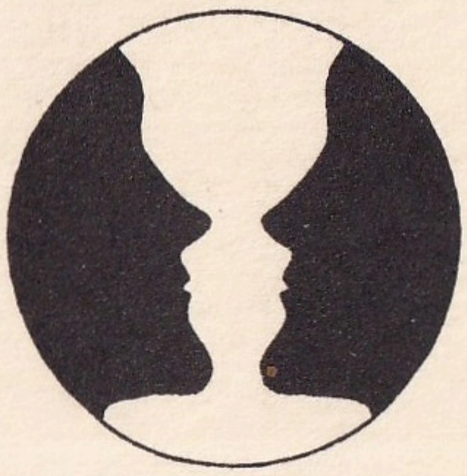
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WARWICK JOURNAL OF PHILOSOPHY

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Department of Philosopy

University of Warwick

Coventry, United Kingdom

1989

Editorial Preamble

This is the Journal's second issue, and its contents continue to reflect the wide ranging interests of our readership. Its interdisciplinary tone is to be found within each of the articles and reviews, and in their assembly. Readers will find rigourously argued analyses of diverse subjects such as: literary philosophy and philosophical literature, the philosophy of history, of science, and of politics.

Alison Martin's paper treats Yeats and Nietzsche side by side, allowing Nietzsche to act as foil for Yeats' vacillation over the relationship of mind and sensuality. Chris Mounsey reexamines the common reception of Blanchot as the 'perfect reader' of Levinas, from the perspective of Blanchot's citing of Riemannian geometry. Along the way he generates a dialogue between Blanchot, Levinas, Paul Davies and Heidegger on the question of textuality and ethics.

The third paper on "*Macbeth*, Language, Inheritance" from Douglas Burnham develops a reading of Shakespeare's *Macbeth* in relation to its ideological/philosophical underpinnings. In doing so, Burnham suggests a possible reinterpretation of 'the Scottish play' organised around the problematics of language in the movement of deconstruction. The article from Andrew Benjamin is a work in progress, and deals with the philosophical problem of how history can be studied as an object. He does this within the framework of Lyotard, Foucault and the post-modern critique of the philosophy of identity.

During the 1940s Popper published his now famous two volume work, *The Open Society and Its Enemies*, in which he attacks philosophers of totality. He does this on the basis of his concept of liberalism which underlies his philosophy of science. Here, David Miller's paper attempts to extend this criticism, in particular with respect to Popper's critical rationalism, both in the philosophy of science and political philosophy.

The issue also includes three relevant reviews on very diverse texts by James Williams (on Lyotard), John O'Reilly (on Kearney) and David Wood (on J.L.H. Thomas).

BRINGING IN THE BALLOON OF THE MIND TO THE DANCE SONGS OF YEATS AND NIETZSCHE

Alison Martin

HANDS do what you are bid
Bring in the balloon of the mind
That bellies and drags in the wind
Into its narrow shed.
Yeats

Let's bring in the balloon of the mind with Yeats and Nietzsche. Yeats - the philosophical poet; Nietzsche - the poet-philosopher: both preachers of passion and creativity, affirming life. Each like a shuttle on a loom, framed and encapsulated by a tradition, drawn towards it yet pulling away to re-create it and in the process weaving a new pattern. Each so often disdainful of the other's form of creativity, yet so often fusing them in a language that attempts to belie the division between sensuality and intellect, body and soul. Ultimately, they are explorers on expeditions to cross the gorge that cuts down between art and life. These expeditions are not the same, but they do point magnificently and fruitfully towards each other. Nietzsche wants to fill the gorge, to go beyond a 'this one' or a 'that one' into the multiplicity generated by his vision of life as flux. For here life is art, if there is life at all, and art is, in a sense, 'physiological'; life-affirmation is a dance song. Yeats perpetually vacillates between antinomies, occasionally glimpsing a fusion, though a fusion as Unity. Sometimes yearning after Unity, Yeats nevertheless suspects its probable stasis as a denial of life-creativity. Only dance can fully exude the soul 'in' the body and the body 'as' soul, its movement making form and content inseparable. Ambiguity pervades his poetry; it hardly rests on either side of, or between, the soul and the body, art and life. Whilst Nietzsche shoots a powerful arrow, piercing into the balloon that drifts upwards, Yeats, although standing firmly on the ground, still provides the material for patching up the tear. Equivocally desiring the tranquillity, the airy spaciousness that the balloon ride may offer, his uncertainty poignantly depicts a characteristic ambivalence towards life.

Yeats - Bodily Passions

Yeats' later poetry provides our focus, for here he is more concerned than in his early work to reveal the body from out of the mist of the eternal soul and to expound a conception of the mind free from mechanistic determination and necessity. The influence of Nietzsche on Yeats the artist may have had some relevance to his creative life at this later stage. It seems certain that he had read *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, Nietzsche's most poetic discourse and the primary text I shall use for an interpretation of his philosophy here.[1] However, we shall not assume a correlative effect, nor even look for one. As Nietzsche writes,

> *one ought to employ 'cause' and 'effect' only as pure* concepts, *that is to say as conventional fictions for the purpose of designation, mutual understanding,* not *explanation.* (BGE, 33).

The early poetry exudes Romanticism;[2] it is delicate, sensitive, rhythmic and more accessible than Yeats' later work. Later, Yeats moved away from Romantic theory and its view of language as merely being the form to an independent imaginative content, thus entailing an unavoidable form/content split. Creativity was always important for Yeats, though, and he became attracted to the Symbolist aesthetic in which the imagination is believed to be working in language to realise ideas and meanings for a poem. Form and content are subsequently indissoluble. Whether Yeats fully accepted the implications of form/content unification is doubtful, for he was never content with the enclosed contextualism of Symbolism. Whilst poetry could be self-reflexive and generate its own world, his symbols are often empirical realities emblematic of spiritual realities.

Always vacillating, his poetry sometimes wants to go beyond contextual boundaries; Symbolism with Romanticism creeping back by an idealistic view of the aesthetic object and aesthetic value. At other times, Yeats denied this dream of an imaginative integration with nature and looked for a freedom within a poetics of will framed in tragic awareness. Thus creativity is not an expression, the self moulding language, but rather creativity is a language which shapes its own inner reality. As an adjunct to a particular will, it constantly creates new masks, the anti-self, which provides a self immersed in poetry with perpetual change and movement, this being the only freedom

against a deterministic universe and language. Creativity cannot ignore the body; the tragic conception of life lends itself to power and passion, to a dance within determination rather than a mystical flight away from it. Yeats writes,

> *As life goes on we discover that certain thoughts sustain us in defeat, or give us victory over ourselves or others, and its is these thoughts, tested by passions, that we call convictions. Among subjective man (in all those, that is, who must spin a web out of their own bowels) the victory is an intellectual daily recreation of all that exterior fate snatches away, and so that fate's antithesis ... We begin to live when we have conceived life as tragedy.*[3]

It is the laudable imperative to begin to live which finds compliance with Nietzsche's campaign to draw us down from life-denying metaphysics.

Zarathustra's Body - Yeats' Body

Zarathustra, always an impassioned speaker, clears the ground for his dramatic discourse against the 'hair-shirted despisers of the body'. His uncompromising language can cast a shadow over its own intricate subtleties, but he establishes quite clearly the matter to be inveighed against, pointing to the front it presents then slipping unseen around the back to reveal its hidden underside. Zarathustra speaks to 'the Afterworldsmen', those who 'thought themselves transported from their bodies and from the earth.' Perhaps Platonists, perhaps Christians, perhaps those artists that dream of expressing the universality of Being by their creation. Zarathustra is not fooled,

> *I know these Godlike people all too well: they want to be believed in and doubt to be sin. I also know all too well what it is they themselves most firmly believe in.*
>
> *Truly, not in afterworlds and redeeming drops of blood; they believe most firmly in the body, and their own body is for them their thing-in-itself.* (TSZ, 61).

By running away from the body, they give the strongest affirmation of its significance, which is attributed in the very need to run away. It is always a

significance they hope to negate - the body is for them a weight, a burden, a 'thing'.

> *Listen, rather, my brothers, to the voice of the healthy body: this is a purer voice and a more honest one. Purer and more honest of speech is the healthy body, perfect and square-built: and it speaks of the meaning of the earth.* (TSZ, 61)

Yeats does hear the voice of the body. It is always a cry against the claims of abstraction, intellect and excessive reason that he hears this voice.[4] Yeats' body is frequently distinguishable from the mind and the soul, though it is rarely distinctly separable. It is not always 'healthy' in Nietzsche's terms, for the poetry has moods whereby the claims of the soul may be against and indeed superior to those of the body. Sometimes his body is a troublesome emblem of the irrevocably determined finitude of existence, as in the pensive mood of 'The Tower' which bemoans the senility of the body:

> *What shall I do with this absurdity -*
> *O heart, O troubled heart - this caricature,*
> *Decrepit age that has been tied to me*
> *As to a dog's tail?* (CP, 218)

Here the body is evidently separable from the 'I' and the 'me', it caricatures the former self. With the body in decay, the mind can set its rigid patterns in action with thought and philosophy, though it is an inferior substitute. For Yeats, the intellect 'clears the mouth from the sybil's cave, but it is not the sybil.'[5] The intellect is thereby merely a preliminary measure, always an inferior substitute for poetic passion. Here Yeats associates the latter with the energy of a youthful body, while the former is just a necessary dealing with the abstract to prevent the decaying body from rattling due to total vacuity:

> *It seems that I must bid the Muse go back,*
> *Choose Plato and Plotinus for a friend*
> *Until imagination, ear and eye,*
> *Can be content with argument and deal*
> *In abstract things: or be derided by*
> *A sort of battered kettle at the heel.* (CP, 219)

At other times, there is the hope that the body will retain the power of physicality, a marvellous palliative to the paucity of an over-bearing intellect. Strong language again in the emphatic plea of 'A Prayer for Old Age':

> *GOD guard me from those thoughts men think*
> *In the mind alone;*
> *He that sings a lasting song*
> *Thinks in a marrow-bone;* (CP, 326)

Marrow-bone thinking, musical because its form is the same as its content, finds itself opposed to praised wisdom; the rhythm of a song is more attractive than the status acquired in the identity of the 'I': 'O what am I that I should not seem/ For the song's sake a fool?' *(CP, 326)*

This sense of the choice between mind and body is not necessarily a 'free' one that the mind or body can control, yet it compounds their evocation as separable entities. The poem 'Those Images' exemplifies this potential with its question,

> *WHAT if I bade you leave*
> *The cavern of the mind?*
> *There's better exercise*
> *In the sunlight and wind.* (CP, 367)

Another demand to run with the sensual rather than suppress it; to 'Recognize the five/That make the Muses sing,' echoing Blake's 'Senses Five/ Still the chief inlets of the soul in this age.'[6]

Yeats seeks the image of the child - lithe, carefree, finding height in the moment by experiencing its physical intensity. The body is here an inlet for a soul loving pleasure. Zarathustra stirs together this mixture of soul in body, body in soul:

> *"I am body and soul" - so speaks the child. And why should one not speak like children?*
> *But the awakened, the enlightened man says: I am body entirely, and nothing beside; and soul is only a word for something in the body.*

> *The body is a great intelligence, a multiplicity with one sense, a war and a peace, a herd and a herdsman.* (TSZ, 61)

Zarathustra's body does not oppose itself to reason or intelligence; it does not quiver with fear at their mention, nor strut before them in surly defiance. Neither does it tread with lugubrious servitude along the corridors they erect. Zarathustra's body laughs at their arrogance. It does not see a division between itself and them, for the body creates what is called mind and soul and it knows which is in control.

> *Behind your thoughts and feelings, my brother, stands a mighty commander, an unknown sage - he is called Self. He lives in your body, he is your body.* (TSZ, 62)

The body is the 'great intelligence'; the 'I' - which is not the self - is only its instrument. A body in decay entails a self in decay since they are inseparable.

> *You say 'I' and are proud of this word. But greater than this - although you will not believe it - is your body and its great intelligence which does not say 'I' but performs 'I'.* (TSZ, 62)

For Nietzsche, nature is chaos, and all that is derives from the forces of this chaos; identity is the conjunction of forces specified by their differential relation with all similar organisations. Hence the body is a multiplicity of forces, a conjunction enabling a unification of low-level activities of common ends and purposes; it is the 'multiplicity with one sense.' However, within this multiplicity is a creative hierarchy of urges, in which the passions are dominant. Those urges attributed to 'mind', rationalising intellect, will attempt to root out the passions, but it is a fruitless endeavour, that of a self that wants to die. The cultivation of the passions ensure a healthy body; dominance of the passions releases another, more creative reason,

> *There is more reason in your body than in your best wisdom. And who knows for what purpose your body requires your best wisdom?* (TSZ, 62)

Reason is an instrument of the passions - nothing to fear here. Any worship of the soul and intelligence, a theology and a philosophy, which denies the body is simply the unhappy body guaranteeing its unhappiness by attempting

to crawl away from itself and life. Zarathustra's body, the healthy body, affirms life in its creativity.

The body the locus of creativity! What about the soul? The desire to create beyond the transitory, the finite, the ever-dying body?

Death - Dialogue - Vacillation

Death, as the perishing of organic entities, is ostensibly the event which underlies the need to transcend the body. Death is a necessary and all-pervading condition of life; our life-affirming patterns try to cover it but it is always waiting for us in the next valley, glaringly naked. Yeats' poem expresses this:

> *Death*
> *Nor dread nor hope attend*
> *A dying animal;*
> *A man awaits his end*
> *Dreading and hoping all;*
> *Many times he died,*
> *Many times he rose again.*
> *A great man in his pride*
> *Confronting murderous men*
> *Casts derision upon*
> *Supersession of breath;*
> *He knows death to the bone -*
> *Man has created death.* (CP, 264)

Death is not just the passing away of the body, for 'man has created death.' Death is specifically human; dread and hope, those moods which attach themselves to an event given meaning, to a purpose attributed value, leave the dying animal alone. The animal of man, of course, decays and dies, but it is man, the manifestation of something beyond the merely corporal, who creates death as an end by embodying this very manifestation. Human life is a stake in the games we create. Here we give ourselves death; the hope of gaining all necessitates the risk of losing all; even the winner has to pledge a stake in a new game to perpetuate the winning position. Facing the fleshless cruelty, courage is taking the risk, accepting death, then risking 'all' once more. Surely the poem invokes a disinclination to continue with this game of

contingent life and death which finds no ultimate meaning, no meaningful conclusion?

The tight-rope walker of 'Zarathustra's Prologue' was knocked from his rope by a buffoon. Dying, he tells Zarathustra of his fears of the Devil.

