Book Reviews

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Book Reviews


Irene Harvey makes it plain from the outset that this is a philosopher’s book, designed in large part to rescue Derrida from the false characterization of his work put about by literary critics. Her reading will proceed by way of textual explication, but not—most certainly—the kind of exuberant verbal “freeplay” espoused by his admirers in departments of literature. Rather, its approach will be to place Derrida’s writings in a post-Kantian tradition where issues of epistemological critique are still very much on the agenda. Deconstruction may seem to have shelved such questions in its will to break with the prevailing discourse of Western “logocentric” reason. Certainly this has been the reading canvassed by those who want to argue that philosophy is just another kind of writing, with no privileged truth-claims that would set it apart from poetry, criticism or the human sciences at large. Some (like Geoffrey Hartman) have seized upon those elements in Derrida’s work that seem to subvert such merely institutional boundary-lines, and to open up a space of liberated intertextuality where languages endlessly merge or migrate. Then there are philosophers—among them Richard Rorty—who applaud Derrida for much the same reason; for having borne out their own neopragmatist claim that “truth” is what presently counts as such in the ongoing plural discourse of civilized exchange. If philosophy is indeed just a diverse collection of texts with no monopoly on wisdom or truth, then one way of making that point is by showing (with Derrida) that its concepts come down to metaphors in the end, or that its arguments are everywhere subject to a play of rhetorical undecidability. And so it has come about that deconstruction is perceived—especially by philosophers in the “mainstream” analytical tradition—as a mere “literary” bag of tricks with no serious claims on their attention.

Harvey has nothing expressly to say about this current line of easy-going pragmatist rapprochement. She wants a more strenuous reading of Derrida, a more “philosophical” reading, in precisely the sense of that word that Rorty thinks Derrida has played off the field. The following brief excursion into the history of ideas may help to establish a context for her arguments. Deconstruction takes up the main problems bequeathed to modern thought by the Kantian project of enlightened rational critique. That is to say, it has to do with strictly _transcendental_ modes of reasoning, those which raise first-order questions about the limits and conditions of knowledge in general. According to Kant, philosophers had got things wrong by failing to distinguish clearly between ontological and epistemological issues. In short, they had assumed that the proper business of philosophy was somehow to prove that reality conformed to our ideas or representations of it, thereby establishing an exact correspondence between real-world objects and objects of knowledge. When this program didn’t work out—when Hume, for example, was forced to admit the lack of any ultimate logical grounds for our commonplace assumptions and beliefs—then these thinkers either despaired of the attempt (falling
back into various kinds of epistemological scepticism) or elected to save appearances by denying that these problems had any real bearing on everyday, practical experience. Thus Hume famously divided his day between the reassuring pleasures of social intercourse and the lonely, at times almost maddening pursuit of (perhaps non-existent) philosophical grounds. Time, causality, the existence of other minds, natural laws and regularities of sense perception—these all became subject to a corrosive sceptical doubt as soon as one asked, like Hume, what *logically* compelling reasons there were for accepting their absolute and unconditional necessity. And this because Hume took it largely for granted, in the standard empiricist fashion, that any argument addressing these questions had to do so on the basis of direct acquaintance with a world of indubitable sense perceptions which alone could guarantee its claims to truth. But clearly this led to a form of circular reasoning, since the possibility of attaining such knowledge was itself both the premise and the wished-for conclusion of all these arguments. Thus Hume had to recognize the limits placed upon thought by the fact that all its ideas and representations might *not* correspond to anything objectively "there" in external reality. Cause and effect—to take the best-known instance—could always be construed as just a useful fiction, a means of imposing regularity and shape on the otherwise chaotic data of sensory experience. And the same applied to all those other deep-grained habits of thought whose logical validity Hume was unable to establish, despite their persisting (in his own more sanguine moments) as the plainly indispensable basis of commonsense reason.

Kant’s “Copernican revolution” in philosophy consisted of his turning these problems round to ask a whole different set of questions. What must be the nature of our cognitive capacities, given the various intelligible aspects under which experience presents itself to us? How far can philosophy go in providing a foundationalist account of the powers that enable us, as rational subjects, at once to interpret that experience and to occupy a shared world of human understanding? Where exactly had traditional thinking gone wrong in its desire to make reality conform at every point to the projections of speculative reason? By asking these questions Kant thought it possible to break the closed circle of empiricist reasoning and hence provide an answer to last-ditch sceptics like Hume. If ontological issues were indeed beyond reach of *a priori* adjudication—if the very act of raising them created all kinds of insuperable problem and paradox—then philosophy still had its work cut out in beating the bounds of conceptual analysis and showing exactly how our forms of understanding constitute a world of shared objects and experiences. It would now be a matter of examining those various cognitive modes (intuition, understanding, pure and practical reason, aesthetic judgement and so forth) whose powers and limits could be assigned by means of transcendental deduction, or by asking the distinctively Kantian question: what must be the case with our cognitive faculties—our knowledge-constitutive categories—for the world to make sense for us in the way it does?

Kant’s three *Critiques* were devoted to expounding this program in all its intricate ramifications. The tripartite division served, broadly speaking, as a means of respecting the boundaries between pure reason (epistemology), practical reason (ethics) and judgement (aesthetic understanding). But these
faculties were not to be conceived as so many separate or self-enclosed realms of knowledge. Rather, they existed in a state of complex reciprocal determination, so that—for instance—the link between sensory intuition and concepts of the pure understanding could only be grasped by way of an appeal to aesthetics, which thus came to play a crucial mediating role far beyond its usual confinement to matters of artistic sensibility and taste. Practical reason was likewise linked to both pure reason and aesthetic judgement through a network of articulated contrasts and dependences which precluded the reduction of Kant's thinking to a species of typecast faculty-psychology. To follow the Critiques in all their detailed process of argument was also to grasp the central doctrine of Kantian enlightenment: that philosophy can only arrive at mature self-knowledge through the exercise of a reason whose nature is revealed in the act of independent critical reflection. And this doctrine applies equally to the realms of religious and political belief, where it is—Kant argues—the rightful prerogative of each individual to criticize existing value-systems and to grant or withhold rational assent according to the dictates of conscience. If this condition fails to obtain—if the subject passively consents to laws which brook no kind of reasoned critique—then state and individual alike have forfeited their claim to membership of a genuine participant democracy. Hence the strong ties between Kantian philosophy on its "technical" side and the politics of enlightened or liberal-progressive thought.

