do not know (for it is no longer of the order of knowing) to whom the apocalyptic dispatch [*envoi*] returns; it leaps [*saute*] from one place of emission to the other (and a place is always determined *starting from* the presumed emission); it goes from one destination, one name, and one tone to the other; it always refers to [*renvoie à*] the name and to the tone of the other that is there but as having been there and before yet coming, no longer being or not yet there in the present of the *récit*. And there is no certainty that man is the exchange [*le central*] of these telephone lines or the terminal of this computer without end. No longer do we know very well who loans his voice and his tone to the other in the Apocalypse; no longer do we know very well who addresses what to whom. But by a catastrophic overturning here more necessary than ever, we can as well think this: as soon as we no longer know very well who speaks or who writes, the text becomes apocalyptic. And if the dispatches [*envois*] always refer to other dispatches without decidable destination, the destination remaining to come, then isn't this completely angelic structure, that of the Johannine Apocalypse, isn't it also the structure of every scene of writing in general? This is one of the suggestions I wanted to submit for your discussion: wouldn't the apocalyptic be a transcendental condition of all discourse, of all experience itself, of every mark or every trace? And the genre of writings called "apocalyptic" in the strict sense, then, would be only an example, an exemplary revelation of this transcendental structure. In that case, if the apocalypse reveals, it is first the revelation of the apocalypse, the self-presentation of the apocalyptic structure of language, of writing, of the experience of presence, either of the text or of the mark in general: that is, of the divisible dispatch [*envoi*] for which there is no self-presentation nor assured destination. But let us not worry, there is an apocalyptic *pli* [fold, envelope, letter, habit, or message]

there. Not only a *pli* as dispatch, a *pli* inducing a tonal change [*changement*] and an immediate tonal duplicity in every apocalyptic voice. Not only a *pli* in the "apocalyptic" signifier that designates at times the content of the *récit* and of what is announced, namely the catastrophes and the cataclysms of the end of the world, the upheavals, the bolts of thunder and the earthquakes, the fire, the blood, the mountain of fire and the sea of blood, the plagues, the smoke, the sulphur, the burning [*la brûlure*], the multiplicity of tongues and kings, the beast, the sorcerers, Satan, the great whore of the Apocalypse, and so on; and at other times, it designates the announcement itself and no longer what is announced, the revelatory discourse of the to-come or even of the end of the world rather than what it says, the truth of the revelation rather than the revealed truth. But I think of another *pli*, which we are also in, in the light of today: everything that can now inspire a de-mystifying desire regarding the apocalyptic tone, namely a desire for light, for lucid vigilance, for the elucidating vigil [*veille érudite*], or for truth, well all that is already found on the way. And I shall say in an apocalyptic transfer(ence), it is already a citation or a recitation of John or of what already programmed John's dispatches [*envois*], when for example he writes, for a messenger, under the dictate of the great voice come from behind his back and which thrusts [*se tend*] like a shofar, like a ram's horn:

To the messenger of the community in Ephesus, write:

"He says this,

he who holds the seven stars in his right hand,

he who walks in the midst of the seven lamps of gold.

'I know your works, your toil,

your endurance:

you cannot endure evil men.

You have tried those who call themselves envoys and are

not (*tous legontas eautous apostolous kai ouk*

eisin, qui se dicunt apostolos esse, et non sunt),

and you find them false.

...

But I have this against you:

your first love, you have left it."

(2:1-2,4)

And the dispatches [*envois*] increase, then the seven messengers come, up to the seventh, after which

The temple of Elohim is opened to the sky.

The coffer of his pact appears in his temple.

There come lightning flashes, voices, thunders,
an earthquake, great hail.

A great sign [*semion mega*] appears in the sky:

a woman clothed in the sun,

the moon under her feet,
and on her head a crown of twelve stars.