> *'On my honour, my friend,' answered Zarathustra, 'all you have spoken of does not exist: there is no Devil and no Hell. Your soul will be dead even before your body: therefore fear nothing any more!'* (TSZ, 48)

Who would not despair at such a reassurance?

> *The man looked up distrustfully. 'If you are speaking the truth,' he said then, 'I leave nothing when I leave life. I am not much more than an animal which has been taught to dance by blows and starvation'* (TSZ, 48).

Life can seem nothing more than an irrational accident to him; his many deaths have still not saved him from passing away. His thought and action were just a rambling, a thinning out, 'like milk spilt on a stone' in Yeats poem 'Spilt Milk.' Zarathustra calls to the 'great man in his pride' in response to the walker.

> *'Not so,' said Zarathustra, 'You have made danger your calling, there is nothing in that to despise'* (TSZ, 48).

Nothing to despise in danger, in grasping life as it drags and bellies in the wind and withstanding its harshness in the here-and-now; in playing into the significances attributed to life and creating one's own meaning. Risk has more reward than the continuous accumulation of assurance policies by the preachers of virtue. They bow their heads in virtuous industry, with one eye forever sneaking a glance towards their inevitable decay, just hoping for a peaceful sleep beyond this earth and its time. Zarathustra speaks of the futility of the preacher who craves for a security that is truly inane:

> *His wisdom is: stay awake in order to sleep well. And truly if life had no sense and I had to choose nonsense, this would be the most desirable nonsense for me, too.*

Blessed are these drowsy men: for they shall soon drop off. (TSZ, 58)

The preachers of virtue await their transformation into a perfectible, unearthly soul, negating the conflicts of the 'imperfect' embodied self. The tensions of this dichotomy are waged in Yeats' poem, 'A Dialogue of Self and Soul'. Yeats gives 'voice' to that soul which Zarathustra declared will be dead before the body.

My Soul. *I summon to the winding stair;*
Set all your mind upon the steep ascent,
Upon the broken, crumbling battlement,
Upon the breathless starlit air,
Upon the star that marks the hidden pole;
Fix every wandering thought upon
That quarter where all thought is done:
Who can distinguish darkness from the soul?
(CP, 265)

The soul claims the 'I' for itself - it wants all of the mind (certainly not the body) to go upwards, away from the earth, up the winding stair of a tower that is for Yeats suggestive of the height of the spirit and the isolation of the artist. This soul wants stasis, no more wandering; it wants an end to thought, a fusion with darkness in contrast to the visual metaphor of 'seeing the light' of knowledge. The Self responds with its own emblems, also ancient and sacred.

My Self. *The consecrated blade upon my knees*
Is Sato's ancient blade, still as it was,
Still razor-keen, still like a looking-glass
Unspotted by the centuries;
That flowering, silken, old embroidery, torn
From some court-lady's dress and round
The wooden scabbard bound and wound,
Can, tattered, still protect, faded adorn.
(CP, 265)

The blade upon the knees, physically linked, is the passion of the 'old fool' which cuts 'razor keen' into life and its battles; it has always mirrored the

truth presented to it despite the blemishes of time. The flowering beauty is the beauty of passion. Perfection does not make beauty: bound tightly to the scabbard the embroidery was always the consequence of accident and contingency - not a purposeful object. Such is beauty, captured by the double sense of 'wound'. Beauty adorns by winding itself to passion, being a part of what passion is, and protects by binding the wound, the injurious consequence of this burgeoning passion.

The soul once again invokes the desire for infinity which was the yearning of 'The Tower', particularly given the degeneration of a man, 'long past his prime':

Think of ancestral night that can
If but imagination scorn the earth
And intellect its wandering
To this and that and t'other thing
Deliver from the crime of death and birth. (CP, 265)

Eternity calls to Being, the essential form given umbrage by the imagination of earthly beings, and above the intellectual analysis of this or that. The vision of Being offers solace to those caught within the ceaseless flow of becoming. Death and birth are the crimes committed by humanity in being deaf to the truth of the soul's peace for the sake of shallow earthly reward.

The self is emphatic, it has heard Zarathustra's healthy body. It claims the 'I' for itself and sets its flowers of the day against the soul's tower of the night: 'And claim by a soldier's right/ A charter to commit the crime once more' *(CP, 266)*. The self makes danger its calling and claims the freedom of a passionate becoming. The language of the soul's response unwittingly necessitates that its own voice be silenced, made a stone by the very sense it draws from the self's charter.

My Soul. *Such fullness in that quarter overflows*
And falls into the basin of the mind
That man is stricken deaf and dumb and blind
For intellect no longer knows
Is *from* ought, *or* knower *from the* known -
That is to say, ascends to heaven;
Only the dead can be forgiven;

But when I think of that my tongue's a stone.
(CP, 266)

Passionate becoming drowns the aspirations of the soul to the eternity of Being by its unlimited fervour. It fills the mind and numbs the senses, obliterating both of them, as they are indistinguishable in this messy fluidity. Without the essence of Being, what appears *is*, has truth. The subjective - the ought of the knower - is the known, they are unified. The soul glimpses in Unity something akin to what it had named soul: a Unity that should be afterworldly. This unity surely cannot be a Unity for the living since then the soul's voice, calling away from life to promise the perfection of Unity, would be as lifeless and silent as a stone. With complex syntax and shifting meanings the soul inadvertently catches a rare Yeatsian Unity, although it is ambivalent as to whether it is a unity made possible by the self or the soul.

The self gains precedence here as it wills Zarathustra's dictum, 'Become what you are!',[7] suggesting an affinity with Nietzsche's assimilation of Being and becoming and his doctrine of eternal recurrence. The declaration of compliance with life has the powerful, passionate syntax that Yeats desired, but its ostensibly assured resolution is perhaps too assured to prevent it swinging round to its opposite - an ease of extremity which always vacillates.

My Self. *A living man is blind and drinks his drop*
What matter if ditches are impure?
What matter if I live it all once more?

The questions are an impertinent 'so what?' to the determined character of existence; life is an undignified struggle of which we cannot see the whole and must subsequently take that 'drop' which comes to us. The self shakes a defiant fist against the continuum of an 'impure' unchanging sameness, accepting a self which is 'brought face to face with his own clumsiness.' Without the 'escape' of the soul, of eternity, life returns as all there is, finding no culmination in a 'better' world, in a higher Being. This 'what matter if?' of course echoes Zarathustra's doctrine of eternal recurrence.

Zarathustra's 'stillest hour' comes to him and inveighs him to speak of this doctrine; its enormity is terrifying to him.

Then again, something said to me voicelessly: "You know, Zarathustra, but you do not speak!"
And I answered at last defiantly: "Yes, I know, but I will not speak!"
Then again something said to me voicelessly: "You will *not, Zarathustra? Is this true? Do not hide yourself in you defiance!"*
And I wept and trembled like a child and said: "Alas, I want to, but how can I? Release me from this alone! It is beyond my strength!" (TSZ, 167)

Is it not truly terrifying to know that life is the 'crime of death and birth,' that it holds no Edenic ending beyond this life, 'your eternal life'? Is it not frightening to feel it as a ceaseless coming and going, 'the rattle of pebbles on the shore/ Under receding wave'? Yeats' 'Vacillation' tells us to 'let all things pass away,' for who would want the fate of 'the finished man among his enemies'? The finished man knows only completion, senses the ending; he stands against Time and change and is thereby unable to respond to 'that defiling and disfigured shape' which 'the mirror of malicious eyes/ Casts upon his eyes.' The finished man internalises all derision. The unfinished man can immerse himself into that determined universe and find freedom in the drama of the mask; shifting from self to anti-self and back as life passes away and returns, he responds to the challenge of all derision. He accepts the self.

Zarathustra's doctrine is also a view of the 'soul'.[8] If Zarathustra were to die, his animals *suppose* what he *would* say:

"Now I die and decay," you would say, "and in an instant I shall be nothingness. Souls are as mortal as bodies."
"But the complex of causes in which I am entangled will recur - it will create me again! I myself am part of these causes of the eternal recurrence."
"I shall return, with this sun, with this earth, with this eagle, with this serpent - not to a new life or a better life or a similar life:"
"I shall return eternally to this identical and self-same life, in the greatest things and in the smallest, to teach once more the eternal recurrence of all things." (TSZ, 238)

Zarathustra does not understand this doctrine to mean that *when* I die I shall experience reincarnation, and be the self-same person. His teaching is for self-acceptance. If I were to live again then to be myself at all 'I' would have to return to exactly this 'self-same' life, because otherwise 'I' could not be myself, but would be another person. Zarathustra's self is the unity of a multiplicity relative to all other unities within the multiplicity of forces - to want to change one aspect of the self as it has been is to want to change all aspects, as each thing affects all others: all characteristics are contingent by virtue of their equal necessity.

> *Have you ever said yes to a single Joy? O my friends, then you have said Yes too to all woe. All things are entangled, ensnared, enamoured: if you ever wanted one thing twice, if you ever said, "You please me, happiness! Abide, moment!" then you wanted* all *back.* (TSZ, 238).

To suppose eternal recurrence presupposes its actuality, for to posit the 'I' of 'if I' is to affirm oneself to oneself and in so doing to affirm that moment. 'If we affirm one single moment we thus affirm not only ourselves but all existence.' The moment is a configuration of all becoming, hence of all that has been, is and will be. Subsequently, it will 'return' as the self-same moment, for it always is the self-same moment.

Yeats offers a vision of this moment in 'Vacillation'; it is the joy of the 'brand, or flaming breath.' The heat of this flash projects an intense moment of unity, its spontaneous joy annihilating the claims of the finite body and the morally accountable heart.

> *BETWEEN extremities*
> *Man runs his course;*
> *A brand, or flaming breath,*
> *Comes to destroy*
> *All those antinomies*
> *Of day and night;*
> *The body calls it death,*
> *The heart remorse.*
> *But if these be right*
> *What is joy?*

This moment is but a flash that is destined to fade; a glimmer of joy that can hardly be grasped. I suggest that the eternal is momentary in Yeats while Zarathustra's moment is eternal. This difference is manifested in their respective perceptions of the eternal return and their notions of the self. Yeats can separate the body from the self to the extent that he envisages the body as the locus for the adoption and presentation of different selves. Thus upon this primarily stable physical entity, the masks of self and anti-self are placed. The body is a point on the circle of life which passes through it and constitutes the daily recreation of the unfinished man. All creators remain on this outer circle, they can re-create life despite its ceaseless turning and passing away. Those desiring certainty gravitate to the stasis of the centre deity, which is life-denying, avoiding its flow. Attaining the eternal involves either defying life, a prospect Yeats vacillates over, or finding a unity of antinomies that includes the self. Both are momentary: with each the flow of life intrudes to break their singularity or unity.

Zarathustra's self is not separable from the body, as a configuration of many forces it cannot be a point on a circle, its identity is only a conjunction constituted by the relativity of many 'circles': nothing is separate from it. The moment of its affirmation is eternal because there is nothing to intrude upon this moment, it is a fusion of all.

It is barely surprising that the vision of 'A Dialogue of Self and Soul' is less joyous than the moment of 'Vacillation', for the vision is a resolution of a self attached to the body and its finitude, rather than a celebration of fusion, which the joy of the flaming breath momentarily suggests. The self is content to live it all again, it has self-acceptance. Like Zarathustra's shepherd who, when being choked by a heavy, black snake, was able to bite off its head and spit it out, the self here also casts out disgust, throwing off the 'Spirit of Gravity':

> *When such as I cast out remorse*
> *So great a sweetness flows into the breast*
> *We must laugh and we must sing,*
> *We are blest by everything,*
> *Everything we look upon is blest.* (CP, 267)

The resolution lacks passion, though. Perhaps because Yeats is never certain as to whether this play of the self includes all, whether there is not still some

abstract perfection, some timeless form beyond the organic. The 'sweetness' does not have the transforming power of the joy of Zarathustra's shepherd.

> *No longer a shepherd, no longer a man - a transformed being, surrounded with light, laughing! Never yet on earth had any man laughed as he laughed! ... My longing for this laughter consumes me: oh how do I endure still to live! And how I could endure to die now!* (TSZ, 180)

Yeats' self always has an antinomy to waver over, always the prospect of an artefact which may transcend the self to offer eternity. His masks wonder whether they are creating beyond themselves. Zarathustra's self has to create 'beyond' itself since its moment of positive life-affirmation is constitutive of the artefact, there is no given entity which can transcend the power of force by its stability. There is no space left for doubt, because this space would not offer a glance at the eternal; rather, the doubt would fill it with non-creative, reactive forces. The created is not separable from the creative, the former depends upon the latter, having no form without the power of force.

Yeats' body, cut off from the soul, only to want it back. His poetry cuts off eternal unity, then wants the eternal back by cutting off the passing organic altogether. The search for a poetry outside time takes him far but still draws him back to antinomies, to a cycle of life and death.

Byzantium - Elusive Beauty.

Yeats creates two poems which are like crystals where his antinomies cluster: 'Sailing to Byzantium' and 'Byzantium'. An obscure collection of difficult symbols, they suggest the antithesis of organic and abstract art forms: between the natural (a self that plays into change) and the perfecting style of geometrical form which distorts nature's imperfections. Byzantium is the place of this perfection; less the Unity that our soul had plunged into (where infinity and finitude find fusion), more the infinity of the soul's 'quarter where all thought is done.' Yeats attempts to voyage there in style - a style offering sense to the labyrinthine confusion of poetry addressing poetry. The style of dense symbolism in 'Byzantium' reaches for abstract perfection yet its very abstraction compounds its inevitable return to finitude by the vagaries of interpretation. As we have seen, Zarathustra's creativity of force overrides the feasibility of essential, eternal form.

'Sailing to Byzantium' is the quest for the perfection which 'Byzantium' tries to be; it is a compensatory quest, like 'The Tower', out of the chagrin of an 'old man' whose rejection of organic unification is predicated upon the inevitability of organic decay.

> *That is no country for old men. The young*
> *In one another's arms, birds in the trees*
> *- Those dying generations - at their song,*
> *The salmon-falls, the mackerel-crowded seas,*
> *Fish, flesh, or fowl, commend all summer long*
> *Whatever is begotten, born and dies.*
> *Caught in that sensual music all neglect*
> *Monuments of unageing intellect.* (CP, 217)

From out of Byzantium comes a poem inextricably bound to 'that' country from which it distances itself; denigrating the sensual, it nevertheless depicts it with a rhythmic sensuality. The indictment is ostensibly against the organic, yet it is the old man's (the poet's) inability to realise the organic with eternal perfection that causes real offence.