These themes are prominent in Derrida's recent essays, especially his writings on the role of philosophy in relation to the state and teaching institutions. Here he addresses the Kantian "principle of reason" from a deconstructive standpoint which questions its juridical truth-claims, and which shows up the various rhetorical strategies that work to maintain the appearance of pure, "disinterested" reason. Yet Derrida also declares more than once that there is simply no escaping the demands laid down by this "lucid vigil" of enlightened critique. Any project which aims to break altogether with the Kantian heritage—as with certain forms of current postmodern or pragmatist thinking—effectively loses all critical force and reduces to a species of passive conformist ideology. Such (for instance) would be Rorty's attempt to enlist deconstruction in the pragmatist cause of demonstrating once and for all that philosophy is just another "kind of writing" with no special claim to authority or truth. However problematical Kant's appeal to the tribunal of disinterested reason, still there is a need to think those problems through with a sense of their rigorous necessity and lasting pertinence.

Now Harvey is not concerned—explicitly at least—with these political dimensions of Derrida's work. Nor is she out to vindicate the Kantian enlightenment tradition as against its latter-day pragmatist detractors. Her interest focuses squarely on the ways in which deconstruction relates to Kant's epistemological concerns and (more specifically) his use of a priori or transcendental-deductive forms of argument. Here she finds a number of detailed correspondences which justify her assertion that Derrida belongs within this Kantian tradition, despite his having pressed its claims to the point where they open onto strictly unthinkable problems in the nature of their own undertaking. Derrida begins, in a sense, where Kant leaves off: with the question of what grounds can finally be offered for the principle of reason itself. In
several notoriously obscure passages Kant declined to address this question or referred it back to the supposed self-evidence of a knowledge beyond reach of further explanation. It was here precisely—at the crucial stage of joining up “sensible intuitions” with “concepts of the pure understanding”—that aesthetics came to occupy its mediating role. But there seems no way that Kant can possibly prove the existence of a preordained or necessary fit between these two orders of cognition. Quite simply, “the answer must be: It (the totality of rules that we call nature) is only possible by means of the constitution of our understanding, according to which all the above representations of the sensibility are necessarily referred to a consciousness and by the particular way in which we think, namely by rules” (cited by Harvey, p. 19).

In short, the correspondence has to be assumed—effectively taken on trust—for experience to make any kind of intelligible sense. So Kant is obliged to posit this grounding principle as a matter of a priori truth, something known without question at a level of awareness that requires no further justification. Hence his recourse to a grounding “constitution” and to “rules” which must be the precondition of all knowledge whatsoever. “Although what they are and precisely how many there are can be precisely determined, why they are just these and not others and from whence they come cannot be known” (Kant, cited by Harvey, p. 18).

It is at this stage that Derrida’s critique draws out the unself-acknowledged problems and antinomies of Kantian reason. It does so, not by abandoning the forms of rational argument, but rather by pressing beyond their sticking-point in Kant to ask what might be their ultimate justification. For Derrida, as Harvey reads him, this quest for first principles must always lead on to a moment of aporia, or insurmountable paradox, where thought comes up against the non-availability of any such legitimizing grounds. But their absence cannot be taken for a sign (as Rorty would have it) that philosophy took a wrong turning with Kant when it became obsessed with all those pointless epistemological puzzles. What is required is a more rigorous attention to precisely the passages where Kant had to stipulate that no further questions were in order. The upshot may indeed be to shake the foundations of Kantian thinking, since these passages are so many cornerstones-defective cornerstones, as it seems—in the edifice of the three Critiques. But to deconstruct a set of philosophical assumptions is not to discredit or simply reject the whole enterprise of which they form a constitutive part. Rather it is to ask (in distinctly Kantian vein) what might be the basic presuppositions that make such an enterprise possible, but whose presence is necessarily concealed or obscured by the desire that its logic should appear self-evident.

Harvey spells out this relationship between Derrida and Kant in a sentence which—as with much of her writing—one has to read at least twice over before the sense comes clear: ‘That which leads Kant to rely on the notion of constitution as such, which cannot be known further, since in the process we would always necessarily rely on that same ‘object of investigation’, is that which Derrida aims to reveal the conditions of possibility of and in turn, necessarily, the conditions of the—more rigorously speaking—impossibility of” (p. 19). Despite its lamentable awkwardness of style this passage articulates the central points of Harvey’s argument. Derrida provides the most rigorous, indeed the most authentically Kantian reading of Kant precisely through his
willingness to problematize the grounds of reason, truth and knowledge. Deconstruction refuses to rest content with the notion of an end-point to critical inquiry, a stage at which thinking simply has to accept the self-evidence of its own rational laws. Kant's appeal to "a priori forms of intuition" thus appears a kind of stopgap measure and one, furthermore, that avoids the more radical implications of his own thinking. It is in the nature of transcendental arguments to push back the process of inquiry from stage to stage and ask at every point what grounds exist for the claim to know truly what we think we know. And it is the virtue of Derrida's reading to raise this question to the highest point of visibility, to demand a reason for reason itself, without resorting to premature forms of intuitive self-evidence or circular argument.

This is not to say—far from it—that Derrida succeeds in breaking altogether with "Western metaphysics" or the Kantian desire for some terminal point to the giving of reasons for reason. In fact deconstruction is always, inescapably bound up with that same ubiquitous system of concepts and categories which it claims to reveal in the texts of 'logocentric' thinkers from Plato to Saussure. Thus Harvey observes that Derrida's arguments depend at every point on the conceptual resources of an age-old philosophical tradition which effectively determines the form and possibility of reasoned argument in general. They presuppose (among other things) the "if . . . then" structure of deductive or syllogistic reasoning; the existence of criteria for judging the validity of (more or less rigorous) deconstructive readings; and the use of terms like "origin," "proper," "legitimate," "necessary" and so forth, terms which—on a simplified view of deconstruction—should have no place in Derrida's vocabulary. But this is to misunderstand the very nature of his critical engagement with the concepts that organize philosophic discourse. What Derrida seeks to bring out is the deep and unavoidable complicity between Western metaphysics and the various efforts—Kant's and his own included—to think the limits of that same tradition. As Harvey writes, "any attempt to understand Derrida's work is a movement toward its reappropriation by metaphysics, and thereby a movement, paradoxically, toward the former's recognition and thus destruction" (p. 124). "Destruction" not in the sense that metaphysics would henceforth be relegated to the history of outworn or ruined ideas, its truth-claims shown up once and for all as so many metaphors or fictions masquerading as genuine concepts. What is destroyed is the assurance that those concepts must be the end-point of rational inquiry; that any thinking so rash as to question their ultimate validity will lose itself (as Kant believed) in a realm of unanchored speculative reason where paradoxes loom at every turn. For Derrida, these problems cannot be outfaced by laying down laws for the proper, self-regulating exercise of reason. Hence his very different way of posing the transcendental question: namely, by asking what conditions of impossibility mark out the limits of Kantian conceptual critique.