(11:19-12:1)

Then we, *Aufklärer* of modern times, we continue to denounce the imposter apostles, the “so-called envoys” who are not sent [*envoyés*] by anyone, the false and the unfaithful ones, the turgidness and the inflation of all those charged with a historic mission of whom nobody has requested anything and whom nobody has charged or entrusted with anything. Thus shall we continue, in the best apocalyptic tradition, to denounce the false apocalypses?

The habit [*pli*] being taken up, I am not going to multiply the examples. The end approaches, but the apocalypse is long-lived. The question remains and comes back: what can be the limits of a demystification? No doubt one can think—I think this—that this demystification must be led as far as possible, and the task is not modest. It is interminable, because no one can exhaust the overdeterminations and the indeterminations of the apocalyptic strategems. And above all because the ethico-political motif or motivation of these strategems is never reducible to some simple. I recall thus that their rhetoric, for example, is not only destined to mislead the people rather than the powerful in order to get to reactionary, backward-looking, conservative ends. Nothing is less conservative than the apocalyptic genre. And seeing that it is an apocryptic, apocryphal, masked, coded genre, it can give some detours in order to mislead another vigilance, that of censorship. We know that apocalyptic writings have increased the moment State censorship was very strong in the Roman Empire, and precisely to catch the censorship unawares. Now this possibility can be extended to all censorships, and not only to the political, and in politics to the official. Even if we go no further than political censorship, and if we were alert enough to know that political censorship is not only practiced starting from specialized State lairs [*officines*], but everywhere, like an Argus with a thousand eyes, in a majority, in an opposition, in a virtual majority, with respect to everything that does not let itself be centered [*cadrer*] by the logic of the current political discourse and of the conceptual oppositions legitimated by the contract between the legitimate adversaries, well we would perhaps think that the apocalyptic discourse can also get round censorship thanks to its genre and its cryptic ruses. By its very tone, the mixing of voices, genres, and codes, and the breakdown [*le détraquement*] of destinations, apocalyptic discourse can also dismantle the dominant contract or concordat. It is a challenge to the established admissibility of messages and to the enforcement or the maintenance of order [*la police*] of the destination, in short to the postal regulations [*la police postale*] or to the monopoly of the posts. Conversely, we could even say that every discourse or every tonal disorder, everything that untunes and becomes inadmissible in general collocation, everything that is no longer identifiable starting from established codes, from both sides

of one front, will necessarily pass for or be considered mystagogic, obscurantistic, and apocalyptic. It will be made to pass for such.

If we now inquire about another limit of demystification, a limit (perhaps) more essential and which would (perhaps) distinguish a deconstruction from a simple progressive demystification in the style of the *Lumières*, I would be tempted by another bearing [*démarche*]. For finally, to demystify the seductive or agogic move is fine; it is necessary; but mustn't we first ask ourselves with a view to what, to what end does it [*ça*] seduce, use trickery, mislead, move? About this other bearing, I am going to say a very quick word, in order to conclude and respond thus if possible to a request. Several times I have been asked (and that is why I shall allow myself a brief exhibition or galactic (and nongalactic) show of certain of my writings) why (with a view to what, to what ends, and so on) I have or have *taken on* an apocalyptic tone and proposed apocalyptic themes. Thus have they often been qualified, sometimes with suspicion, and above all, I have noticed, in the United States where one is always more sensitive to phenomena of prophetism, messianism, eschatology, and of the apocalypse-here-now. That I have multiplied the distinctions between closure and end, that I was aware of speaking of discourses *on* the end rather than announcing the end, that I intended to analyze a genre rather than practice it, and even when I would practice it, to do so with this ironic kind [*genre*] of clause wherein I tried to show that this clause never belonged to the genre itself; nevertheless, for the reasons I said a few minutes ago, every language on the apocalypse is also apocalyptic and cannot be excluded from its object. Then I have also asked myself why, to what ends, with a view to what, did the Apocalypse itself, I mean the historic writings thus named and first the one signed by John of Patmos, install itself little by little, above all for six or seven years, as a theme, a concern, a fascination, an explicit reference, and the horizon for me of a work or a task, although I know very badly these rich and secret texts. This was first the case in *Glas*, whose columns are constantly shaken by apocalyptic agitations and laughs on the subject of the apocalypse and which in a certain moment (p. 220) mixes the remains of genres and of John, the one of the Gospel, of the Apocalypse, and of Genet. We see there: "The Gospel and the Apocalypse violently severed, fragmented, redistributed, with blanks, displacements in accents, lines skipped or shifted around, as if they reached us over a broken-down teletype, a wiretap [*table d'écoute*] within an overloaded telephone exchange. . . ." And a long sequence jumbling the citations comes to an end thus:

"And I, John, I have heard and seen all this." As his name indicates: the apocalyptic, in other words, capital unveiling, in truth lays bare the hunger for/of self. *Funeral Rites*, you recall, on the same page: "Jean was taken away from me. . . . Jean needed a compensation . . . the . . . revelation of my friendship for Jean. . . . I was hungry for Jean."

It [Ça] is called a colossal compensation. The absolute phantasm as absolute self-having [*s'avoir absolu*: cf. *savoir absolu*, absolute knowledge] in its most mournful glory: to swallow (one)self in order to be (close) by (one)self, to make (one)self a mouthful, to be(come) (in a word *bander* [bind, bandage, bend, blindfold, get a hard-on, bandy]) one's own proper bit. [222]

That was finally, I said this a few minutes ago, the case with *La Carte postale*, where the allusions increase to the Apocalypse and to its arithmosophy, where everything speculates on the figures and notably seven, the "written seven," the angels, "my angel," the messengers and the postmen [*facteurs*], prediction, the announcement of the news, the holocaustic "burning," and all the phenomena of *Verstimmung*, of the changing of tone, of the mixing of genres, of *destinerrance*, if I can say that, or of *clandestination*, so many signs of more or less bastard apocalyptic filiation. But in concluding I did not wish to stress this thematic or tonal network. For want of time, I shall limit myself to the word, if it is a word, and to the motif "Come" that occupies other texts written in the meantime, in particular "Pas," "Living On," and "En ce moment même dans cet ouvrage me voici," three texts dedicated, we can say, to Blanchot and to Levinas. I was not immediately aware of the citational resonance of this "Come," or at least that its citation (for the drama of its citationality was what mattered to me at the outset, its repetitive structure and what, even in its tone, should be able to repeat itself, thus mimic itself, indeed "synthesize" itself) was also a reference to John's Apocalypse. I was not aware of this when I wrote "Pas," but I did know it at the time of the other two texts. And I noted it. "Come," *erkhou, veni, viens*, this appeal resounds in the heart of the vision, in the "I see" following the dictation of Christ (starting from Chapter 4) when it is said:

I see, in the right hand of him who is sitting on the throne,
a book-roll written on the inside and out,
sealed with seals: seven.

I see a messenger, strong.
He cries in a great voice:
"Who is worthy to open the book
and break the seals?"

No one can,
in heaven, on the earth, or under the earth,
open the book or look at it.

[5:1-3]

And each time the Lamb opens one of the seven seals, one of the four living beings says, "Come," and it is the retinue of the Horsemen of the Apocalypse. (In the "Envois" of *La Carte postale*, one or the other often says: they believe that we are two, or that I am alone, or that we are three, or that we are four; and it is not certain that they are wrong in this; but everything