Music, having no real form/content division, and not an 'object', captures that Unity the poet desires; with no evident 'beginning' or 'end' it can fill all space and cross divisions that may define the inner from the outer self. The poet is jealous of this Unity, a music he can no longer hear. Such is this capacity for Unity in music that the moment of its commencement, filling the silence, can entail a forgetting as it captures the self. A Platonic division between mind and body is allegedly enforced as rapturous sensuality forgets intellect and neglects its 'monuments' - those cold statues embodying an eternal truth, but only in death.

Already we know that Byzantium is a substitute for the 'aged man' who, we now learn, is 'but a paltry thing' - a negative reaction to loss rather than a positive desire for abstraction. The soul is invoked only to obscure the decrepitude of the body, to 'sing' loudly against mortality. This conflict between the soul and the body is not satisfying, their enforced division makes each want to claim the natural for itself, a natural supremacy. The soul teaches nothing but non-creative 'studying' of its 'own magnificence.' The poet yearns to be resolute, away from those antinomies, from the capricious

heart which 'knows not what it is.' He calls to the spiritual realm, 'O sages standing in God's holy fire/ As in the gold mosaic of a wall,' thus linking the harmony of spiritual wisdom with that of imaginative splendour, not with the 'natural.' He calls to them to descend to the chaos, the whirlpool of history, to 'perne in a gyre', and to take him 'into the artifices of eternity.' Abnegating the organic, suggesting spiritual harmony may coalesce with an imaginative construct, this abstract form is nevertheless ambiguous - 'artifice' is made, but also mocks. The final stanza vows to reject the organic in return for eternal redemption. The transcendental poet desires abstract beauty yet here it is mere entertainment, 'to keep a drowsy Emperor awake'; he too may become a singing bird whose 'golden bough' promises eternity, yet his song is of history, 'of what is past, passing or to come.' Byzantium is a voyage out of time in a style heavily qualified by the organic; the dubious rewards of abstract art merely re-affirm antinomies and their conflict.

'Byzantium' is Yeats' attempt to arrive and be the poet of Byzantium. Its style is abstract, a mosaic of images that belie a unified, 'natural', progression; its development is elliptical. It is the poetry of the soul, drawing language to its own inner meaning, to an imaginative artifice that attempts no resolution of antinomies by aesthetic transcendence. The first stanza 'finds' Byzantium:

> *The unpurged images of day recede;*
> *The Emperor's drunken soldiery are abed;*
> *Night resonance recedes, night-walkers' song*
> *After great cathedral gong;*
> *A starlit or a moonlit dome disdains*
> *All that man is,*
> *All mere complexities*
> *The fury and the mire of human veins.* (CP, 280)

Typically Yeats, an antithesis between organic and abstract, between life and art, is imaged here. Against those 'unpurged images of day' - the chaos and imperfection of the organic, the 'fury and mire' - we imagine the purged images of night, the aesthetic perfection of the soul. It can 'hail the superhuman' and reach a spiritual purity outside the bounds of reasoned intelligence, as in the second stanza:

> *Before me floats an image, man or shade,*

> *Shade more than man, more image than shade;*
> *For Hades' bobbin bound in mummy-cloth*
> *May unwind the winding path;* (CP, 280)

Here, the floating image of Byzantium finds uncertainty; its perfection is less a reflection of 'essential man' than a representation of him, his shade; then less than that, more a floating image of no reality. Who can deny perfection for the sake of reality? The poet has hope, not certainty, that life could be resolved by art - shown by the repetition of 'may'. Hades' bobbin is man's destiny; the mummy image is art. Like the monument of the first poem it is paradoxically at once out of life and a preservation of a higher, unchanging life after death. A destiny bound by art may straighten the gyre of chaotic reality, then 'breathless mouths' may call to the perfected voice that is beyond the fluid and moving, the 'moisture' and the 'breath', of transient organic speaking. Whatever, this poet resolves to 'hail the superhuman' and, in the third stanza, name the perfection, recalling the bird and golden metal of the first poem: "Miracle, bird or golden handiwork,/ More miracle than a bird or handiwork" *(CP, 281)*. The miracle is an event neither of the organic nor of the articulating craftsmanship of the human creator; it is perfection achieved by poetic immersion into the aesthetic purity that expects perfection. Immersion is a leave-taking of 'complexities', not a unity.

> *At midnight on the Emperor's pavement flit*
> *Flames that no faggot feeds, nor steel has lit,*
> *Nor storm disturbs, flame begotten of flame,*
> *Where blood-begotten spirits come*
> *And all complexities of fury leave,*
> *Dying into a dance,*
> *An agony of trance,*
> *An agony of flame that cannot singe a sleeve.* (CP, 281)

By the soul of 'midnight' come the flames of art, the miracle energy that is not organic ('faggot fed') nor consciously created ('steel lit'). The flames are art, 'begotten of flame', the creative imagination of the immersed poet. Here the organic, the 'blood-begotten', bring their spirits and find perfection by feeding themselves to such a flame. Their dance is a harmony derivative of organic death, it promises not unity but 'an agony'. Here the ecstasy of aesthetic transcendence is also the pain of its ephemerality, for immersion in

perfection finds no permanence: it cannot 'singe a sleeve.' The poet's resolve is to seek transcendence in spite of the perpetual return of finitude.

> *Astraddle on the dolphin's mire and blood,*
> *Spirit after spirit! The smithies break the flood,*
> *The golden smithies of the Emperor!*
> *Marbles of the dancing floor*
> *Break bitter furies of complexity,*
> *Those images that yet*
> *Fresh images beget,*
> *That dolphin-torn, that gong-tormented sea.* (CP, 281)

Art 'breaks' from the organic, but it cannot alter the continuation of the cycles of birth and death. It is a glorious perfection of abstract form; the 'marbles' are a harmonious base for ecstatic departure to a spiritual dance which will fade with the dawn. The 'fresh images' of organic life forever intrude upon this imaginative flight and ground its infinity.

Yeats' harmony here comes of the belief that language can leave the body, the self, and become abstract form; indeed, language must leave the body to become the stylized art he desired, for his art is a primacy of form, not force. Hence, the harmony of poetry entails a denial. This is unlike the unity of *dance* where art cannot deny the body, where body and soul are unified in a living art. Byzantium could be by-passed for this image of art as dance.

Dance - Division - Force

Yeats perceives dance as the fusion of soul and body, art and life; Zarathustra is recognisable as a dancer. Dance is art and life for Zarathustra; dance is *one* form of art which includes life for Yeats.

Yeats' poem 'Among Schoolchildren' depicts this image of the artist, an image that emerges among school children who study and learn, 'in the best modern way.' The irony of 'best' is evident - they are taught memory and intellect, suppressing that passionate imagination which comes from the body. The 'sixty-year old smiling public man', smiling because not showing his private despair at such a schoolroom, can only 'dream of a Ledaean body', one that is born of the unity of body and soul, the child of 'Leda and the Swan.' A body that can live life as tragedy, with the impassioned

enthusiasm of a child. The image is dissociated from reality by its contrast to the children before him:

> *And thinking of that fit of grief or rage*
> *I look upon one child or t'other there*
> *And wonder if she stood so at that age -*
> *(...) And there upon my heart is driven wild:*
> *She stands before me as a living child.* (CP, 243)

Even impassioned bodies suffer organic decay, though, and the 'present image' of this Ledaean body is as 'hollow of cheek' with age as this old man who smiles to give illusion of comfort with his decrepit body, that 'old scarecrow.' Yet all those creations of the intellect, flirting with the soul, the thought of Plato, Aristotle and 'world famous golden-thighed Pythagoras' are but 'old clothes upon old sticks to scare a bird.' They are the fabrications of the soul which cover that ageing body for the purpose of scaring the bird which sings the song of change. All images have their followers:

> *Both nuns and mothers worship images,*
> *But those the candles light are not as those*
> *That animate a mother's reveries,*
> *But keep a marble or a bronze repose.*
> *And yet they too break hearts - O presences*
> *That passion, piety of affection knows,*
> *And that all heavenly glory symbolise -*
> *O self-born mockers of man's enterprise;* (CP, 244)

The mother's images of organic creation, physically animated, are the converse of the god-worshipper's images of marble and bronze, art moulding static perfection for eternity. These 'presences' are works of art that mock their creation because they symbolise all glory but take from man, in their creation, 'passion, piety, or affection,' and thereby deny these glories of life to him. This art of marble represents for eternity everything it denies its creator. Neither creation of body or soul prove complete:

> *Labour is blossoming or dancing where*
> *The body is not bruised to pleasure soul,*
> *Nor beauty born out of its own despair,*
> *Nor blear-eyed wisdom out of midnight oil.*

O chestnut tree, great-rooted blossomer,
Are you the leaf, the blossom or the bole?
O body swayed to music, O brightening glance,
How can we know the dancer from the dance? (CP, 245)

Here is the image of the dance as unifier. The life-denying labour of the artist is transformed by art which nurtures the body to a creativity with the soul. The beauty of the dancer is born from the love of beauty; without purpose, the dancer's beauty has no meaning, no end. It does not attempt to show the beautiful, to prove its virtue out of despair at the ugly - it simply *is* beauty. Neither does it involve the labour of the intellect, the blurred vision of meticulous creation involving thought. Like the tree swaying in the wind, the dancer sways to music. Each is an organic unity, developing of its own volition; each part indivisible, refuting all meaning and purpose.

Dance: perfect art, the body not bruised to pleasure soul. Poetry: persistently demanding intellect to clear that sybil's cave, thus the body sacrificed to the work.

Yeats' vacillation must entail 'The Choice': 'The intellect of a man is forced to choose/ Perfection of the life, or of the work' *(CP, 278)*. Yeats must always deny life whilst his art, poetry, is attributed the quality of the abstract, of Byzantium; whilst poetry is a form of language separable from the body, he will encounter divisions. He denies to 'man' the inherent perfectibility of the dancer as he denies to 'woman' the intellect: here, the 'he' of 'Michael Robartes and the Dancer' informs the 'she' of her virtue, a virtue he actually seeks:

He. *Opinion is not worth a rush;*
In this altar-piece the Knight,
Who grips his long spear so to push
That dragon through the fading light,
Loved the lady; and it's plain
The half-dead dragon was her thought,
That every morning rose again
And dug its claws and shrieked and fought.
Could the impossible come to pass
She would have time to turn her eyes,
Her lover thought, upon the glass

And on the instant would grow wise. (CP, 197)

The dragon is woman's intellect which fires opinion, the knight kills the dragon out of love for the lady. 'He' knows opinion because he has opinion, he fights the war of opinion with his spear. The dragon perpetuates the 'shriek' of female voice which prevents her from seeing herself 'upon the glass.' This image, appearance, has the instantaneous wisdom of soul and body which the dragon and spear fight hopelessly for. The image is all the lover desires, 'but bear in mind your lover's wage/ Is what your looking glass can show'; 'she' should be the unity of that physical image, that is her creation. Book knowledge is worthless compared to bodily passion:

For what mere book can grant knowledge
With an impassioned gravity
Appropriate to that beating breast
That vigourous thigh, that dreaming eye? (CP, 198)

'She' in her laconic bemusement, taking the opinions of 'he', asks 'and must no beautiful woman be/ Learned like a man?' It seems that the best wisdom of man, a creative wisdom, is the wisdom and beauty of the body, that learnedness which 'she' already has.

While Michael Angelo's Sistine roof,
His 'Morning' and his 'Night' disclose
How sinew that has been pulled tight,
Or it may be loosened in repose,
Can rule by supernatural right
Yet be but sinew. (CP, 198)

The danger of the body is countered by the fundamental ambivalence towards the division of mind from body, 'Did God in portioning wine and bread/ Give man His thought or His mere body?' What the principles of 'he' teach, though, are that 'she' 'may live in uncomposite blessedness.' That is the consequence of her beautiful form. Her beauty will lead him 'to the like'; it is germane for 'she' to embody that sensual truth which the intellect of man evades. No thought is permissible unless, of course, it is that thinking which comes of the whole body, the beautiful movement of the dancer.

... *if they*

Will banish every thought, unless
The lineaments that please their view
When the long looking glass is full
Even in the foot-sole think it too. (CP, 198)

We know 'the best modern way of teaching' and, naturally, 'they say such different things at school.'

Yeats splits the body into two essential physical forms, as he splits art into forms which are either essentially separate from the body (poetry) or essentially co-terminus with it (dance). Zarathustra is a dancer because art for him is a primacy of force, not of form. Zarathustra is recognisable as a dancer. The old man of the forest says, 'yes, I recognize Zarathustra. His eyes are clear and no disgust lurks about his mouth. Does he not go along like a dancer?" *(TSZ, 40).*

'God is dead' (TSZ, 41) - those who seek life, who do not blink at the 'fountain of delight', must not look upwards to a ubiquitous creator which is in fact a heavenly nothing. The seers must have courage, for 'is seeing, not seeing abysses? ... He who sees the abyss, but with an eagle's eyes - he who *grasps* the abyss with an eagle's claws: *he* possesses courage' *(TSZ, 298).* Courage for life-affirmation by creating; creators must draw through and beyond their body, upon the great body of universal life which is chaos. Zarathustra urges the people: 'I tell you: one must have chaos in one, to give birth to a dancing star. I tell you: you still have chaos in you' *(TSZ, 47).* Chaos is the infinite play of forces in a multiple of perspectives, yet common to all beings. Art is the unmasterable *physis* of the force of this chaos - the intensity of physical strength which creates forms, those momentary bundles of forces we impose upon chaos. All art is of the body, 'physiological.' There is no denial, it is the pleasure of the healthy body which has killed disgust at life:

One does not kill by anger but by laughter. Come, let us kill the spirit of Gravity! ...
Now I am nimble, now I fly, now I see myself under myself, now a god dances with me. (TSZ, 69)

Art as a primacy of force can offer no essential division between forms; forms are derivative of physiological strength, poetry no less than dance. The

beautiful is not an organic unity to be epitomised by particular forms - a tree, a dancer, a woman. Rather, beauty is whatever has the power to create its own reality; to transpose values through art on the basis of sensual stimulation. The ugly is that which has no life because it is powerless to create; that which reaches to the 'eternal' pretends to be of the rationalising intellect:

A little *reason to be sure, a seed of wisdom scattered from star to star - this leaven mingled with all things!*

A little wisdom is no doubt possible: but I have found this certainty in all things - that they prefer to dance *on the feet of chance.* (TSZ, 192)

Zarathustra's power of force makes life an art, it cannot separate life from art, he cannot have Yeats' ambivalence. All is a dance song of the body.