Writing, supplement, trace, différence—these are some of the terms that Derrida uses in order to unsettle the presumed deep foundations of philosophic discourse. But he does so always in the knowledge that there is no getting "beyond" metaphysics, no language that would not be in some sense complicit with the language it seeks to deconstruct. And by the same token Derrida can argue that deconstruction is always already at work in those cardinal texts of Western tradition that invest most heavily in a logocentric
scheme of values. On the one hand these thinkers establish a series of loaded binary distinctions between speech and writing, presence and absence, authentic living memory and mere mechanical recollection. But on the other—if one reads more attentively, with an eye to certain symptomatic blindspots and evasions—their arguments turn out to depend at crucial points on the supposedly derivative or secondary term. In each case there operates a perverse double logic which constrains these writers not to mean what they say or effectively, consistently say what they mean.

Thus Plato in the *Phaedrus* argues that writing is a "poison," a bad substitute for the inward, authentic knowledge that can only be gained through the living communion of souls made possible by spoken language. But the Greek work for "poison" (pharmakon) can also signify "remedy," "medicine" or "cure," an ambivalence which, according to Derrida, marks the very logic or structural economy of Plato's dialogue. In Rousseau likewise, the opposition between speech and writing goes along with that between nature and culture, the second term in each case held to represent a falling-away from original innocence and grace into a state of unnatural dependence on various kinds of civilized artifice. Yet here also the "dangerous supplement" of writing comes to occupy a pivotal role in Rousseau's reflections on the origin of language, on social evolution, ethics, politics and other related themes. Indeed Rousseau is more than once forced to admit that his own life-history is more real to him when he subsequently writes or narrates it, in texts like the *Confessions*, than it had been at the time when his experiences were actually taking place. He puts this down to the combined bad influence of solitary daydreams, of auto-erotic fantasy and the writer's habit of living in a world remote from present (natural) forms of spontaneous human intercourse. But what these apologies conceal, according to Derrida, is that curious "logic of supplementarity" which operates everywhere in Rousseau's text and effectively subverts the metaphysics of presence vested in the notion of authentic, living speech. However strong his desire to prove otherwise, Rousseau inadvertently sets this logic in train through a whole series of covert metaphors and narrative ploys.

With Husserl and Saussure we reach the two modern thinkers most germane to the project of deconstruction. Husserlian phenomenology renews the attempt—the perennial attempt, since Descartes and Kant—to provide indubitable grounds or foundations for the exercise of philosophic reason. It does so by means of a "transcendental reduction," a Cartesian mode of disciplined, abstemious inquiry which suspends all reliance on the "natural" or commonsense attitude in order to isolate the elementary structures of thought and perception. The two aspects of this program which chiefly interest Derrida have to do with Husserl's theory of language and his phenomenology of time-consciousness. In each case Husserl seeks to distinguish a moment of authentic self-presence, the *Jetztzeit* of punctual perception and plenary sense, from those other modalities of knowledge which involve memory, anticipation or traces of an absent experience. Thus time and language alike bear witness to the primacy of that which reveals itself directly to a consciousness intent upon "eidetic inspection," or the bringing-to-light of structures implicit in the act of subjective understanding. The logic of temporality can only be grasped by reference to a "now" where the subject is
presently, knowingly located and from which point the receding horizons of past and future are experienced as so many forms of strictly derivative representation. And in the case of language, according to Husserl, one has to keep a similar distinction in mind, namely that between "expressive" and "indicative" signs. These terms signify on the one hand a language authentically possessed of self-present meaning and intent, on the other a merely token or conventional usage that deprives words of their expressive force and reduces them to so many lifeless, arbitrary marks. Husserl is concerned with language only in so far as it reveals the intentional character—the signs of animating purpose and sense—manifest in linguistic forms. So it has to lay down a firm distinction between "expressive" and "indicative" signs, the latter being counted merely parasitical upon language in its natural, authentic state.

But on closer examination it appears that Husserl is unable to maintain this clear-cut separation of realms. For it is a necessary fact about language, a "condition of possibility" in the Kantian sense, that it can only be perceived as language in so far as it belongs to a system of articulate terms and relationships which must always precede the individual act of utterance. Such of course is the basis of modern structural linguistics, as theorized by Saussure: the principle that meaning consists in the differences, the distributive economy of sound and sense, rather than depending on a one-to-one relation between signifier and signified. But this creates problems for the Husserlian project, since language in its structural or differential aspect necessarily exceeds the conscious grasp of even the best-trained phenomenological observer. Speech-acts are always already caught up in a network of preexistent codes and conventions which enables them to signify, to work for all practical purposes, regardless of the speaker's avowed intentions. And the same kind of problem arises with Husserl's attempt to account for the modalities of time-consciousness from the standpoint of a transcendental ego which can only exist in the momentary grasp of a pure, self-present understanding. For there is simply no conceiving of time present except in terms of a layered, differential temporality where what is happening now is defined by contrast with what has just happened and what is about to take place. Husserl distinguishes the long-term aspects of memory and anticipation from those other, more immediate "retentions" and "protentions" which exist at every point in the stream of consciousness and compose (so to speak) a moving pocket of authentic temporal awareness. But this is to imply, against the whole drift of his manifest intentions, that presence is a purely differential concept, unthinkable outside the structural economy of a time that can nowhere be found to coincide with the punctual self-presence of a transcendental ego.

So Derrida mounts his critique of Husserl very largely on the basis of Saussurian structural linguistics. But when he directs his attention to Saussure (in *Of Grammatology*), that program turns out to have logocentric blindspots of its own, passages where the argument self-deconstructs into chains of contradictory assertion. Thus Saussure recommends that linguistics should concern itself as far as possible with spoken language; that writing should be treated as a merely derivative or supplementary system of signs, and one moreover that often works mischief with the primary medium of speech, since it introduces all manner of corrupting influence through its use of arbitrary spelling conventions, anomalies which can then feed back into speech by a kind of un-
natural contagion. In this respect Saussure is simply repeating the standard, prejudicial view of writing which Derrida finds everywhere at work in the Western philosophical tradition. But with Saussure that prejudice is all the more visible for the fact that he conceives of language as a differential system of relationships, marks and traces; a system whose most obvious analogue is precisely that of writing. Like Rousseau and Husserl, he often has recourse to graphematic models and metaphors at those crucial points where his argument comes up against its own explanatory limits. How can language be conceived or represented as a structural economy "without positive terms," a network of signifying elements whose meaning is constituted wholly in the play of differences among and between them? Only by resisting the temptation to reify the idea of "difference" itself, which would merely be to replace one kind of positivity with another. But this means that writing, not speech, must be the privileged model for a general linguistics, since writing most perfectly exemplifies the notion of a system of differential marks and traces irreducible to self-present sense. What Saussure quite explicitly means to say is at odds with what his argument compels him to mean: namely, that a certain kind of writing engenders the very possibility of systematic thought about the nature and workings of language.