happens as if the hypothesis could not go beyond four; in any case it is fiction.) Farther on, I mean in John's Apocalypse, in Chapter 17, one of the seven messengers with the seven cups says, "Come. I shall show you the judgment / of the great whore" [17:1]. It is a question of Babel. And in 21, "Come! I shall show you / the bride, the wife of the Lamb" [21:9]. And above all at the end of ends, "Come" launches into or has repercussions in an exchange of appeals and responses that precisely is no longer an exchange. The voices, the places, the journeys of "Come" traverse the partition [*paroi*] of a song, a book of citational and recitative echoes, as if it [*ça*] began by responding. And in this traversal or this transfer(ence), the voices find their spacing, the space of their movement, but they nullify it with one stroke [*d'un trait*: with one brilliant melodic passage, run, or virtuosic passage]; they no longer give it the time, the beat. There is a kind of general narrator there: at the moment of the signature, it will call itself the witness (*mar-tyrōn, testimonium*). There is the angelic messenger there to whom he ascribes the dispatch [*l'envoi*]. There is John there who takes up the word again and says that at present he prostrates himself before the messenger who tells him:

"Do not seal the words of the inspiration of this book:
yes, the time is near."

[22:10]

The *double bind* of an order that John could only disobey in order to obey. Then Jesus takes up the word again, naturally in a mode directly related to what Plato called mimetic or apocryphal, and the play of quotation marks in the translation poses all the problems you can imagine. Each time we know that so-and-so speaks because he presents himself: I, so-and-so; but he does this in the written text through the witness or the general narrator who is always the receiving party. Here it is, and it is the end:

"I, Yéshoua', I have sent my messenger
to testify to these things for you to the communities.
I am the scion and the seed of Dawid,
the shining star of the morning."

[22:16]

Close quote. The text of the witness resumes:

The breath and the bride (*numphē, sponsa*, the promised)
say [together]: "Come."
Let him who hears say: "Come."
Let him who is thirsty come,
let him who wishes take the water of life, freely.
For all who hear, I testify
to the words of the inspiration of this book:
if anyone adds to them,
Elohim will inflict on him the afflictions described
in this book.

If anyone takes away from the words
of the book of this inspiration,
Elohim will take away his share of the tree of life,
outside the city of the sanctuary described in this book.

The witness to these things says: "Yes, I come quickly."

Amen.

Come, Adôn Yéshoua'.

Dilection of the Adôn Yéshoua' to all . . .

[22:17-20]

The event of this "Come" precedes and calls the event. It would be that starting from which there is any event, the coming, the to-come of the event that cannot be thought under the given category of event. "Come" appeared to me to appeal to the "place" (but here the word *place* becomes too enigmatic), let us say to the place, the time, and to the advent of what in the apocalyptic in general no longer let itself be contained simply in philosophy, metaphysics, onto-eschato-theology, and in all the readings they have proposed of the apocalyptic. I cannot reconstitute what I have attempted in this respect in a milieu of resonances, responses, citations referred, deferred, referring to some texts of Blanchot, Levinas, Heidegger, or others such as one could risk in this today with the last book of Marguerite Duras, *L'Homme assis dans le couloir*. What I had then tried to expose to an analysis that would be, among other things, a spectrography of the tone and of the changing of tone, by definition could not keep itself at the disposal of or confine itself to the measure, to the tempo, of philosophical, pedagogic, or teaching demonstration. First, because "Come," opening the scene, could not become an object, a theme, a representation, or even a citation in the current sense, and subsumable under a category, whether that of the coming or of the event. For the same reason, that bends itself difficultly to the rhetoric required by the present scene. Nonetheless I am trying to extract from this, at the risk of essentially deforming it, the demonstrative function in terms of philosophical discourse. I shall say this then while accelerating the movement. Come from the other already as a response and a citation without past present, "Come" supports no metalinguistic citation, even when it is itself a narrative, a *récit*, already, a recitative and a song whose singularity remains at once absolute and absolutely divisible. "Come" no more lets itself be stopped and examined [*arraisonner*] by an onto-theo-eschatology than by a logic of the event, however new they may be and whatever politics they announce. In this *affirmative* tone, in this *affirmative* tonality, "Come" marks in itself, in oneself, neither a desire nor an order, neither a prayer nor a request [*demande*]. More precisely, the grammatical, linguistic, or semantic categories from which the "Come" would thus be determined are traversed by the "Come." That "Come," I do not know what *it is*, not because I yield to obscurantism, but because the question "what is" belongs to a space (ontology, and from it the learnings of grammar, linguistics, semantics, and so on)