What Then?

Bringing in the balloon of the mind for impassioned creativity is a feat for strong arms because it always wants to drift off again to some new height. It is frightened of abysses and scorns the sensual, the dance songs. Nietzsche's dance song of life passes by this indolent scorn since his physiology of art cannot be acclaimed as a 'mere' sensuality, a mere hedonism. Nietzsche calls the body *'intelligente'*, it draws upon the force of chaos to create form by the only intelligence which has the style to depict the noble from the base: bodily intelligence. Its will to power is an enabling power, not a dominating imposition; it has to create beyond to allow form to emerge from chaos. The true noble keeps dancing to chaos, drawing out forms that are ever-dying, forever creating:

Alas, I have known noble men who lost their highest hope. And henceforth they slandered all high hopes. ...

'Spirit is also sensual pleasure' - thus they spoke. Then the wings of their spirit broke: now it creeps around and makes dirty what it feeds on. ...

But, by my love and hope I entreat you: do not reject the hero in your soul! Keep holy your highest hope!' (TSZ, 71)

Keeping holy despite eternal recurrence, despite death, is a courageous task. Reason as an instrument of the passions, beauty as the transposition of value, art as the creation of new values - these are by no means an abnegation of all that is not typically understood as the aesthetic. It is a demand for impassioned undertakings against reactive indifference.

On the premise that body and soul are separable, Yeats can be the poet of the 'merely' sensual, drawing a distinction between it and the political in his poem, 'Politics.' Against Thomas Mann's dictum (quoted by Yeats as an epigraph), that 'in our time the destiny of man presents its meaning in political terms', Yeats feels that sensual desire for 'that girl standing there' is a distraction from the concerns of destiny. The knowledge of the traveller, the thought and reading of the politician which lead to a concern with world affairs are opposed to the passion of desire. Once again Yeats posits a choice between two alternatives. Here the sensual is so attractive:

And maybe what they say is true
Of war and war's alarms,
But O that I were young again
And held her in my arms! (CP, 393)

Yeats did 'spin a web' out of his own bowels, though, nobly recreated his poetry. Body separable from mind, from soul, his passions would vacillate between them. His beauty is so momentary, the 'brightening glance' of the dancer, then the image of Byzantium; of the body, then not. Beauty for beauty, hardly touching life. Zarathustra's beauty can never 'leave' life, being that of positive life-affirmation, of a healthy body that eternally re-creates. Who has the strength for this, though? Who can claim that they have never wanted the peace of Yeats' soul, never yearned for the timeless, perfected beauty imagined in Byzantium, never wanted to get out of this chaos that is destined to return? And who has not identified this with a need to escape from the body?

Yeats never abandoned the perfection of the work, to which his poetry testifies. He surely had Zarathustra's courage to 'keep holy your highest hope,' but his poem 'What Then?' is haunted by Plato's ghost which taunts

his achievements from the position of the eternal Being in death. Seeking eternal significance they seem doomed to insignificance:

'The work is done,' grown old he thought,
'According to my boyish plan;
Let the fools rage, I swerved in naught,
Something to perfection brought';
But louder sang the ghost, 'What then?' (CP, 348)

Deaf to such taunts, Zarathustra's strength is in looking not to eternity but to the passionately embodied life. Yeats' ambivalence is less resolute, but extremely perceptive to the cries of the many who do seek to create beyond this eternal life.

Notes

Abbreviations used:

BGE, *Beyond Good and Evil.*
TSZ, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra.*
CP, *Collected Poems.*

1. Otto Bohlman in his book *Yeats and Nietzsche* suggests that Yeats had actually read Nietzsche as early as 1902. Bohlman chronicles Yeats' reading of Nietzsche and outlines general Nietzschean themes to be found in Yeats. I shall not chronicle their relationship but concentrate primarily upon the issue of the 'body', using very particular poems. Bohlman tends to emphasise their similarities to show the influence of Nietzsche, rather than examining the implications of their differences, too.
2. Romanticism often omits the question of the body in its search for spiritual unity. Blake, however, in *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*, does suggest the necessary unity of Body and Soul, for the Body is the source of energy for the passionate intensity that he demands challenge the powers of reason. Yeats was greatly influenced by Blake, having edited an edition of his work.
3. Quoted in Lentricchia, p. 62.

4. Yeats' aversion to reason derives in part from the association of reason and morality in literature, which could be reduced to a pedantic 'point of view.' He wrote,

'I hated and still hate ... the literature of the point of view.' (*Essays and Introductions*, p. 511)

5. Quoted T.R. Henn in *The Lonely Tower*, p.108.

6. Blake, *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*, pl. 4.

7. This is a constant Nietzschean theme. The phrase captures the persistency of Being within becoming, all form being essentially movement. TSZ, p.255.

8. The doctrine of eternal recurrence is extremely complex; varied interpretations have been placed upon it. Whilst it is sometimes attributed cosmological significance, I follow Nehamas' view that it is more cogent to accept it as a view of the self.

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THE BAD FRIEND

Chris Mounsey

> *How can I have agreed to speak of such a friend as he? Not to praise him, nor to further some notion of truth. The elements of his character, the forms of his existence, the episodes in his life, even in keeping with the research for which he felt himself responsible, to the point of irresponsibility, belong to no-one. There is no witness. The closest friends can speak only that which was near them, not the distance which was affirmed in that proximity, and the distance ceases as soon as presence ceases* (Blanchot, 'Friendship', trans. David Wright).

> *Maurice Blanchot has found a way to pose this problem in the most rigourous terms, at the level of the literary machine: how to produce, how to think about fragments whose only relationship is sheer difference ... without having recourse either to any sort of original totality, or to a subsequent totality that may not yet have come* (Deleuze and Guattari, Anti-Oedipus)

This text will not refer outside itself, in its opinions of the work of Levinas and Blanchot, which are the source of its errors. It will read part of Levinas' *Totality and Infinity*,[1] suggest what might be Blanchot's reading of the same part of the work, read Paul Davies' readings of Levinas and Blanchot in 'Difficult Friendship',[2] and read Davies' reading of Libertson's reading of Blanchot's reading of this part of Levinas. In doing so, it will necessarily be brief and rather programmatic in order to reach its conclusions within the space allotted, such conclusions that will challenge the notion that Blanchot is the 'perfect reader' of Levinas.

It will go farther, and suggest that the friendship between the two writers is not so much 'difficult' (in Davies terminology), as surprising, at least on an intellectual level. It will demonstrate that Blanchot's position is so fundamentally different from that of Levinas that Davies' suggestion of 'friendship' between the two writers cannot be seen other than as an enactment of the philosophy of Levinas. For, it will attempt to show that the

notion of closeness and distance, which characterises Levinas' notion of 'proximity', is the same as Davies' notion of 'difficult friendship'. Thus it will suggest that the work of Levinas and Blanchot have such disparate viewpoints that, as Euclidean geometry is unassimilable into Reimannian geometry, so is Blanchot's position unassimilable into Levinas' position.

The text will focus upon the notions of the 'said' and the 'neuter', to demonstrate this unassimilibility, and this will lead to serious misgivings as to the internal logic of Levinas' ethics. However, it will not shake the necessity of ethical priority, except taken now at the level of the text, rather than as a metaphysics which underlies ontology.

We will begin with a long quotation from Levinas:

> *Being is exteriority. This formula does not only mean to denounce the illusion of the subjective and the claim that objective forms alone ... merit the name of being. Such a conception would in the end destroy exteriority, since subjectivity itself would be absorbed into exteriority, revealing itself to be a moment of panoramic play. Exteriority would then no longer mean anything, since it would encompass the very interiority that justified that appellation.*
>
> *But exteriority is not yet maintained if we affirm a subject insoluble into objectivity and to which exteriority would be opposed. This time exteriority would acquire a relative meaning, as the great in relation to the small. ...Exteriority, or if one prefers, alterity, would be converted into the same. And over and beyond the relation between the interior and the exterior there would be room for the perception of this relation by a lateral view that would take in and perceive (or penetrate) their play.*[3]

This is the heart of Levinas' criticism of Heidegger, and other metaphysicians of subject and object. He is pointing to the paradox of the opposition of the inside and outside. His first move is to suggest that *if* the reality of Being is only to be accorded to that which is not the subject's consciousness, *then* there can be nothing which is the subjects's consciousness, for it would not be real; and if it were real, then it would be included in that which was exterior and thus could not be classified as interior.

His second move shows that if a fixed interiority that is not reducible to exteriority is set up, then exteriority would become mere terminology of interiority: that is, the interior, which does not reduce exteriority to itself, could not have certain knowledge of exteriority. Unless however, this set-up is seen, as Heidegger does, from a farther removed position, a sort of stage management of words which claim of themselves to let the reader experience the real *physis* of blood and earth poking through the text.

Rather than these notions, Levinas posits the 'face to face' as 'effectuating' exteriority, similarly to the second possibility described above, but "starting with a point separated from exteriority so radically that it maintains itself of itself, is me."[4] This is the mythifying move of the approach of the Other or 'proximity', which reduces ontology to the "necessarily subjective field of truth."[5] It is this subjectivity (complicated by the possibility of arbitrary opinions as to the reality of the 'curved' space and the directness of communication across it) which cause the errors which Levinas' ethics is set up to rectify. For Levinas, exteriority is 'curved' because the myth of the approach of the Other as negative or not me is that which produces the positivity of 'me' which can be radically other to exteriority. It is this making of 'me' that is the debt owed to the prior Other, which is Levinas' ethics. Here we can see that exteriority is 'curved' because all the words cannot bridge the gap between 'me' and the 'Other'. Thus all my words come back to me as if I were their guarantor, and responsible for them.

The Neuter

Having given an account of the paradox of exteriority and the solutions of Heidegger and Levinas, we will now attempt to show that for Blanchot, all solutions are illusory, and that his category of the Neuter renders his ontology as something akin to Levinas' "moment of panoramic play." That is, Blanchot denies alterity and collapses interiority and exteriority into a homogeneity of the text,[5a] where 'writing' is reduced to "tracing a circle where what is outside all circles would enter its name."[6]

To show this, we will follow the account of the relationships between the work of Levinas, Blanchot and Heidegger in the first part of Davies' 'Difficult Friendship'. In this paper, Davies attempts to show that Blanchot is the perfect reader of Levinas, and that this gives direct support for the problematic set up by Levinas' philosophy. That is, to be a reader of Levinas

is to give deference (as ethical priority) to the distance which is set up by the "point separated from exteriority so radically that it maintains itself of itself" and 'alterity'.

Levinas' claim to have "broken with the philosophy of the Neuter: with the Heideggerian being of the existent", as we have shown above, can in some sense be justified, but that "the critical work of Blanchot has so much contributed to bring out (this break)"[7], which Davies' paper attempts to demonstrate, is not the case. He shows that there are two ways in which Levinas is misled. In the first, Blanchot appears to be allied with Heidegger in that both isolate a moment in their encounter with the (art) work, a something in the object that cannot be subsumed into category (something that is "the category of category"[8]), but that refuses to be transcendental. This, he suggests is not balked at by either as some piece of religious irrationalism, but taken as something given to thought that thought cannot think. For Davies, this is "a thinking of the other", but we will demonstrate that this thinking is of the same type in which Levinas can refer to the point radically separated from reality without succumbing to that problem of exteriority and interiority we have discribed above. It is this quasi-transcendentality which we will later find problematic in Blanchot's terminology.

The second problem of Levinas' claim for Blanchot's support is also one of terminology. The language of the ethics of the 'face to face' make it difficult to talk of 'breaking with' in the asymmetry of the curved space of discourse, for 'breaking with' is to stand in judgement on the other, to reject it, and thus to speak in a way that may not be spoken. Similarly, it is difficult for Levinas to place Blanchot 'between' Heidegger and himself, so that Blanchot might comment on their being different, as this admits to a topography of the space of discourse which is not available to him: it introduces a 'between' which can only exist if there is some certainty of the 'Other', which Levinas' metaphysics does not allow.

Thus Davies must find another topography into which Blanchot's discourse may fit, and thus comment upon both Heidegger and Levinas. This will be that of 'interruption' and 'neuter', and is found to be of Blanchot's own devising. This will also give status to the claim that Levinas has 'broken with' Heidegger, but to the detriment of Levinas' whole ethical metaphysics.

If we continue for a while to follow the course of Davies' paper, we find that at one moment Blanchot seems to be Heideggerian and the next Levinasian. We can see at one moment Blanchot's terminology of the neuter is seen to be associated with "*l'oubli de l'etre*", and thus he is Heideggerian, while at the next Blanchot is seen to be a little ashamed of this, which returns him to the Levinasian fold. Davies is engaged in a very complex manipulation of levels of meaning, in which that which occurs on the surface of the text may be undermined by marginal occurrences in footnotes. He cites the examples of Blanchot's writing: "The thought of E. Levinas is separated radically from the other as neuter", and "Given the way *we* understand Heidegger's *sein*, it does not correspond to the way I understand the neuter," as Blanchot's being Heiddeggerian. These statements are, however, undermined by the occurrences of "*honte*" and "*honteux*" (shame and shameful) in footnotes, which marks Blanchot as having Levinasian ethics.[9] It is these tactics which will appear to construct a 'between' in Levinas' topography, from which Blanchot can comment upon Levinas; however, as we stated above, there can be no such 'between' for Levinas. Thus, this move by Davies will be seen to marginalise Blanchot's position in favour of Levinas'.

As a departure towards this conclusion, we would suggest that Blanchot's position is radically different from that of Levinas, in that he applies the terminology 'neuter' to the other. And it is here that he can be supposed to be 'between' Heidegger and Levinas. For the application of a term to the 'other' marks a closeness *and* distance from Levinas: *closeness* in that they both write of the other, and *distance* in that Levinas cannot allow anything to be said of the 'Other'. Also, the term 'neuter' marks a closeness and distance from Heidegger: closeness in that Blanchot finds the 'neuter' to be something that is irreducible in the object, and distance in that he states that "Being is still a *name* for the *oubli*."[10]

This naming of Being is not the blood and earth of *physis*, but is an affirmation within Blanchot's own tripartite distinction between Poetry, Philosophy and Literature. It is from this distinction too that we may come closer to an understanding of 'neuter'. Again we will follow Davies text as he discusses Blanchot's paper *'L'Etrange et l'etranger'*, and it will be here that we will find problems in Levinas' claims for support from Blanchot.