Now Derrida is not denying the validity, on their own terms, of Husserl's or Saussure's particular projects. A passage from Grammatology (cited by Harvey) makes the point clearly enough. "I think Saussure's reasons are good," Derrida writes. "I do not question, on the level on which he says it, the truth of what Saussure says . . . I would rather announce the limits and the presuppositions of what seems here to be self-evident and what seems to me to retain the character and validity of evidence." And even more strikingly, with regard to Husserl: "this [Derrida's reading in Speech and Phenomena] does not place in question the apodicticity of the phenomenological-transcendental description, and does not disrupt the founding value of presence." What Derrida sets out to reveal is the deep-laid structure of assumptions that cannot expressly be acknowledged as such by Husserl or Saussure if their arguments are to claim unconditional validity. But these are not "false premises" in the sense that thinking could ultimately do without them or find some better, alternative basis for the conduct of rational critique. If they are (as Derrida says at various points) "unfounded," "illegitimate" or strictly de jure—as opposed to the de facto evidence of what these thinkers actually wrote—it is not owing to some corrigible weakness in Husserl's or Saussure's reasoning. Rather it is the case that they serve necessarily as grounding presuppositions, but still lead on to paradoxical results when one asks (like Derrida) what reasons exist for accepting their ultimate truth. As Harvey says: "At the same instant that Derrida reveals the contradiction between the 'declared' and the 'described' aspects of both Husserl's and Saussure's projects respectively, he insists that these contradictions are irreducible and therefore a necessity . . . indeed, it is toward the condition of this necessity that he turns with his deconstructive project" (p. 78). This is why Harvey sees Derrida (rightly) as having not so much broken with the Kantian tradition of epistemological critique as drawn out its furthest, most unsettling implications. Again, her reading is thoroughly remote from the Rortyan-pragmatist or postmodern view that would count such interests merely a sign of hung-over attachment to outworn ways of thinking.
In fact Harvey goes yet further with this project of seeking out instructive parallels between Derrida and Kant. She focuses again on those passages in the first *Critique* where Kant draws limits to the exercise of pure reason and describes some of the bad results that follow when thought runs free in speculative regions of its own airy devising. This is why concepts must always be matched up with sensible intuitions, or reason held in check by a due regard for the certitudes of commonsense experience. Otherwise thinking will be tempted to abandon the firm ground of its own inherent "constitution" and then to indulge in all kinds of delusive metaphysical quest. Such are the "antinomies of pure reason"—the paradoxes beyond reach of any arbitrating judgement—that Kant puts forward as cautionary instances of what must happen when reason gets out of hand. But there is also a sense of insecurity betrayed by the strength of this desire to save philosophy from the toils of metaphysical abstraction. It comes out clearly in Kant's descriptions of the discipline required to preserve and enforce this self-denying ordinance of method. As Harvey notes, "the 'transgressions' Reason is given to can only be explained as 'aberrations,' 'illusions,' fictive flights of fantasy, the 'pure beings of the Understanding' which necessarily 'arise'—unfounded in experience—which cannot therefore be proven to be either true or false . . . they are the 'troublesome' aspects which we must 'struggle against by scientific instruction yet with much difficulty'" (p. 19). This is why, as Kant argues, metaphysics is "the favourite child of Reason," providing all manner of tempting opportunity for thought to take wing in the heaven of pure concepts. Only by an effort of strenuous self-discipline—by obeying the maxim "no concepts without intuitions"—can philosophy be sure to avoid these perils.

Deconstruction should be seen (Harvey suggests) as the project which follows from suspending that maxim, but suspending it only in order to grasp its absolute necessity for the purposes of Kantian critique. Nor can deconstruction itself escape that necessity, even at the point of raising questions which appear to go beyond the ground-rules established by Kant. It is here, in his attempt to think the limits of philosophy, that Derrida introduces the term *differance* as a means of resisting the drive toward premature system and method. It first comes to light in his reading of Husserl, where Derrida is concerned with the paradoxes engendered by any such attempt to reduce language or representation to a self-present order of intelligible sense. *Differance* is not so much a "concept" as a name for whatever eludes and baffles the project of Husserlian enquiry. It is a neologism, untranslatable into English, whose meaning is allowed to oscillate (as it were) between the two French words signifying "difference" and "deferral." It thus brings together the Saussurian claim (that language is a structure of differences, irreducible to any straightforward logic of identity) with the radical implications of Husserl on the nature of time-consciousness (that the "present" is a moment endlessly deferred through the non-self-identical nature of temporal experience). And of course the anomalous spelling of "différance" registers only in its written form, since French pronunciation is unable to distinguish an "á" from an "é" in the word's last syllable. So Derrida's purpose in adopting this strange portmanteau form is to reinforce the link between writing (or graphic representation) and everything that works to complicate the notion of speech as ideal self-presence.
"The economy of differance" is therefore in some sense an untranscendable horizon for any thinking that would press further along the path of enquiry opened by Kant and Husserl. It is a "general" as opposed to a "restricted" economy,\textsuperscript{11} one that renounces the assurances of concept and system, and thereby willingly exposes itself to the dislocating forces which Kant so feared. It can only be thought of in structural terms, in the same way that Saussure conceived the economy of language-as-difference. Yet it also creates real problems for the structuralist paradigm, since (as Derrida writes) "differences are the effects of transformations and from this point of view the theme of differance is incompatible with the static, synchronic, ahistoric motif of the concept of structure." Saussurian linguistics and its various latter-day offshoots—the so-called structuralist "sciences of man"—are at a certain level called to account by this deconstructive critique. But there is no question here of moving decisively beyond that level in order to expose its limited grasp and hence facilitate the passage to a better, more adequate theory. Even if, as Harvey says, "the notion of structure as such does not exist for Derrida," still he is unable to attach any sense to the term differance without calling upon structural metaphors or analogues. In short, "differance produces what it forbids, makes possible the very thing that it makes impossible" (p. 202). And in this respect it brings out exactly the pattern of mutual interrogative exchange that Harvey finds everywhere at work in the relationship between Derrida and Kant. Deconstruction no more claims to supercede structuralism than it thinks to invalidate the project of Kantian critique. What it does in each case is establish precisely the limits (or conditions of intelligibility) that mark out a given conceptual terrain. And this means acknowledging the extent to which its own operative terms and strategies necessarily partake of a "restricted economy," a given set of enabling philosophical assumptions.