opened by a “come” come from the other. Between all the “come”s, the difference is not grammatical, linguistic, semantic, or pragmatic—and thus permitting us to say: it is an imperative; it is a jussive modality; it is a performative of such and such a type; and so on—the difference is tonal. And I do not know whether a tonal difference finally lends itself to all these questions. Try to say “come”—it can be said in every tone, every tonality. And you will see, you will hear, the other will first hear—perhaps or not. It is a gesture in the word [*parole*], that gesture which does not let itself be recovered [*reprendre*] by the analysis—whether linguistic, semantic, or rhetorical—of a word.

“Come” [*Viens*] beyond being—this comes from beyond being and calls beyond being, engaging, starting perhaps in the place where *Ereignis* (no longer can this be translated by event) and *Enteignis* unfold the movement of appropriation. If “Come” does not try to lead or conduct, if it no doubt is an-agogic, it can always be led back higher than itself, anagogically, toward the conductive violence, toward the authoritarian “duction.” This risk is unavoidable; it threatens the tone as its double. And even in the confession of the seduction: in saying with a certain tone, “I am in the act of seducing you,” I do not suspend, I can even increase, the seductive power. Perhaps Heidegger had not liked this apparently personal conjugation or this declension of the coming. But they are not personal, subjective, or egological. “Come” cannot come from a voice or at least not from a tone signifying “I” or “self,” a so-and-so (male or female) in my “determination.” “Come” does not address itself, does not appeal, to an identity determinable in advance. It is a drift [*une dérive*] underivable from the identity of a determination. “Come” is *only* derivable, absolutely derivable, but only from the other, from nothing that may be an origin or a verifiable, decidable, presentable, appropriable identity, from nothing that may not already be derivable and arrivable [*arrivable*] without “rive” [without the source, spring, *rivus*].

Perhaps you will be tempted to call this the disaster, the catastrophe, the apocalypse. Now here, precisely, is announced—as promise or threat—an apocalypse without apocalypse, an apocalypse without vision, without truth, without revelation, *of dispatches* [*des envois*] (for the “come” is plural in itself, in oneself), of addresses without message and without destination, without sender or decidable addressee, without last judgment, without any other eschatology than the tone of the “Come” itself, its very difference, an apocalypse beyond good and evil. “Come” does not announce this or that apocalypse: already it resounds with a certain tone; it is in itself the apocalypse of the apocalypse; “Come” is apocalyptic.

Our *apocalypse now*: that there is no longer any place for the apocalypse as the collection of evil and good in a *legein* of *alētheia*, nor in a *Geschick* of the dispatch [*l’envoi*], of the *Schicken* in a co-destination that would assure the “come” of the power to give rise [*lieu*] to an event in the certainty of a determination. But then what is someone doing who tells you: I tell you this, I have come to tell you this, there is not, there never has

been, there never will be an apocalypse, the apocalypse deceives, disappoints? There is the apocalypse *without* apocalypse. The word *sans*, *without*, I mention here in Blanchot's so necessary syntax, who often says *X without X*. The *without*, the *sans* marks an internal and external catastrophe of the apocalypse, an overturning of sense [*sens*] that does not merge with the catastrophe announced or described in the apocalyptic writings without however being foreign to them. Here the catastrophe would perhaps be *of* the apocalypse itself, its *pli* and its end, a closure without end, an end without end.

But what reading, what history of reading, what philology, what hermeneutic competence authorizes us to say that this very thing, this catastrophe *of* the apocalypse, is not what describes, in its movement and its very course [*trajet*], in its outline [*tracé*], this or that apocalyptic writing? For example, the one from Patmos that would then be dedicated to going out of itself in this aleatory errance? And what if this outside of the apocalypse was within the apocalypse? What if it was the apocalypse itself, what precisely breaks-in [*faux-effraction*] in the "Come"? What is "(with)in" and what is "outside" a text, here of this text, (with)in and outside these volumes of which we do not know whether they are open or closed? Of this volume written, you remember this, "on the inside and out," it is said at the very end: do not seal this; "Do not seal the words of the inspiration of this book. . . ." Do not seal, that is to say, do not close, but also do not sign.