Poetry, for Blanchot, affirms; Philosophy interrogates; but Literature has no specificity, it neither questions nor affirms, but that which is affirmed

disappears and "meanwhile returns - does not yet return - from this disappearance onwards"[11]. Davies notes that the whole distinction is strategic and not to be upheld, its strategy leading to literature's becoming a general term for the inexhaustible estrangement or alienation of meaning. Here we find an extreme closeness to Levinas' project, for the estrangement of meaning is "as if on a Riemann Surface."[12] The stranger that is meaning is the *experience* of his approach, rather than being given any classically Western Metaphysical terminology of vision.

This is also Levinas' tactic, that is, to go beyond the vision of seeing, beyond the height of height - beyond, then, the visual metaphors that have built Western Metaphysics to that which has no subject to do the seeing and so is 'strange'. Here both Levinas and Blanchot seem to be gesturing away from the movement of the text to some stillness, some pause for breath, some description of what cannot be described. For Levinas stillness is to become the 'said' of *Otherwise than Being*, becoming an a-temporal point. For Blanchot it is marked by the words "disparition - alienation - absence - alteration", none of which have a subject, all of which are verbally neutral, all of which may be said to 'describe' the stranger. But to describe at a distance, marking a movement punctuated by pauses, the edges of a fragment and its unassimilability into a system.

Here Levinas and Blanchot appear to be extremely close in their understanding of meaning. For meaning is the movement of generations, where the father may say "My child is a stranger, but a stranger who is not only mine, for he is me."[13] This is the identity of fecundity, in an idiosyncratic reading of Nietzsche's eternal recurrence. This *other* is synchrony, stability, 'said', to which all sayings return as "eternal returns" of the same, which are self-identifiable but never quite the same; "eternal returns" that do not overlap either spatially or temporally, but feel that they are readings of the same a-temporal 'said'. There is a possible consensus between the word and what is spoken about that avoids the problem of reference by requiring only a partial 'recognition' in an a-temporal framework which does not comment upon any spatial matters. But Blanchot finds that this may also be problematic.

Where, for Levinas, the negativity which comes in the approach of the stranger, the other, gives motion to the text from a distance, for Blanchot, there is still motion in the text even when there is no work done, in the

moments that are 'still'. Blanchot sees a worklessness (desoeuvrement) in the text, not in an opposition to work done, but as an affirmation of the emptiness, the 'neutrality', of the literary space. Orpheus turns to Eurydice and she turns to stone, but even after Orpheus is called to responsibility for his words/work, the road out of the underworld is still there looking back at Orpheus. Outside the positive-negative binarism of the work done, the 'other' of the text is always already there, always neutral, a movement behind the energy of the play of words, a linear temporality, taken to be always already part of the surface, as the white paper around the letter or the black screen around the pixel, and even more than that, being the temporal element of reading that is indissociable from the text's spatiality. Otherness for Blanchot is not radically other but a part of the 'neutral', or at least to be comprehended with respect to the 'neutral'.

While Levinas' text must freeze time in order to become the condition of its own possibility, Blanchot finds that the aporias in the text itself which make the totality of the meaning of the text impossible, the sites of double reading,[14] can only exist against the possibility of a 'neutral', which is the condition and possibility of the text in the first place. What Levinas has done is to "acclimatize and domesticate the neuter", substituting for it "the law of the impersonal and the rule of the universal"[15] as the 'said'.

What Blanchot insists upon is having no distinctions - a text that is 'curved' (in the same way as Levinas' intersubjective space) and always propelling forwards (the neuter); a (w)hole which cannot be determined in terms of internality and externality, which is all surface, and which has no signifier/signified opposition and thus has no need to substitute a-temporality for time to guarantee the signified. Armed with this definition of textuality we can proceed to a reading of Blanchot's essay "Interruptions", which will illuminate the unassimilibility of Blanchot into the work of Levinas.

The Interruption

Interruption is defined in two ways, both under the general heading of "the gap (which) makes becoming possible. Discontinuity (which) assures continuity of understanding."[16] The first level of interruption is necessary for meaning in that there must be pauses between sentences, stops in order to understand, which constitute the dialectic of all discourses. This type of interruption is opposed to "the terrible monologues of Hitler", seen as a

mystifying move rather than a moment of reason or comprehension. The second level connects the idea of the 'neuter' to interruption.

Here the distance between the speakers is not the reducible, but the irreducible distance which has elicited the various philosophical moves of considering the interlocutor as an objective fact; considering her as another 'I', who though different, shares some equality in speech; or by erasing the distance between the two by evoking familiarity. These Blanchot has little time for as they all tend towards a simple unity, where the exterior (the interlocutor) is reduced to the interior, or 'my view', and as such are steps of faith and thus have no need to account for themselves. What interests Blanchot, however, is the irreducible distance in which what is at stake is the stangeness between the interlocutors that resides in being an infinite separation, and which does not attempt any comprehension of that distance, let alone a reduction of the other.

This is, for Blanchot, "otherness which is under the sign of the neutral."[17] We must try to amplify the import of this sentence, for Blanchot has separated it off from the rest of the text, and it appears to have a tranformational character upon what follows. Considering the definition of Blanchot's textuality given at the end of the previous section, otherness cannot remain radically other, and can only be collapsed into the 'neutral' of the constructed space which exists between what appears to be subjective and what appears to be objective.

If it would seem that neither the distance nor the interlocutor may be accounted for in the same, but the giving of terminology to both is to make this very move, then the category of categories, the 'neutral', must include these syncategorematics "under its sign": that is, the opposition of distance and interlocutor to the same will become doubtful. Thus, whereas for Levinas the approach of the other fails to be categorised, and the a-temporality of the 'said' is appealed to as "the distance of the distance" between 'me' and 'alterity'; for Blanchot, this would be to make a move which forbids itself, as the temporality of the 'neutral' continues even when one appeals to a-temporality.

Thus for Blanchot, a-temporality becomes mythical and hence founders.

We can read the next sentence in this light: "The presence of the other, understood as neutral, brings into the field of relations a distortion which hinders any straightforward communication and any relation to unity."[18] The presence of that which seems to be other can only be understood as 'neutral', as not-other, for otherness itself would be an a-temporality (a point of certainty whose unavailability to direct knowledge is its very certainty), but this presence will *nevertheless* bring about a distortion in the field of relations, for the notion of communication would tend to collapse if there was no other, however illusory, with which to communicate.

At this point we may consider Davies' reading of Libertson on Levinas and Blanchot.[19] Davies points out that Libertson "argues that Blanchot's notion of Neutral *parole*, the Neutral *entretien* leads him to take a panoramic view of proximity".[20] Libertson is suggesting that the 'neutral' is a fixed point outside the play of meaning of the text, from which one may view both interlocutors of the *entretien*. He sees the 'neutral' as a fixed 'between', located as a separation of distinct interlocutors. For this reason, Libertson criticises Blanchot for an ineradicable Hegelianism, that is, a making dialectical of Levinas' ethical space. Davies in turn criticises this reading of Blanchot, as such an overview is not available to his reading of Blanchot as participating in Levinas' ethics. Thus Davies rejects Libertson's view of the 'neutral' as the "happening of separation", which is not possible in the asymmetrical space of Levinas' proximity.

However, following our reading of Blanchot, we would see the 'neutral', as "the happening of the space of text" which is not reducible to any fixed subjects of communication - even if one begins "with a point separated from exteriority so radically that it maintains itself of itself, is me" - and therefore ends up with an asymmetrical space of discourse. We would suggest that the neutral is a "point sign" towards that which is necessary for the text to occur, but which does not go beyond the occurrence of the text itself. Thus we would say after Deleuze and Guattari that the "agents [of communication] are not persons any more than the relations [of communication] are intersubjective."[21]

It is for this reason that, having come this far with Davies, we must question his project, for in his criticism of Libertson he falls back upon Levinas' position, and thus must reduce Blanchot's textuality to Levinas' ethical

space, irreparably deforming Blanchot's notion of the text in the topography of Levinas' ethics. Davies writes:

> *And even if the neuter is the non-general, doesn't its insistence and repetition blur the careful and hard won distinction Levinas makes between the other and the third* (illeity).[22]

The 'neuter', in our reading of Blanchot, does not only blur these distinctions, but blurs all distinctions which attempt to go 'beyond' anything but surface of text. We would rather take the neutral to its conclusion as the non-general and criticise these distinctions in Levinas. For the reason of the superficiality of Blanchot's text, it will be useful to draw on mathematics, to illustrate the radical difference in the positions of Blanchot and Levinas.

Riemannian Geometry

To accept Davies' account of difficult friendship would be to valorise all the similarities between Levinas' and Blanchot's work, including their ethical interests, their use of textual strategies to go beyond the bounds of what may be written, and their recorded intellectual debts to one another. It would be to mark this closeness, while also noticing the distance between their notions of alterity. This would seem to have been the source of Davies' title, combining Levinas' *Difficile Liberté* [23] with Blanchot's 'Friendship',[24] in an enactment of 'Difficult Friendship' that all friendships are taken to be. We can see now that this would only be an enactment of Levinas' position, for Blanchot's notion of the neutral eradicates any distance in its textuality. This may be demonstrated by a brief discussion of the 'Interruptions' essay.

The subtitle of the first section, 'as if on a Riemann surface', seems to follow Levinas' curvature, and thus asymmetry of the intersubjective space, but we would suggest that the properties of a Riemann surface are one dimensional and do not need to fall back on any 'outside' to analyse its shape. Thus, though Blanchot's space is curved, its curvature does not produce the asymmetry of Levinasian ethics. This is because although Euclidean geometry's fifth postulate is that any point not on a line falls on another line parallel to the first line, Riemannian geometry denies the notion of parallelism.

To give an account of a non-planar surface in Euclidean terms requires at least three intersecting planes, usually taken to cross at right angles to each other, and crossing at a single point taken to be zero. These planes are used as references for the three spatial dimensions, from which parallel lines are drawn to give a complex definition of the surface to be analysed. Thus a definition of the non-planar shape will be built up from parallel lines drawn from each of these planes, and will depend upon a structure outside the shape, placed over it as a three dimensional graticule from which measurements are taken within a given, quantified, fixed space.

Farkas and Kra's definition of a Riemann surface is "a complex 1-dimensional connected (analytic) manifold,[25] which gestures away from the possibility of using any outside to give an analysis of it. Ahlfors and Sario write,

> *Riemann came to realize that for full generality it is necessary to abandon the complex plane as the carrier of functions. The reason is that analyticity is a local property ... and ... when only the local properties are retained, the carrier becomes ... abstractly defined.*[26]

In a Riemannian analysis of a non-planar shape, the notion of 1-dimensionality reduces the multi-valued functions of Euclidean geometry to simples, dealing with position and place rather than measure and quantity, with all the unnecessary restrictions these concepts incur.

Just as with Blanchot's notion of textuality, there is no appeal to an outside or an a-temporal structure to act as an arbiter in Riemannian geometry. Further,

> *The theory of Riemann surfaces has a geometric and an analytic part. The former deals with the axiomatic definition of a Riemann surface, methods of construction, topological equivalence. and conformal mappings of one Riemann surface on another. The analytic part is concerned with the existence and properties of functions that have a special character connected with the conformal structure, for instance, subharmonic, harmonic and analytic functions.*[27]

Thus to define the whole non-planar shape is not an issue for Riemannian geometry, for this would necessitate the introduction an extraneous element (parallelism) into the definition of localities. The important step the Riemann took was in pointing out that in analysing any point on a surface, the local characteristics of that point will give an abstract definition of the whole plane, and there is therefore no need to resort to parallelism.

To use this as a model of language, as Blanchot does, would suggest the single surface of his textuality, within which positivity and negativity are plays in a series of arbitrary, local, ephemeral analytics, each of which defines the geometry of the whole topography abstractly in each analysis. This whole topography would be the 'neutral' in Blanchot's terminology, the text being the moment of analysis of that topography, which in a Leibnizian way would contain the whole universe (of language) within each moment, and in no hierarchy.

The notion of the neutral thus has a double outcome. First, its unidirectional temporality makes of the text a continuous surface; but more importantly, this very unidirectionality that is the continuous surface of the text has no need for otherness to explain its shape, its meaning. Nevertheless, the text will appear to curve back on itself writing stories for itself to explain itself. "Outside", write Blanchot,"... is in all speech, but also risks turning into what eludes speech."[28] Whether there is or is not anything to guarantee language is not at issue, for it need no longer be decided in the one-dimensional text, what is important is that language *attempts* to create an outside; and in its circularity appears to be successful. The outside appears to be real, but is a created space filled with apparent objects, which to attempt to define is merely to extend the text indefinitely. The indefinite extension of Blanchot's textual curvature does not close back upon itself, for if it did, an explanation would be able to account for everything in fact rather than in appearance.

Nor is the topography of the space of the text able to be symmetrical (Hegelian) or asymmetrical (Levinasian). This is because there is no outside position from which to gain a sufficiently panoramic view to make any sense of subjectivity or intersubjectivity, or any position "separated from exteriority so radically that it maintains itself of itself" from which to posit the existence of an a-temporal.

In *The Writing of a Disaster*, Blanchot writes that "laws - prosaic laws - free us, perhaps from the Law by substituting for the invisible majesty of time the various constraints of space."[29] Here we can read the 'neuter' in "the invisible majesty of time", and the stories of reference outside the text in the "constraints of space." But the freedom is illusory, merely part of a self-constructed, self-constructing space.

Similarly, Levinas' notion of 'proximity', which names the approach of alterity, must also be criticised by Blanchot as it is just another prosaic law, an illusion, a mythification inherent in the temporality of the 'neuter', the constant pulse of the text. That Levinasian ethics is based upon an originary interruption is just another story, just another attempt to give a guaranteeing depth to the surface of the text that has no more value than any other story. At the end of *La Folie du jour* Blanchot writes: "A story? No. No stories, never again."[30]

Postscript: Ethics

But what can we say, "Fishing, with the arid plain behind me/ Shall I at least set my lands in order?"[31] On this planar text, linear temporality seems too smooth, too dry for any seeds to be nurtured and grow. But then there is the fragment that Blanchot has shored against his ruins. The fragment which cannot be taken up into any system, the gift of the poet to the philosopher. This fragment which is the constituting of fragments, as a temporality may not guarantee any particular reading or therefore any proscriptive ethics, but this in itself gives the power that generates an ethical.