Harvey's book is welcome for several connected reasons. It marks a definite stage of progress beyond the "literary" reception of Derrida's work, a reception that has consistently ignored or misconstrued its philosophical implications. Among literary critics the term differance is mostly taken as a licence for deconstructive "freeplay," a convenient shorthand for the notion that meaning is always, irreducibly indeterminate, and that texts can therefore be subjected to any number of novel interpretations. Harvey's reading of Derrida alongside Kant should help to turn back this damaging misapprehension. It is also (as I have argued) a timely corrective to the fashionable pragmatist view which sees nothing but multiplied error and delusion in the quest for philosophical reasons and grounds. At last the signs are that Derrida is receiving the kind of sustained analytical attention that his work absolutely demands. Of other recent studies, two stand out in this regard: Rodolphe Gasché's The Tain of the Mirror (specifically on Derrida's relation to Hegel)\textsuperscript{12} and John Llewelyn's Derrida on the Threshold of Sense (placing him within the broad context of modern Continental philosophy).\textsuperscript{13} It is a pity that Harvey's prose so often manifests an indifference not only to the niceties of English style but to straightforward requirements of grammatical sense. Still her book deserves careful reading, most of all by those philosophers as yet unprepared to take serious account of Derrida's work.

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Notes


Theodore Leinwand’s *The City Staged* deals with the citizen comedies of the first decade of James I’s rule. Leinwand argues for a “dialectical” (p. 15) and “mutually constituting” (p. 6) relationship between city comedy and urban life, contending that “Londoners borrowed conventional dramatic types to characterize contemporary merchants, and that playwrights availed themselves of familiar stereotypes to shape their play merchants” (p. 5). These theatrical and social stereotypes are neither realistically referential nor essentially moralistic, in Leinwand’s view. Nor do they derive from mere literary conventions. Instead, they serve an ideological function, confirming the social order and its hierarchical structure. Leinwand regards drama as a collective enterprise, and, citing Jeffrey Sammons’ *Literary Sociology and Practical Criticism*, he contends that all literature is, “in some measure, the joint production
of author and public” (p. 14). At the same time, he sees a need to comprehend the historical circumstances of such collective productions: “the sharing is never universal, the typifications are always bound to desire, and one’s idea of an ordered life is rarely disinterested” (p. 4). In its emphasis on the links between social function and artistic form, *The City Staged* provides a useful corrective to earlier, more strictly literary studies of Jacobean comedy. Leinwand also offers perceptive readings of individual plays. Nevertheless, the book suffers from a rather vague and disembodied concept of the function served by these typifications because it never clearly locates or defines these interests and desires.

The problem begins with Leinwand’s oddly ahistorical chapter on “The Merchant Citizen in History.” In his introduction, he complains about “how seldom drama criticism is informed by the historical account” (p. 20). Proposing to correct this omission and answer “such questions as Why now?, and, Why this way?” Leinwand claims that “we may begin to account for the plots and character types in city comedy by locating the entire genre within the discussions and disagreements Londoners were having about the way they perceived their city and those who populated it” (p. 20). These controversies are briefly indicated by a summary of five tracts on commerce including William Scott’s audacious defense of *sancta avaritia* in his *Essay of Drapery* (1635). Leinwand uses Scott’s essay and two others written fifteen to twenty years later than the plays as evidence of the complex attitudes inspired by the merchant-citizen. He is apparently oblivious to the anachronism. Several influential writers, including Hobbes, displayed increasing respect for bourgeois self-interest and declining esteem for aristocratic honor during the 1630s; Leo Strauss discusses their ideological shift in his study of Hobbes’ political thought. For all Leinwand’s urgency about the need for a more rigorous historicism, his own efforts succumb here and elsewhere to a kind of free-floating abstraction.

The same confusing vagueness besets Leinwand’s discussion of the plays and their aims. He proclaims that “Where social change is occurring at an excited pace, the demand for role definition will be high” (p. 39). Hence, the need for stereotypes and their sharp distinctions between classes and genders. The stock characters of city comedy—the greedy merchant, the gentleman-gallant, and the widows, wives, maids, and prostitutes all serve this general need. Yet, for some reason, the plays also challenge “the tyranny of stereotyping” (p. 7). The origins and motives of this challenge remain unclear. In Leinwand’s rather patronizing view, “Playwrights often function as unconscious conduits for sentiments too ‘obvious’ to be noticed explicitly by them or their contemporaries” (p. 11), but their plays constitute what Catherine Belsey calls “interrogative texts” permitting spectators “to construct from within the text a critique of ideology” (p. 18). The plays’ spectators are far more privileged, capable of “transcendence” (p. 6) and “an increased sensitivity to the ways others see themselves” (p. 7), but they must have suspended their otherwise pressing “demand for role definition” during performances. Even so, it is not clear from Leinwand’s rather sketchy historical description how this “increased sensitivity” would fulfill the social needs of the average London playgoer in the first decade of James’ rule. These flaccid generalizations betray the book’s rather tenuous connection to the history of the period.
Yet, despite these shortcomings, Leinwand’s analyses of the plays are generally intelligent and persuasive, and the political implications of his thesis are suggestive. The latter simply require more development and explicit historical support. In Leinwand’s view, city comedy has it both ways in its treatment of social stereotypes. The Dutch Courtesan, for example, “arouses the spectator’s self-consciousness to the extent that it can be read not only as a conservative reaffirmation of traditional values but also as a progressive challenge to them” (p. 63). Indeed, this is the “unsteady critical project” of all these plays: “The stereotype that is exploited is also the stereotype that is tentatively examined” (p. 186). For all its satiric wit and belligerence, city comedy is a deeply conservative genre, according to Leinwand. Amidst its chaotic intrigue, an essentially aristocratic and patriarchal sense of self and social value persists. Leinwand acknowledges the triumph of the traditional prejudices in city comedy. Merchants are all fixed “in predetermined social roles” (p. 79). Even in the most outrageous and unsettling depictions of women such as The Roaring Girl, “the protest against gender-determined roles is limited” (p. 164). The genre depends upon and vindicates the self-assured if rather vacuous gentleman (p. 119). Leinwand argues somewhat less convincingly that “we must not be fooled by the prevalence of these popular codes: dividing stage and audience, they call attention to themselves, and, potentially, to their shortcomings or contradictoriness” (p. 80). His argument becomes more doubtful when he proposes some fairly opaque ways of conveying this ironic message. He speculates that in Michaelmas Term, “the choristers acted the convention into high relief,” so that from “this new distance the audience would have had a chance to consider its assumptions” (p. 56). In discussing Epicoene, he speaks more confidently and persuasively of the critical intelligence behind that play, showing how Jonson exposes the gallant’s unreliable heroism (p. 130). Jacobean city comedy depicts varied aspects of the crisis of the aristocracy and the rise of an urban merchant class. Professor Leinwand rightly argues for manifold links between these plays and London society. To do full justice to these links and to answer the question, Why now?, his description of the decade’s history would have to be far more substantial and detailed. Nevertheless, Leinwand’s discussion of the plays is nearly always provocative and illuminating.