The end approaches. Now there is no more time to tell the truth on the apocalypse. But what are we doing, you will still insist, to what ends do we want to come when we come to tell you, here now, let's go, "come," the apocalypse, it's finished, that's all, I tell you this, that's what happens, that's what comes.

NOTES

/1/ Translation from the Greek, of course, but with some circumstances [*conditions*] I must specify here, at once because it will be a question of this in the course of the discussion and because what is at stake could be named the *appropriation* of the apocalypse: that is also the theme of this exposition. In sum, Chouraqui's very singular attempt consists, for John's Apocalypse as well as for the New Testament generally, in reconstituting a new Hebrew original, under the Greek text at our disposal, and in *acting as if* he were translating that *phantom* original text about which he supposes, linguistically and culturally, that it had already had to let itself be translated (if that can be said in a largely metaphorical sense) in the so-called original Greek version. "The translation I publish, fed by the contribution of the traditional versions, has the calling to search under the Greek text for its historic context and its Semitic substratum. Such a course [*démarche*] is possible today . . ." [9]. According to Chouraqui, it passes through an "Aramaic or Hebrew retroversion" of the Greek text taken for a "filter." So

the historic translations of the New Testament in Aramaic or Hebrew will have played an indispensable role here, but only a mediating one. "[E]ven if the text is expressed in Greek and, for what is from Jesus, if it is founded on an Aramaic or a Hebrew (Mishnaic, rabbinic, or Quomranic) whose traces have disappeared, the thought of the Evangelists and the Apostles has as ultimate terms of references the word of YHWH, that is, for all of them the Bible. It is the Bible that is recovered in analyzing the Greek text, even if one must preliminarily pass through an Aramaic filter or through that of the translation of the Seventy. . . . Starting from the Greek text, knowing the techniques of the translations from the Hebrew into Greek, and the Hebrew resonances of the Koine, I have tried with each word, with each verse, to touch the Semitic ground in order then to return to the Greek that it was necessary to recover, enriched with a new substance, before passing to the French" [11-12]. Such is the project, it gives as its reference a *double authority*, evoking in turn the "almost unanimity of the exegetes" [11] or "the great ecumenical current" [15], the "ecumenism of sources" [16]. For multiple reasons I shall not directly discuss the authority of these authorities. But when the question concerns language, text, event, and destination, etc., the questions I shall propose in this exposition would not have been able to be unfolded if the foundation of such authorities had to be kept under cover in the unquestionable. A secondary consequence of this precaution: it is not as to an *authorized* translation that I shall often refer to that of André Chouraqui.

/2/ The stake here, this goes without saying, can be very grave, above all in an eschatological or apocalyptic text. Chouraqui has clearly assumed his responsibility as translator; here one can only leave it to him: "The most constant freedom I have taken with the Greek text concerns the verb tenses. Already Joüon had noted this: 'The attention given to the Aramaic substratum is particularly useful for avoiding a too mechanical translation of the Greek tenses.' The Greek verb conceives time above all as a function of a past, a present, and a future; the Hebrew, or the Aramaic, on the contrary, instead of specifying the time of an action, describes its state under two modes: the finished and the unfinished. As Pedersen has seen so well, the Hebrew verb is essentially *intemporal*, that is, *omnitemporal*. I have tried, between two notions of time irreducible to one another, to resort most often to the present which in contemporary French usage is a very supple, very ample, very evocative tense, either in its normal use, or under the form of the historic present or the prophetic present" ("Une nouvelle traduction du Nouveau Testament," Preface to *Un Pacte Neuf*, p. 13).

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