What we would suggest is that Levinas' giving a status to an a-temporal 'said' in order to give meaning to a temporal 'saying' is committing a paralogism of understanding. For he mistakes the conditions of understanding for understanding itself. This is done by suggesting that understanding must partake in some way of a total understanding which he calls the 'said', rather than allowing the field of totality to be part of the saying as it continues.[32]

Blanchot's treatment of the text as one dimensional and fragmentary, however, would account for both the totality gestured at, and the incompleteness, of understanding. On the one hand, the inherent incompleteness of understanding would come about because meaning can only be understood as a local ephemeral analytic, which privileging to

locality would also generate the fragmentariness of fragments. On the other hand, totality would be gestured at as the whole is abstractly defined by the fragmentary analysis, the local meaning. This can be seen to be what understanding is, and how it would separate sense from nonsense, for nonsense would not map conformally onto any area of the abstractly defined plane.[33]

Thus we can see that the abstractness of totality cannot be used to give weight to any hierarchy of locally defined fragments. This will in turn reject all forms of systematic ethics as no particular system can be said to be more correct than any another, except in an arbitrary way. For all speaking/writing will be as if for the first time, since there is no guarantee of the status of any text, or of any ontology or other foundation. Thus there is no guarantee of any system, even numbering, and even the notion of pluralism will collapse before the fragmentariness of fragments, of all speaking/writing. Neither is this fragmented plane monistic, nor it is eternally the same, nor is it *L'Entretian Infini*; it is just another story.

Notes and Bibliography

1. *Totality and Infinity*, E. Levinas. tr. Lingis, The Hague, Nijhoff, (1979), (Hereafter, TI).
2. 'Difficult Friendship', P. Davies, *Research in Phenomenology*, vol. 18, 1988, (Hereafter, DF).
3. TI p.290.
4. Ibid.
5. Ibid.

5a. Text here must be understood in a similar way to Derrida's notion of pan-textualism suggested by "*Il n'y a pas d'hors text.*"

6. 'Interruptions', tr. R. Waldrop/P. Auster, from *L'Entretien Infini*, M. Blanchot, Paris, Gallimard (1969).
7. DF p.150.
8. Davies' terminology.
9. DF p.153.
10. DF p.153.
11. 'L'Etrange et l'etranter', *Nouvelle Revue Français*, No. 166 (1961) p.163.

12. Subtitle of Blanchot's Essay 'Interruptions'.
13. TI p.267.

14. Here "double reading" must be read in double, for it means both points of double bind, and also the possibility of future readings of the whole text.

15. DF p.158.
16. 'Intrruptions'.
17. Ibid.
18. Ibid.
19. J. Libertson, *Proximity: Levinas, Blanchot, Bataille and Communication*, The Hague, Nijhoff 1982.
20. DF p.165.
21. *Anti-Oedipus*, Deleuze and Guattari Tr, M. Seem, London, Atholone, (1984) p.42.
22. DF p.167.
23. *Difficile Libert*, E. Levinas, Paris, Albin Michel (1963).
24. 'Friendship', M. Blanchot, Tr. D. Wright from *L'Amitie*. Paris, Gallimard (1971).
25. Farkas & Kra, *Riemann Surfaces*, Los Angeles USCP (1977).
26. Ibid.
28. 'Interruptions'.
29. *Writing of Disaster*, M. Blanchot, tr. A Smock, Nebraska, University of Nebraska Press (1986) p.144.
30. *The Madness of the Day*, M. Blanchot, tr. L. Davis, New York, Station Hill (1981), p.18.
31. 'The Waste Land', T.S. Eliot, from the *Complete Poems and Plays*, London, Faber (1969), p.74.

32. A quote from Deleuze and Guattari's *Anti-Oedipus* will serve to illuminate this point:

> *We believe only in totalities that are peripheral. And if we discover such a totality alongside various separate parts, it is a whole of these particular parts but does not totalise them; it is a unity of all those particular parts but does not unify them; rather it is added to them as a new part fabricated separately.*

33. See p.22 above, and Ahlfors and Sario quote.

MACBETH[1], LANGUAGE, INHERITANCE

Douglas Burnham

Ia

A question that refuses to be merely conventional: just who is Macbeth? The Macbeth/Duncan relationship forms itself along a single axis, both figures one-sided to a fault. Macbeth appears unequivocally as "cruel by nature" (he most unfeelingly cuts off and displays the head of an enemy who had, in defeat, committed suicide with his family); Duncan enters as unkingly, so "soft and gentle" that he constitutes a threat to the state's security - indeed, the rebellion that Macbeth was called upon to crush began over precisely this softness and laxity as regards state criminals. The bi-pole is a Janus-faced phenomenon, for the two are related by blood, through a common royal grandfather. "The mean virtue betwixt these two extremities" might have made both a great king and captain. The princes, Duncan's sons, are untested in battle and state affairs, and consequently may be accounted too young to rule, should the king their father suddenly leave the throne. Macbeth seems the logical heir, just as he already commands the chief military post. Thus, as Duncan proclaims one of these sons Prince of Cumberland, Macbeth has two, clear, outstanding motives for regicide. There exists a third 'motive', although not in Macbeth's own experience: the "wholesome" and "commendable" laws he will introduce as King in the ten years of his reign prior to the re-eruption of his native cruelty. We can understand, pity, and perhaps even cheer (but not aloud) this Macbeth - he borders on magnificence, on being the saviour of a war-torn Scotland.

Ia
Introduction

All of these statements are almost false. That is, with respect to Shakespeare.

Paradoxically, a scholar's most hypersensitive awareness often centres on precisely what he desires should least influence him. As this essay's readers will have more or less quickly noticed, the above description of Macbeth and Duncan is not (explicitly) Shakespeare's, but from Holinshed's *Chronicles of*

England, Scotland and Ireland, Shakespeare's most obvious direct source for *his* play. That "more or less quickly" - commensurate with the "almost false" - will be one exploration of this essay.

This slightly deceitful game I have just played, and which I hope to be forgiven, was designed to illustrate the kind of textual issues involved in an exploration of Shakespeare *vis-à-vis* his sources. Any Shakespearean student, and any man educated or up on current events in Shakespeare's own time - because, for example, Banquo was said to be the founder of the Stewart (Stuart) line, and thus the story was in contemporary circulation - would have been aware of the ghost of Holinshed haunting Shakespeare's text, its surface as well as its "underside" or "flesh", but still might not have seen this haunting *as* spirit; that is, might not have "minded" its presence. And even thoroughly aware of this spectre, we cannot exorcise it - instead, we exercise it, strengthen its grip on the text in the very act of habituating ourselves to it. We begin to see the work it accomplishes there, the necessity of its presence to that text's stature: the tension between these two texts sparks an energy which drives Shakespeare's play in its emotional as well as ideological success. This essay will follow the trace of this spark through the play where it will illuminate a detailed philosophy (which, here, is to already say ideology) of language, power and nobility. The character of Macbeth will be destroyed in order to be reassembled at the play's tragic closure, a closure which is, at the same moment, a political and metaphysical statement.

First, though, another game.

II

Immediately, we sense that Shakespeare contradicts Holinshed's evaluations. Not Macbeth but Lady Macbeth asks to be inhabited by cruelty, while Macbeth is "full o' th' milk of human kindness"; similarly, Macbeth's head-cutting follows on no pathetic suicide, and thus does not differ from what the noble Macduff does to Macbeth at the play's end. Of course, Duncan's position reverses as well: we seem him order, with martial haste, the execution of a chief criminal offender in the rebellion. That Duncan "hath borne his faculties so meek" *(1.7.17)* counts as an outstanding virtue, and is Shakespeare's deep, if highly condensed, bow to Macbeth's own ten years of "good" rule in Holinshed. Malcolm, Duncan's eldest son, has fought in the battle himself, and has only recently been released from captivity. Both of

these facts eliminate and reverse what in Holinshed we could count as motives for murder. Further, there exists no indication that Macbeth is Duncan's cousin, for the word 'cousin' signifies merely comradeship-in-arms and not a blood relation when used by Malcolm in act V. What is magnificent, or even notable, about Macbeth is the existential fact of his crime and nothing more.

II

Immediately, we sense that Shakespeare preserves Holinshed's formulations intact. Macbeth cannot halt the bloody images that haunt him, and his first thoughts on hearing Malcolm made heir apparent are only of the necessary enlargement of his future crimes. Similarly, his greed dares him, in full consciousness, to "jump the life to come" - to risk, that is, his immortal soul - for power in the here and now; he is always himself fully aware of what he does, and his scheming ambition simply swamps his conscience. It must be remembered that the details of the murder of Duncan (the slaying of the two chamberlains, in particular) stem from a different story out of Holinshed. There, this deed is judged even more harshly than that of Macbeth proper. Shakespeare's importation of it testifies anew to Macbeth's ingenious and cruel ambition. Again, Duncan and his line are pathetic creatures: Duncan so far from the real world that he is not only unaware of the outcome of the rebellion, but - what is truly ridiculous - entirely unaware of a *second* war met, fought, and won. His son, Malcolm,upon learning of his father's murder, merely says - and we can only imagine blandly - "O, by whom?" *(2.3.102)*. We have no evidence that Malcolm fought, merely that he was held captive. Thus, Duncan's placing (and its blatant lack of political timing) of this ineffectual prince in the nearest position to the throne can only be interpreted as an act of fond senility; Macbeth, Duncan's "cousin" as in Holinshed, can only see this as a gross injustice both to himself and to Scotland. Macbeth's crime originates in the fateful conjunction of overriding, relentless ambition and the most compelling of political and personal motives.

III

The point of this exercise in stubborn (but not unheard of) reading is that the ghost of Holinshed, inherited by Shakespeare, makes sense of, "possesses", what is already there "in writing", in Shakespeare's text. We cannot arrive at a clear, unambiguous concept of Macbeth as a character, in relation to the

plot or the other characters, without Holinshed either as foil or source for Shakespeare's version. Shakespeare's Macbeth has no character of his own.

Shakespeare, however, knows this: he uses our acquiescence in this haunting in order to present a Macbeth who is precisely *not* clear, and thus towards whom our relationship can *evolve*. (The most fascinating example of this is the progressive undermining of the signification of the word "cousin.") Shakespeare releases this text to the audience and to posterity where he knows the sharp die of Holinshed will coin it and give his Macbeth initial value: Shakespeare's Macbeth lends himself to interpretation along the strict bipolar channels of Holinshed. The paradoxes in Shakespeare's characterization, however, avoid flattening Macbeth out into vagueness precisely to the extent that they will allow an opposing (indeed, precisely opposite) interpretation to have always been present. By this means, Shakespeare accomplishes a unique reversal: to allow for and then bar Holinshed's Macbeth entrance to the play. At the least, this results in a heightening of Macbeth's dramatic fall from "grace", and thus a corresponding magnification of *Macbeth* in its artistic and tragic impact.

More importantly, Macbeth's 'confusion' of two selves, and the dialectical resolution in the last moments of the play, pass thematic judgement on the ideological forces among which the play must carefully negotiate. I say carefully, for I believe that some recent criticism has underestimated its enemy in believing that "mouth honour" to the dominant ideology was the only means wielded by writers in the support of that ideology.[2] *Macbeth*, in my reading, shows subtle and profound strategies at work; dominant ideology too can be smuggled. These strategies, however, in their complexity must necessarily put everything at risk, even the very meaning of the word "success", in order to be successful. The success will not be forthcoming, due to transcendental conditions behind the risk itself. However, to reiterate, the strategies involved merit study.

IVa

In asking the question "who is Macbeth" and expecting an answer, we raise the question with respect to his guilt. The various contradictions we have been exploring have precisely this content. One element has yet to be examined: the witches.

Shakespeare's inheritance from Holinshed contains the witches' prophecy scene in great detail. But Holinshed does not have Macbeth become "rapt" in the witches' presence as Shakespeare does. Commentators have suggested that Macbeth was thus startled, or overcome with bloody images and premature guilt, because he had *already* thought of the prospect of murder. But we have no comments like Hamlet's "O my prophetic soul" to clue us in, nor any suggestive aside until considerably later in the scene. We will uncover both a more simple and more adequate explanation.

Another, seemingly unrelated, accrual: the presence of the witches in a scene and a half prior to Macbeth entering the play. This, certainly, creates the tone of Shakespeare's work, or more literally its atmosphere, for its action then takes place under the cover of fantastic and evil forces, and these find correlative echo in the oppressively claustrophobic and frantic pace to the play. But also we hear of, and then actually see, the witches' magical power[3] in these same short scenes: they cast a spell.

> ALL *The weird sisters, hand in hand,*
> *Posters of the sea and land,*
> *Thus do go about, about:*
> *Thrice to thine, and thrice to mine,*
> *And thrice again, to make up nine.*
> *Peace! The charm's wound up.*
>
> MACBETH *So foul and fair a day I have not seen.* (1.3.32-)

This is Macbeth's first line, and already an inheritance. His words more than simply echo the sisters' chant "fair is foul and foul is fair" *(1.1.10)*, they seem determined by it. The witches' language is manifestly a language of power, which forces itself to be heard, remembered, repeated. Modern commentators mark this echo, of course, but although they usher in a commanding magic to other Shakespearean plays, little is made of the "charm" which winds Macbeth up like a toy, and makes him rapt (from Latin *rapere*, to seize, and thus significantly related to "rape"). Particularly in a tragedy, it seems, the hero must act, think, and above all *speak* with a great deal of freedom. Time and again in critical texts one can feel this "forgotten" rule immaterially at work pre-empting or effacing any question of the witches' influence. But here, we simply find Macbeth made "rapt" by the magic spell, and words

placed in his mouth - *constrained* from the beginning, then, his tragedy will be, as Sophocles' Oedipus', to always *believe* that he is completely free.

IVb

In a similar vein, consider that Macbeth is *made* Cawdor, a movement exterior to patrilineal - and thus 'natural' - inheritance towards an 'artificial' naming given its validity only by the power of the king to name. Macbeth's new title is thus both an involuntary (albeit welcomed) inheritance, and a displacement outside rightful lineage. "Nothing is but what is not," *(1.3.141)* does not only answer to Macbeth's "horrible imaginings" of murder, but also to his sudden, radical removal from that single name inheritance (an inheritance the expectation and the fulfilment of which do not fall sequentially in time in the same manner as other events) by which he had always defined his being. Not just the removal of the father figure, then, but the exchange of the father like a commodity. Macbeth's not having a son to inherit (who could then, at least, claim 'tradition' and the "lineal hand" as authority[4]) leaves him isolated and agonized in the unnatural and artificial.