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Critical anthologies provide an interesting index of literary criticism’s changing assumptions. In 1960, M. H. Abrams edited English Romantic Poets which, as the title indicated, was poet-centered, organized around the problems of interpreting the work of the six major poets. The introductory section, “The Romantic Period,” reflected the then dominant concerns of defining Romanticism (Lovejoy) and accommodating the Romantic poetry to the New Critical procedures of close reading (Wimsatt on nature imagery and
Abrams on the correspondent breeze metaphor). Ten years later, Harold Bloom’s anthology is entitled *Romanticism and Consciousness*, and only one of its four parts is organized around the problems of interpreting the six poets. The other three parts all have “Nature” in their subtitles, thereby imposing the Bloomian problematic—Nature versus Consciousness (or Imagination)—on the whole volume, even though many of the individual essays are well outside that interpretive paradigm. Nevertheless, despite the lingering presence of the Abrams-oriented criticism, the Bloom volume’s criticism is well outside the New Criticism’s frames of reference. Phenomenology (more or less) provides the intellectual terms by which Romanticism is written about. Fourteen years later Arden Reed’s anthology is entitled *Romanticism and Language*, thus marking another stage in Romanticist criticism. Reed’s anthology lacks the institutional authority of the previous two anthologies—the Abrams and Bloom anthologies were virtually required texts in university Romantics courses—not because the 1984 anthology is of lesser quality but because in Romanticist studies there is no longer anything close to a critical consensus which would permit a single-volume anthology to be as representative as the 1960 and 1970 volumes actually were. *Romanticism and History* and *Romanticism and Women* are the two most obvious kinds of hypothetical anthologies whose concerns could not be fit within the rubric of *Romanticism and Language*, but without difficulty one could multiply the *Romanticism and ______’s* to reflect the fractured situation of contemporary criticism.

It is not as though there were intellectual uniformity in the Abrams and Bloom anthologies—hardly—but the authors shared many assumptions which never entered into debate: there were six great Romantic poets (Shelley’s greatness needed a little defending and Byron’s Romanticism needed clarifying, but the canon was well established); the critical task was to “know” the Romantics, understand the meaning of their writings, and even if there were diverse ways of knowing, the enterprise itself was not questioned because it was assumed a poem, a corpus of poetry, a poet’s oeuvre, could be coherently described. That three of the four parts in Bloom’s anthology were not devoted to the poets themselves indicates the pressures which the consensus was undergoing, that a “rethinking” of assumptions was being undertaken. Indeed, the 1970s was the period in which the institution of literary studies lost its consensus in a debate over fundamental assumptions. By now literary criticism resembles a political party which has split into numerous factions which are beginning to weary of fighting each other; the factions are settling into complacency, consolidating their gains, and jockeying for power. Each faction has enough consensus to issue a coherent anthology of essays on a literary topic, but the institution no longer speaks with one voice. A recent anthology (1986), *Romanticism and Contemporary Criticism*, edited by Morris Eaves and Michael Fischer for Cornell University Press, is interesting in this context because the justification for bringing together six very different critics is not Romanticism but contemporary criticism: “English Romanticism is important to contemporary literary theory” (p. 9). Romanticism, then, is a point of departure, an occasion to clarify theoretical differences and not to ask collectively what Romantic poems “mean.”

*Romanticism and Language* is of course an encoded title, really meaning *Romanticism and Deconstruction*—just as *Romanticism and History* would
probably signify Marxist approaches and Romanticism and Women feminist approaches. It is part of a power struggle at the level of discourse to appropriate a key word like language, history, women, ideology, reading, and so on in such a way that it comes to signify a critical approach and not something more general and multivalent. I find, therefore, Arden Reed's statement in the "Preface" that the essays in this volume "were written more in a spirit of opening up fields of inquiry than in the expectation of closing them off" (p. 9) a little disingenuous. Of the ten essays, only one is really outside the deconstructionist approach (Leslie Brisman's Bloomian essay on Swinburne as a Shelleyan), and another—Richard Macksey's essay on "To Autumn"—is not so much outside of deconstruction as within an older structure of feeling. Only if Reed meant opening up possibilities within the deconstructionist problematic was he being accurate. In Reed's "Introduction" he articulates clearly the volume's methodological concerns, explaining that the essays "are concerned with language in a more radical way [than previous criticism], in that they seek to displace our understanding of literature as a representational art form in order to characterize the maneuverings and interferences of the text and so raise questions about the texture of Romantic literature, about its intertextual relations, and about the irreducibility of the signs in which Romantic thought is encoded" (p. 14). Deconstruction is so useful because it "offers a way to interrogate the ideologies by which earlier critics had underwritten Romanticism while still allowing for, if not encouraging, a sustained reading of what literature" (p. 17). The rhetoric here, which is not peculiar to Reed, is strikingly reminiscent of the anti-metaphysical pronouncements of New Criticism which asserted a devotion to the text itself, its irreducible texture, and sustained close readings. This anthology's strength, however, is similar to that of the best New Critical work: it lies not in its ideology critique but in its detailed and interesting readings of individual texts.

This is a fine collection of essays on Romantic poetry, the metaphysics of poetic language and representation, and the idea of Romanticism. There is not a weak essay in the book: every one is carefully written, thoughtful, innovative, and theoretically sophisticated. Most of the essays provide close readings not usually of an entire text as such but of a part which is then interpreted in ways to suggest the whole. Cynthia Chase, to take a typical example, interrogates a section of Rousseau's Sixth Promenade and a short section from The Prelude, Book VII, to develop various ideas on invisibility, writing, intertextuality, and the representation of the self. "The Ring of Gyges and the Coat of Darkness: Reading Rousseau with Wordsworth" is an impressive interpretive performance, as it ranges from Rousseau to Plato to Wordsworth to Milton to Shelley, as it cites ideas from de Man and other literary theorists. It is not of course a flaw in the essay that one has a difficult time keeping the discrete threads of the intertextual tapestry separate because it is both taken for granted and explicitly argued that writing is textuality, not literary works by authors. As Romantic authors try to embed an "individuality" in their writing to provide guidelines by which a reader could stabilize the multivalence of meaning by reference to authorial intention, they merely illustrate the futility of this enterprise. Rather, it is the gap between intention and meaning that Chase—and most of the other critics in the anthology—takes as the primary point of departure. The Romantics, according to this vol-
volume, try to bewitch and enchant us with their good intentions and sincerity; however, deconstructive interpretation can liberate us from the illusions of Romanticism.