Va

The impact of the witches and the first fury of events is to alter Macbeth's whole language. In Holinshed, the weird sisters omit telling Banquo that the condition for his sons ruling is his own murder. In Shakespeare this becomes, "Lesser than Macbeth, and greater. Not so happy, yet much happier" *(1.3.65)*. In this same mould Shakespeare casts "fair is foul and foul is fair" *(1.1.10)*, "the battle's lost and won" *(1.1.4)*, and so forth. As a paradox, "the battle's lost and won" hardly merits mention: that victory semantically requires the co-presence of defeat is no profound observation. However, the play brims with victories bound closely up with defeats in a more interesting sense: Macbeth's gaining of the title Cawdor marks the beginning of his residence under the witches' power; Duncan's victory over one rebel Cawdor defines and situates his fall to the next; and "nothing in his life/ Became him like the leaving it" describes the victory and defeat of both Cawdors (and Siward's son to boot), since Macbeth too stands at his most magnificent in the last lines of his last scene. Virtually every word from the witches is prophecy - this verifies their magic power and draws attention to their influence over Macbeth. Macbeth picks up these paradoxes and makes them his "own":

"This supernatural soliciting
Cannot be ill, cannot be good ...
... and nothing is
But what is not" (1.3.130-42).

Again and again we shall see that Macbeth's whole pattern of thought falls predetermined from the rich, paradoxical language of the witches.

Vb

Significantly, in the second prophecy scene, Macbeth is forbidden to speak to the apparitions, he must only listen, absorb, or rather *be* "amazed". So, that Macbeth eventually repudiates the witches with "Infected be the air whereon they ride,/ And damned all those that trust them!" *(4.1.148)*, is (at least for now) just so much "boasting like a fool" *(4.1.153)*, for these figures have selected their prophecies carefully to be temptations and seem like instructions.

Damned indeed. So far from asserting Macbeth's independence of speech, thought and act, he is even further embroiled in their logic and language. He trusts his life to the literalness of their words, he takes them 'at their word', which is to say, by communicative convention, he seeks out the one, easiest, deep structure and anchors the signifier there. But why? Macbeth 'equivocates' himself, after all, and well. How, we ask, can he possibly be so innocent? Why does he not *see* the visual clue of the bloody child and realize there *is* a way to not be "of woman born"? Again, and more obviously, why does he not notice the crowned child carrying the tree and thus understand that the forest has a way, outside of all nightmares, to 'advance' on Dunsinane? His naivete is terrifying. The play will answer these questions by positing philosophic significance to the distinction between sight and sound.

VI

In this second prophecy scene we have just discussed, what one finds unsettling are precisely the ambiguous power relations depicted. The witches do acknowledge that these apparitions are their "masters" *(4.1.63)*, and further, we recognize among the apparitions hierarchies of potency, but these "masters" float in and out pronouncing fate. There is no sense in which their elevated position generates or commands Macbeth's fate, only pronounces it

clothed in a particular surface structure - which, certainly, alters Macbeth's thinking, acting and speaking *about* his fate, and thus accelerates his downfall, yet seems to not also exert power over the battle tactics of the English, and certainly less over the particulars of Macduff's birth. Thus these "apparitions", though called masters, perform like puppets themselves, and even their visual form imitates (and occasionally dis-ambiguates, as we have noticed) their message. They *are* the messages, not subjectivities; they generate little original discourse, and fail to act the founding gesture of power which would give the first glimmer of meaning to Macbeth's manipulation.[5]

So whose language is it? Macbeth doomed to be "puppet", that is, to what hand? The witches', their "masters'"? One looks in vain for a pinnacle of power in these never-ending gradations, a position of power and of a free transcendental subject prior to its language and action - this pinnacle is nowhere to be found. One can speculate that some contemporary poet understandably felt this eerie lack needed filling, and thus created Hecate and a whole aristocratic economy of evil, mythological power. The Hecate scene seeks to animate and even humanize the source of Macbeth's plight in particular, and "the close contriver of all harms" in general. Certainly, this is one reason why that scene begs to be called an interpolation: it just does not fit in. Within the play, power and language have no ultimate source among the forces of evil, and no anthropomorphized evil genius or devil holds the strings. Shakespeare refuses to allow matters to be so simple: Macbeth's and the witches' language is never only a symptom of their corruption.

VII

This absence of power source accomplishes, as well, the redemption of the tragedy as tragedy, the re-inscription of Macbeth's guilt. As long as the witches hold sway over him, he is in some way innocent, and their free activity assumes the guilt. From Holinshed too, there are motives, outside determinations. Thus, a violation of the traditional view of a tragedy: no action or flaw in this man leads to his fall from greatness and to his death. But these appeals to innocence are rendered invalid, first by Holinshed's exorcism, and then by the understanding of inherited power in the play which admits of no originally free power anywhere. The concept of accrual alone remains - change within constraints, marketplace freedom, a historical *and* economic understanding of human activity: precisely the explanation capitalism, with its particular and simultaneous understandings of value and

participation, must give. By his nature as representative figure Macbeth participates, and has always participated, in this economy. This is why one cannot fail, in accordance with the play's dramatic success, to (reluctantly) recognize the necessity of Macbeth's guilt and disinvest one's support for the character: in the end, there exists no one else to be guilty. Macbeth becomes sole tragic hero.

But this recognition of the imperative of social forces does not close the matter philosophically. For Shakespeare, such forces, wherever they qualify humanist freedom, always are associated with language. Rather, language *is* social force, at least in its negative modality. This language - language in general - is undoubtedly the vehicle for the breakup of the solidarity of Macbeth's personality, illustrated by Shakespeare through his use of Holinshed as textual plaything.[6]

VIII

In order to understand the operation of language in the play, listen to the Lord Lennox's carefully ironic speech from *Act III, scene vi.*

> *"My former speeches have but hit your thoughts,*
> *Which can interpret farther. Only I say*
> *Things have been strangely borne. The gracious Duncan*
> *Was pitied of Macbeth: marry, he was dead.*
> *And the right'valiant Banquo walked too late;*
> *Whom, you may say, if't please you, Fleance killed,*
> *For Fleance fled. Men must not walk too late.*
> *Who cannot want the thought, how monstrous*
> *It was for Malcolm and for Donalbain*
> *To kill their gracious father? Damned fact!*
> *How it did grieve Macbeth! Did he not straight,*
> *In pious rage, the two delinquents tear,*
> *That were the slaves of drink and thralls of sleep?*
> *Was not that nobly done? Ay, and wisely too;*
> *For 'twould have angered any heart alive*
> *To hear the men deny't..."* (ll. 1-16)

A brilliant few lines worth chuckling with, certainly. But what is Lennox's point, beside Macbeth's guilt in these matters? Precisely that Macbeth's

'innocence' appears too neat and tidy, begins to sound like a children's story, albeit a gruesome one. Macbeth has spoken too much, too long, and bored his audience, practically forced them to write a better text than he. We sense this happening in the banquet scene, when Lady Macbeth only problematizes the situation further with her impromptu cover-ups for Macbeth's madness: is it actually meant to reassure the guests that their "lord is often thus"? Every event has to have a verbal solution, has to be neatly tied up, because information and language cannot be allowed to proliferate, question, and set up alternate discourses. Thus Lennox can, even must, dissimulate his meaning within Macbeth's own language: there is no other space.

But the over-abundance of explanation itself constitutes the fault: language always escapes. The metaphor for this in the play are the three horsemen 'messengers' who arrive at Dunsinane. Last of all, though they "coursed" Macbeth "at the heels, and had a purpose/ To be his purveyor" *(1.6.21-22)* come Duncan's party, for they have lost control of the situation altogether (even in the first scenes, aged Duncan's grip on events slips, for he is at a distance from the battles, receiving "post" and "read"ing of Macbeth's successes *(1.3.90-98)*). Second arrives Macbeth. But he too can offer no new information, for though he rode hard himself, one horseman "had the speed of him," and, "almost dead for breath, had scarcely more/ Than would makeup his message" *(1.5.36-38)*. The horseman, then - like the witches' "masters" - *is* scarcely more than this message itself. The message, the bit of information that escaped or out rode its master, is precisely that which the as yet infirm of purpose Macbeth did not want to reach his wife too soon: that Duncan, the doomed king, was coming as guest. The identical horse image returns in *act 4, scene 1*, when Macbeth, immediately after determining that Macduff must die, receives news on horseback that Macduff has already fled the country. Macbeth now occupies Duncan's position of being the last to know, of being always too late and at-a-distance. The horseman always escapes, like Fleance, like the "consequence" that Macbeth wishes to "trammel up" *(1.7.3)* but knows: "we but teach/ Bloody instructions, which, being taught, return/ To plague th' inventor" *(1.7.8-10)*. Thus, although we do not realize it until later, even from the very beginning Macbeth is losing control: he neither creates his ideas, intentions and language, nor masters their purveyance and exclusivity; better, it is of the nature of language here neither to be mastered nor created in its entirety.

IX

The qualified guilt we have been exploring has a further consequence: viewers over the centuries have always found it difficult not to admire Macbeth, as with Richard III. Even with the rank odour of his crimes before us ... he is tricked, naive like a child, and despite all that a magnificent monster. This moral paradox (the more guilty and self-responsible, the more admirable) we call humanism: Macbeth is the bourgeois ideal hero.

As we have seen, power, never rules absolutely over any level, for there are always accruals, enabled by distance and will. Macbeth's monstrous magnificence consists precisely in his isolated creativity: for example, his prowess as a miniature Iago or Mark Anthony with the two murderers. Many of Macbeth's 'texts' are designed (as all rhetoric) for a particular interpretive field. The ruse to pass the guilt onto Duncan's guards, for example. Thus even here, in what we have called accrual, inheritance - of language, motives, thoughts and power - is thematised. With the two murderers, it is not enough that they commit the deed on Banquo and son - they must *wish* to kill him for themselves. Macbeth here wants to 'pass on' responsibility for the murder, to leave the act and motive in other hands. But, of course, this possibility only follows from precisely *his* action. Paradoxes of this kind are at the heart of the play, which forces us to ask what we mean by "wish to" or "responsibility" - as with the witches and Macbeth, so with Macbeth and his murderers. The play will answer its own question not only with a complex understanding of human causation, but with a general a priori condemnation of all discourses of power.

X

To understand this condemnation, we must first observe a distance - spatial and temporal - which implicated here in Macbeth's series of actions. Macbeth murders Duncan, and never acts directly again. Lady Macbeth must step in and bloody the King's guards (which was, however, Macbeth's idea), and murderers perform the later crimes: first seduced into their crimes (thus projecting not merely Macbeth's will but his conscious ego itself towards the arena of immediacy[7]), and later simply commanded. This progression, Macbeth's removal from the scene of the crime, is of increasing distance, disengagement, and even off-handedness. The weight and magnitude of Macbeth's guilt grows alongside his displacement: this is because, in

Shakespeare's play, the use of language (the action of power *at a distance*) already has a moral import smuggled within it.

It does not, however, follow that Macbeth's crimes are evil because of their association with the mechanism of language, nor that language becomes initially contaminated through its use by Macbeth. As we shall see below, no simple temporal or narrative causation explains this moral import; instead, an original postulation. Language does not become corrupt, it is originally corrupt. In *Macbeth*, evil *speaks*.

XIa

We are now (finally) in a position to explore the fundamental postulates which so condemn the phenomenon of language.

One principle form of Shakespearean faith states that all masks eventually fall away, and that no mask is hollow. For instance (a small but very illustrative detail), in a scene where Shakespeare borrows so many particulars from Holinshed, he does not maintain the detail of Malcolm *writing* secret letters to noblemen in Scotland, urging them to abandon the King. This must be because in Shakespeare's ideal world, these men must respond spontaneously, 'from their hearts' as it were, utterly rejecting Macbeth's huge rhetorical effort. Similarly, in the Lennox speech just quoted from at length, how is it that Lennox and this anonymous Lord know so much (ie. Banquo's death) including items (Macduff's leaving Scotland) that even Macbeth, with all his spies, cannot discover?

They just know. It is a scene often ridiculed, which one commentator has ironically, yet perhaps appropriately, called "miraculous."[8] The point is, being on the side of right in a late act of the play, attentive to the authentic and seeing through the veils of rhetoric - and yet more important, being on the side of God and King: that is, aristocracy - these men cannot fail but to be inundated with truth. There is a contradiction in the temporal rationality of the plot only, not in the mysticism of dramatic propriety. So, while the King ignores his eyes and favours speaking, his enemies favour *seeing* and *being there*. Immediately after the murder of Duncan, Macduff enters saying "do not bid me speak; See, and then speak yourselves." So once again we have the visual presence of naked truth contrasted with the - what? - Shall we say *authority* of the text?

XIb

The contrast is seen most dramatically in the famous scene between Macduff and Malcolm. Malcolm, hiding in England, pretends to the ownership of all manner of vices which collectively would dwarf Macbeth's, his intention being to test Macduff's dedication to Scotland's true interest. Both sides in this odd contest use, or are assumed to use, verbal trickery: the question is whether the veil of words will be stripped aside by a "noble passion" - undisguisable, pre-verbal despair or repugnance - emanating from Macduff's innermost self; a passion which, when at last Macduff explodes with it, "Wiped the black scruples" (as if wiping clean a schoolroom slate) from Malcolm's soul. "God above," Malcolm then says, "deal between thee and me!"

In Holinshed, now, the scene ends. The two embrace and set to planning Macbeth's overthrow. The revelation of Malcolm's nature has had, apparently, an instant effect, as the aristocratic metaphysics of presence and authenticity demand. But Shakespeare isn't satisfied: isn't Macbeth's evil the more profound, his short-lived, unsteady triumph the more giddy, if his corruption should reach his enemies as well - indeed, should reach the heart of presence, truth and light itself? Shakespeare's Macduff is strangely silent after Malcolm's true soul-baring. Then he says, "Such welcome and unwelcome things at once/ 'Tis hard to reconcile" *(4.3.139)*. There is a delay postulated here, a suspension of all beliefs at the whirlwind's heart, the introduction of time within the notion of immediacy, an introduction always already made possible by the fact of language itself. Dramatic irony is rich here, since we, as audience, cannot be sure if Macduff is yet aware of Macbeth's butchering of his family. This uncertainty enlarges the tension and the weight of that doubtful moment until it aches - especially for those who know (knew) their Holinshed, for that knowledge has just been trampled to earth. In many ways, then, the whole latter third of the play pivots on the tension of those two bland (and, in a real sense, momentarily ignoble) lines, for moral heroism is born out of their silence.

But what has happened to the hand of God and the metaphysics of authenticity, as I have called it? The next few lines reassert it with scrupulous clarity, for they pay homage to James I in the form of a glowing reference to the divine kingly ability of curing disease *by touch*. Thus the vital

metaphysical oppositions (which for Shakespeare lie at the origin of morality itself) between presence and absence or operation-at-a-distance, and between the non- or pre-linguistic and the rhetorical or inherited, are elevated to a new height and linked to the theological.