I will briefly summarize the essays before returning to the anthology's emancipatory claims. Susan Wolfson's "The Language of Interpretation in Romantic Poetry" deals with Coleridge's *Rime of the Ancient Mariner*, Wordsworth's "The Thorn," Keats's "La Belle Dame Sans Merci," and "Ode on a Grecian Urn." The interpretive ambiguities of each poem, which have long been argued over, become allegories of each poem's unreadability and resistance to interpretation. Cynthia Chase's essay, which I have already mentioned, treats Rousseau's fantasy of becoming magically invisible and Wordsworth's depiction of how Jack the Giant-killer is represented as "invisible" at the Sadler's Wells theatre in such a way that, by means of a series of intertextual connections, an allegory emerges about writing, the impossibility of controlling an intended representation of "voice." Timothy Bahti's "Wordsworth's Rhetorical Theft" interprets the "theft" passages in *The Prelude* as allegorical enactments of the self's futile attempts to acquire a stable identity by means of appropriating what does not belong to the self; similarly, the "theft" figure operates as an allegory for metaphor's impossible quest to represent one object by means of another. Reeve Parker's "Oh Could You Hear His Voice!" starts with Wordsworth's "The Borderers," which is read as a drama of tale-telling determining character. Similarly, reversing what would have been the ordinary emphasis in biographical criticism, Parker illustrates how Coleridge and Wordsworth create themselves, each other and their literary works by means of intertextual revision and citation. Jerome Christiansen's "The Mind at Ocean" investigates in the same manner as his book, *Coleridge's Blessed Machine of Language* (1981), some of the figurative logic in Coleridge's writing. Arden Reed's "The Mariner Rimed" draws out in a similar way the interplay between figures, principally "rhyme" and "rime," words and nature, concluding that Coleridge's poem subverts the ideology "it is always taken to exemplify" (p. 201). Frances Ferguson in "Shelley's *Mont Blanc*" comes up with the wittiest line in the anthology when she describes Shelley by the end of the poem as "still looking for a mountain who will understand him" (p. 211). She reads "Mont Blanc" as a poem which controls nature's destructiveness by asserting continually a "complementarity" between mind and nature. This essay is the briefest, the most clearly written, and one of the interpretations in the anthology whose reading of a Romantic text is fairly close to the way it has been read traditionally. Mary Jacobus, "The Art of Managing Books," uses *The Prelude's* representations of "books" as a focus for Wordsworth's attempt to naturalize language and stabilize a coherent self; however, this enterprise is undermined by "the insubstantiality inherent in all writing" and by the fact that "the language of books can only be the history of itself" (p. 246). As Derrida wrote, there is nothing outside the text. Leslie Brisman's essay on Swinburne as a Shelleyan is a passionately argued Bloomian interpretation, very unlike any of the other essays. Richard Macksey's interpretation of Keats's "To Autumn" portrays the poem as a pivotal text enacting a passage from romantic to post-Romantic assumptions concerning transcendence; it could have been entitled "Keats Becoming Stevens."
The anthology's essays are interesting and provocative even if one does not take its emancipatory claims as seriously as deconstructive true believers would. Although the anthology is dedicated to Earl Wasserman, only Macksey's essay is somewhat in the Wasserman tradition of criticism. The real tutelary spirit of this book is of course the late Paul de Man, who appears not simply in numerous footnotes but whose ideas and procedures—especially those of Allegories of Reading—dominate the essays. Perhaps a few sentences from his book will make possible a reflection on the anthology's inability to deliver on the promise of liberating us from Romanticism. De Man wrote in the "Preface" that his study began "as a historical study and ended up as a theory of reading. I began to read Rousseau seriously in preparation for a historical reflection on Romanticism and found myself unable to progress beyond local difficulties of interpretation" (p. ix). Perhaps with this passage in mind, Reed writes the following: "Perhaps the most powerful approach on the margin of this volume is the historical, and it is at least worth raising the question how far an historical outlook is compatible with such close reading as is practiced here" (p. 18). Let me raise another question: how can one de-mystify an ideology, in this case Romanticism, by writing a criticism in which the only history is literary history? It is rather amusing to keep hearing how much deconstructionists would like to bring in "history" to their interpretations but never seem to get around to it.

The topic of Romanticism's illusions or truthfulness is extraordinarily perplexing, and it is something by which every post-Romantic generation of literary intellectuals seems to have defined itself. Close deconstructive readings, however valuable they are as interpretations, are not likely to settle the issue. Moreover, the topic of Romanticism and language is hardly identical with the project of deconstructing Romantic texts. Other relevant focuses on that topic include the historically specific and politically pointed theories of language, the various material factors (literacy, education, printing technology, social control of writing and reading) affecting language, and the ways in which language exists as a form of power—social, sexual, political. I would not hold my breath waiting for a deconstructive historical reflection on Romanticism.

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For those approaching American literature from under the European shadow, American Incarnation is the culminating work. In the early national period, the center of Myra Jehlen's book, the complaint was that Europe dominated American culture and that native materials were inferior for sustaining an indigenous art. Jehlen's brief is the opposite, however, namely that the successful emancipation of America from Europe cut American literature off not just from European history but from history itself. Jehlen's inversion of the original American grievance locates her not in the protests against a European presence in antebellum America but in the re-
sponse to the European absence a century later. The largely Jewish and immigrant intellectuals around the 1930s Partisan Review, losing faith in the Socialist possibilities both of the American working class and of Stalinist Russia, turned to the revolutionary promise of modernist culture. By the 1950s, however, New York intellectuals were celebrating high culture not as a radical principle of transformation but as a bulwark against mass social vulgarity and political disorder. Most of these intellectuals celebrated European realism and high modernism. But the American Studies movement that came of age in the 1950s, with the prominent participation of such New York intellectuals as Leslie Fiedler and Richard Chase, was also rooted in the privileging of art as the alternative to radical politics. Acknowledging that the classic American literature failed if judged by novelistic standards, which demanded social and historical complexity and literary verisimilitude, the proponents of American Studies celebrated American literature as romance.

The next generation (Myra Jehlen’s and mine) had two alternatives if it was to resist the fathers (and Mary McCarthy and Hannah Arendt) while remaining inside their categories. One was to insist that the American romance offered access to the real (racial, imperial, and expanding capitalist) history of the United States, the history buried in dominant historiography and social science. The other was to show how American culture had trapped American literature and shut it off from history and society. A decade ago, in “New World Epics: The Middle-Class Novel in America,” (Salmagundi 36 [Winter 1977], 49–68) Myra Jehlen offered the seminal statement of that second point of view. American Incarnation is the brilliant elaboration of her position.

European liberalism, Jehlen argues, freed men (not women) to make history and accumulate capital. That freedom was historical, however, since it operated within and against preexisting social formations. Residual and emergent European cultures limited individual empowerment; “the American middle class, by contrast, always had the stage effectively to itself” (p. 131). European liberalism meant alienation, as empowerment entailed separation both from preexisting corporate bonds and from the land. Liberalism in America meant finding a home, for the American middle class confronted not history but the land. Operating in space instead of time, Americans saw the meaning of America already contained in the continent, unfolding rather than being created. Since America was an “already completed entity” (p. 63), Americans interpreted symbols; they did not make history. Since America was incarnate in the land, there was no sense of intractable conflict either with the land (here Jehlen contrasts Jefferson and other agriculturalists with the Argentinian Domingo Sarmiento, and with Susanna Moodie’s account of English settlement in Canada), or with each other (here Rousseau is used effectively against Franklin).

By the nineteenth century America incarnated not just behavior, as with Franklin, but inner being. Emerson, contrasted with Carlyle, is Jehlen’s central figure in her analysis of the happy American consciousness. But optimism for essayists and political writers was defeat for the American novel. The American incarnation threatens fiction, writes Jehlen, for a novel creates something new. Story-telling imagines alternative worlds, calling the original wholeness into question. If the best world is already implicit in the existent, then fiction is blasphemy. Characters try to make their own history in cir-
cumstances not of their choosing, but they inhabit an already incarnate American nation that stands against history. The American incarnation thus radicalizes and defeats the American novelist, for although “the competitive individualist turned artist is willy-nilly a revolutionary” (p. 132), “the apparently ineluctable tendency of fictional characters is to blaspheme against America.” In each of Jehlen’s examples—the end of The Scarlet Letter, The Marble Faun, and Pierre—the novelist comes up against history and is defeated. The Marble Faun repudiates the creative artist and history-making in favor of deciphering meaning; Pierre chooses blasphemy and self-destruction.

Centering on the self-destructiveness implicit in American fiction, American Incarnation moves beyond “New World Epics.” “New World Epics” was a thematic comparative treatment of European and American novels. American Incarnation rests its case on the formal problem of writing. But that very advance raises questions about the pervasiveness of fictional self-referentiality. The two novels Jehlen analyzes at length are those in which Hawthorne and Melville turned on their own fiction-making projects. What, then, about the fiction that came before? “New World Epics” contrasted Moby-Dick unfavorably with Le Père Goriot, for whereas family and society defeat the French father, the possessed American individualist is slain by nature, the asocial, by nothing. But American Incarnation recognizes that Ahab is not the whole world in his story; he faces real obstacles, Jehlen now argues, by contrast to Pierre. Jehlen’s new account thus implies, against her argument, that although both Pierre and The Marble Faun make artistic creation blasphemous, they bring to an end a social effort carried on in earlier novels. And although The Marble Faun ended Hawthorne’s career as novelist, Melville returned to society after Pierre.

Those two romances themselves, moreover, are more socially engaged than Jehlen allows. Although she chooses the two American Renaissance novels that invoke the Beatrice Cenci portrait, revolve around incest, and shatter on male hysteria about female sexuality, and although she has powerful insights into the self-referential meaning of brother-sister incest in Pierre, Jehlen organizes her chapters not around women but around writing. Before Pierre turns claustrophobically on itself alone, however, in Pierre’s inability to write Pierre, it has exposed the transgressive origins of America in Indian expropriation; the myth of the founding fathers; the incestuous trap of domestic ideology; and the need to colonize the excluded (woman, seamstress, alien, colored—for all of whom Isabel stands) rather than to allow her to speak for herself.

In one of her many breathtaking pieces of analysis, Jehlen shows how Pierre is trapped by his need to bring the illegitimate child inside the legitimate paternal home. Both Pierre and Kenyon in The Marble Faun cannot act historically to redress injustice, Jehlen claims, but are paralyzed by their commitment to the ideal. But it is Melville himself who explodes both the good Pierre and his paternal model. To call Pierre “wholly well-meaning and wholly destructive” (p. 216) is to fall short of Pierre’s own ultimate self-understanding, not to mention Melville’s. The elder Pierre Glendinning is a seducer and abandoner; incest and unconscious vengeance drive the son. Pierre leaves the happy political and domestic family of the dominant ideology in ruins.
Melville cannot imagine, as Jehlen says, that the bastard child could inherit America, but the lack of imagination and the extremity it entails are faithful to American history. Paternal idealization did not paralyze all political action, Jehlen rightly points out. It enabled, for (the most important) example, anti-slavery reform. Since the anti-slavery movement was middle class and (inside the North) not revolutionary, Jehlen's recognition of its accomplishments in no way threatens her larger thesis about middle class hegemony. But when *Pierre* (and other Melville works) are set against anti-slavery, then Melville points to the conflagration unleashed by idealizing the fathers and trying to bring their divided house together. Prophecy, as Jehlen says, is not history, since it sees the future bodied forth in the present. But Melville's prophecies tell us more about American history than Jehlen is willing to allow.

That is because, although Myra Jehlen privileges history, she is really not interested in the history of the United States. Like the American writing she criticizes, her interest lies less in history than in interpreting texts. But if one is to follow through on the claims of liberal hegemony made by Louis Hartz and the American Studies school, then one must acknowledge a special history and not just a special literature in America. And if the literature escapes history when compared to European models, it enters it when compared to the rationalizations dominant in American economic and political vocabularies.

For Jehlen the tension between American history and American literature resides in historical incarnation vs. literary blasphemy. But although the nineteenth-century self-making project dressed itself in pious clothes, writers exposed its blasphemous and destructive underside. Both Emerson's strategy of recalling a split-world to wholeness and Melville's mode of ventriloquizing the blasphemous projects of captains of industry, Wall Street lawyers, marketplace traders and good sons thus had a critical function.

The special character of American history, which defeated both European socialism and the European novel, deprives the critic as well as the novelist of an Archimedean point. At the end of *American Incarnation*, Jehlen calls for a dialogue that includes the gardener and the wife (and she might have added the seamstress), the workers and women on the Glendinning estate. "The terrain is much more varied than it is projected by most of the texts and authors treated here," she concludes. "When we recognize monologue is dialogue—in that dialogue the authoritative voice itself emerges dual" (226). But Jehlen has already pointed out that women (and workers) don't speak with uncontaminated voices in America. In "Archimedes and the Paradox of Feminist Criticism" (*Feminist Theory*, ed. Nannerl O. Keohane et al. [Chicago, 1982], 189–216), as important for feminist theory as "New World Epics" was for American Studies, Jehlen criticized an exclusive concentration on women's writing as if female texts were unaffected by the dominant male culture. It is not just, as she says in the new book, that the middle class had the large stage to itself, but that there was no stage at all on which its presence was not felt.

*American Incarnation* and "Archimedes" share the attention to a hegemonic American discourse. They share as well the juxtaposition of two voices—Europe and America in *Incarnation*, classic American and women's literature
in "Archimedes"—as the way to break down that hegemony. The two Jehlen texts share a middle term, however, which is partially redeemed when one follows her method and brings her two textual voices together. That middle term, of course, is the classic American novel. Found wanting in *American Incarnation* because it is only about the self and not the self in society, that novel is recuperated in "Archimedes" by contrast to women’s writing, for the latter saves its heroine in society by denying her a self. Nineteenth-century women’s writing in the United States provides Myra Jehlen, she knows, with no Archimedes point from which to move or judge America; nineteenth-century European writing is another story. Readers of Jehlen’s blasphemous new book should keep Archimedes in mind.

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