XIc

However, Malcolm then says of the English king, "sundry blessings hang about his throne/That speak him full of grace" *(4.3.158)*. A deconstruction of the pre- and post-linguistic opposition in this play would have an easy time of it, starting from this crucial passage, for Shakespeare is not a carefully consistent writer or metaphysician, and textual corruptions have their own strategies to play.[9] Two problems strike one as, for the moment, more interesting than the deconstruction of the play's implicit metaphysics[10]. First, discovering how the artistry and dramatic success of the play hang upon this metaphysics, which is never one device or theme among others; and secondly, the sketching of the ideological commitments this metaphysics is implicated in.

XII

It is clear to us now that the play has 'sources' - ideological allegiances - other than Holinshed. We have seen that, in certain eyes, Shakespeare's Macbeth is a bourgeois hero. Similarly, the Macbeth story in the *Chronicles* is clearly a republican tale - for all its gestures to 'proper' kingship, most of Macbeth's illegal opportunist reign was far more successful even *morally* than Duncan's. The progress of Holinshed's haunting of the text mirrors that of all the other ideologies which Shakespeare must negotiate for his split audience, court and commons. However, the play, as an ideological construction, must appear unified. What, though, is the machinery of this contrived unity? As we have seen, Holinshed undergos a dismantling and re-ordering via the tool of a metaphysical theory of presence. James I would find all pseudo-republicanism indigestible: accordingly, Macbeth's attraction is qualified both by his obvious evil and his naive (and thus, non-self-present) dependence upon the witches' words. But how is the reconciliation of these two facts effected? how can Macbeth be both 'there' and 'not-there'?

XIII

The play begins on time: "When shall we three meet again?/ In thunder, lightning, or in rain?" So it continues, Duncan's first line asking for report "of the revolt the newest state." Later, Macbeth reminisces: "The times has been that, when the brains were out, the man would die" *(3.4.79)*. Macbeth's entrance into politics, it seems, is identical to the introduction of a new time. The normal (legal, Natural and divine) progress of succession to the throne is not ordinarily temporal: Macbeth sees all the Stewart Kings at once as if *the same* reflexively reflected in a mirrored hall. Presence (and right), then, is also of the present, in the moment but of all moments - timeless as Augustine's God. Macbeth's action at-a-distance is also a distance in time, for language and his inheritance (of the title Cawdor and of the throne) are not phenomena of the instant. Macbeth's increasing distance corresponds to an increasing temporal carelessness with respect to true immediacy. He must constantly remind himself: "the firstlings of my heart shall be the firstlings of my hand" *(4.1.147)*. But as we have seen, he will always trail the horseman. This straggling insists on morality; Macbeth's fall into the language-supplement constitutes his original guilt. Time and space (that activities necessary to maintain his crown) crowd Macbeth - yet in the same movement, leave him alone and stranded.

Macbeth's time "creeps in this petty pace from day to day." This is an homogeneous, 'empty' time, bearing only instantaneous events in their absolute separation, distance and sequence; the time of opportunism, because it is a time wherein value can accumulate as exchange value beyond use value. It is also the time of language. "Creeps" and "petty" are words of servitude describing a time that is at the mercy of - what? - exactly itself, in its hollow, ponderously rolling continuity and wasted expanse. This amounts to a tautology: time is empty because it is empty. Precisely so. Thus the agony in Macduff's hesitation drains the immediate moment and enters the petty creeping of time, for the first time. Time completes itself again by being filled with events that resonate, thus, in *Macbeth*, only via the re-importation of a rightful King, and of God. Such events, as we have seen, are not in time, properly speaking - just as justice, ethics and nobility are not in time. It is significant that this scene ends with Macduff praying "But, gentle heavens,/*cut short all intermissions; front to front*/Bring thou this fiend of Scotland and myself..." (*4.3.230*, my emphasis).

These observations allow us to clarify what have always been confusing points in the play.

XIV

Considering that this metaphysical opposition manifests itself in surface detail as a distinction between sight (the sense of immediacy) and sound (the sense of delay, echo, and language), is it not now understandable that a Macbeth, though terrified of discovery, when seeing the dagger before him should worry that someone might *hear* his footsteps and not, what seems more obvious, that anyone should *see* the dagger?

Similarly, as we have observed, Macbeth cannot *see* the meaning in the particular visual form of the witches' prophecies. Macbeth uses words himself, to slander and deceive; being on the side (so he believes) of self-presence, and thus already behind the veil, he feels he cannot himself be deceived. Accordingly, Macbeth never glances over the battlements to check the enemy numbers (*Act V, scene iii*), nor the movements of the wood (*Act V, scene v*); instead, he trusts reports. Indeed, he even abjures all reports at the beginning of this sequence - trusting the words of the prophecy alone, he wishes to be bathed in a silence broken only by their soothing sounds. Macbeth rarely believes even his own eyes after the early fantastic episodes, which is understandable - but the signs of Macbeth's impending doom are all visual, while the signs of his continuing power, including the dutiful but insincere "mouth-honour" *(5.3.27)* of his subject lords, are verbal. "No more sights!" *(4.1.155)* Macbeth shouts, after his last visit with the witches, as if it were a battle cry.

XV

It is with newly appreciative eyes that we now view Macbeth's last great verbal creation: the famous speech from *act V*.

> *"Tomorrow, and tomorrow, and tomorrow*
> *Creeps in this petty pace from day to day,*
> *To the last syllable of recorded time;*
> *And all our yesterdays have lighted fools*
> *The way to dusty death. Out, out, brief candle!*
> *Life's but a walking shadow, a poor player*

That struts and frets his hour upon the stage
And then is heard no more. It is a tale
Told by an idiot, full of sound and fury
Signifying nothing" (5.19-28).

The inherited image of light is inverted here into a phenomenon deceptive and negative - indeed, life appears *in* negative, as a shadow.[11] This is the height of unnaturalness, the inversion of a cherished symbol. Similarly, language has always seemed Macbeth's asset throughout the play, while here that carefully accumulated semantic wealth is scattered: these few lines offer a concentrated commentary on language, but now Macbeth's appraisal is negative.

What has lighted Macbeth's way if not his instructions, treacherously ambiguous, and his faith in the corrupting power of speech-acts? Macbeth writes that the witches "met me on the day of success" *(1.5.1)*, that is, in the daylight, and when he was at his brightest moment. Therefore, if what we normally metaphorise as lighting our way is knowledge, here the "light" of "yesterday" can be interpreted allegorically as history - particularly the historical force of language and all the values therein written - which 'speaks' through a fool, and lights his way to nowhere. When Macbeth has convinced the murderers that they desire the death of Banquo, he says "Your spirits shine through you" *(3.1.128)*; this strange and ironic usage alerts us to an alternate and inverted image pattern emerging in the play: what is shining through them is precisely (if anything) Macbeth's spirit - a borrowed, thrust upon spirit (itself borrowed...) imaged as light.

No death is more dusty than any other (dust is surely a morally neutral term, the reference must be to the burial service which had entered common usage only a half century before) but fools are fools because they believe that this light, given to them *as* light, illuminates. "Out, out, brief candle" associates itself with Lady Macbeth's words "out damn spot," and the candle extinguished multiplies in meanings accordingly: a wish for death or an end, certainly, as is the conventional interpretation; but also a wish for the freedom of darkness ("come seeling night" *1.2.46*), from guilt and from tiresome, dogged inheritance. Thus the shadow.

The shadow, then, is an empty place, rich darkness, cast by opaque being, by *being there* with the light behind - which *could be* filled with something new,

not merely the amber glow of history. The need is for a different order of light altogether: auto-illumination. This space is the secular bourgeois appropriation of the ontological value of ahistorical (atemporal) immediacy, as prescribed by Shakespeare's fundamental metaphysical elevation of presence over non-presence. The character Macbeth, however, is far from optimistic humanism here. Thus, being called a "shadow", that space is already condemned to a negative interpretation ("but a shadow"). Not, then, that life *is* a shadow but that it *remains* a shadow: this is illuminated by the next images. The player is "poor" because he merely recites *another's* text (an inheritance strictly without accrual); and, in the second image, although we encounter activity and struggle, these are finally only noise, do not become articulate but participate in the emptiness of shadow. Being, Macbeth says, has no light of its own.

XVIa

We have now arrived at the final scene, "tracing the spark", as I put it, through the play from beginning to end.[12] Clearly, Macbeth here exhibits his greatest heroism; Macbeth's action stands lauded indirectly by Siward's praise for his son. Recognizing that the battle is all but lost, he still prefers to fight and refuses suicide (the action of his first *victim* in Holinshed, and of Lady Macbeth), while in the opening lines he does not speak at all of his prophetic invulnerability. It is necessary for dramatic tension that the play end in this strong fashion, but here the drama becomes linked to the ideological functioning of the play. Macduff, who in his moment of his doubt could not recognize fellow Lord Ross in *Act IV*, here knows Macbeth instantly from behind: "Turn, hell-hound, turn!" *(5.8.3)*. In Macbeth's response we see his self-doubt and stricken conscience, but Macduff says, significantly, "I have no words" *(5.8.6)*. Stripped of his beliefs, Macbeth simply refuses to fight. However, his name and nobility (precisely that which he has struggled so long to preserve) threatened with the prospect of freak-show display, we finally have: "Yet I will try the last. Before my body I throw my warlike shield. Lay on, Macduff; And damned be him that first cries 'Hold, enough!'" *(5.8.32-4)*. From "no more sights" we now have "no more cries." Noble Macbeth has come full circle.

Malcolm's closing speech re-configures the state and the stage along newly English (and male) aristocratic lines. These, as he states, are actions for an epoch, not for the moment. Finally, all these things "we will perform in measure, time, and place" *(5.8.73)*, an allusion to both dramatic-poetic art in its propriety, as well as a *proper* time, a time that is not a time because

constantly rooted in the 'same' ideal moment of justification, an unfolding, only superficially in time, of the timeless.

XVII

Conclusions and Summary

The undermining of Holinshed's Macbeth is the mechanism of high artistry in the play, for it allows the introduction of the ultimate philosophical justification for aristocracy, kingship and divine right. Not in tradition and culture, but in presence and immediate contact with self and with truth, which has always been our definition of the 'noble' (from Latin *nobilis*, capable of being known, from *noscere*, to know; thus, the equation of the knowing and the known). Thus, Macbeth's final removal from empty time, collapsing back to his own devices in battle - though certainly in tune with his other (sinister) moments of boldness - is a becoming-noble, a sudden, silent self-clarity and, indeed, purification, that effects the ideological resolution in art of the conflict between aristocratic and bourgeois values. The semantic possibilities in the shadow cast by being in its self-presence, which we have seen Macbeth describe, remain a shadow so long as being remains alienated from the timeless.

This purity is male. The centring and linkage of two ideological powers occurs at the cost of the play's women, who are posited as beings in language and thus in deception. The witches are, as it were, materially forgotten: everyone who has seen them or been effected by them is dead; and Lady Macbeth has killed herself. This exclusion - this forgetting and silence - differentially constitutes the inclusiveness and thus the unity of the play.

These philosophical formations enter the play, only to leave it again in the direction of its epoch. The somewhat disrespectful use of a standard, vernacular history was bound to be noticed. Shakespeare regains favour (or at least the lost sense of authenticity) partly by inscribing within his work new (that is current) historical and politically safe material, namely the references and even methodological bows to James 1. But there is another, thematic, justification subtly distributed throughout the play. The metaphysical opposition between authentic presence and linguistic displacement is played out into another opposition favourable to Shakespeare's activity itself: within language, immediate creativity (that is, poetry) is ethically elevated over

inheritance of tradition (history),[13] thus repeating the result of Aristotle's argument.[14] Macbeth is most pathetic when he abandons himself to blind inheritance, or is transferred forcefully into another inherited system outside of nature; manifestly and simply, Macbeth is greatest when he is a poet.

Notes

1. I should like first to thank Sebastien Odiari for both his comments and his patience concerning this work.

Although I have chosen, perhaps with grave consequences, to ignore most of the millions of words written as criticism of Shakespeare's play, I have depended slavishly on the immense scholarship of the following texts:

Arden Shakespeare: Macbeth. Ed., Kenneth Muir. London, Methuen, 1962. *New Valorium Shakespeare: Macbeth*. Ed., Horace Howard Furness. New York: American Scholar, 1963. *Oxford Shakespeare Concordances: Macbeth*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1971. *Signet Shakespeare: Macbeth*. Ed., Sylvan Barnet. New York: New American Library, 1963.

All line references are to the Signet edition.

Sadly, I came across Jonathan Goldberg's "Speculations: *Macbeth* and Source" (*Post-Structuralist Readings of English Poetry*. Eds., Machin and Norris. Cambridge, 1987.) too late to make much use of it in this essay. At any rate, while within a similar theoretical framework, and making sometimes strikingly similar points, Jonathan Goldberg and I are engaged in different projects. Here, I wished to show how (in a word) certain philosophical motifs could be used to underpin an artistic project in its apparent (that is, ideological) success. Jonathan Goldberg's essay took the opposite approach and deconstructed the play's seeming ideological univocity via an appeal to the forces of intertextuality and exploded difference. Our two essays, then, are complementary.

2. For example, Terry Eagleton's otherwise admirable analysis in his *William Shakespeare* (Basil Blackwell, Ltd., Oxford: 1986). To state that Shakespeare's plays "value social order" and then abandon the topic immediately in favour of the subversive reading is, to my mind, to be dangerously careless. The play makes possible a subversive reading, certainly, but what does it mean here to "make

possible"? For example, tragedy, as it has traditionally been understood, becomes suspect in this play via a disturbance of the notion of the subject upon which it rests. As such, its links to various philosophical and ideological systems are laid bare. But Shakespeare's play does not (can not) stop here: this crisis is strategic (although never - and this is most important for our larger critical purpose - merely an illusory or incidental crisis) within the move towards a re-entrenchment of those very categories which it questions. *Macbeth*, it might be said, is the tragedy of Tragedy. This larger movement, and its mechanics, cannot be ignored.

3. A demonic but real power, as prescribed by James I (monarch for whose court the play was written, and the first Stuart King of England) in his *Daemonologie*.

4. Shakespeare, when he acquired a family coat of arms - symbol of the established gentleman - had it given to his father, John Shakespeare, in order that he himself might *inherit* it.

5. Earlier, upon the first prophecy coming true, Banquo exclaims, "What, can the devil speak true?" *(1.3.107)*. But there is no devil here. Macbeth's fifth act servant, named Seyton, an unambiguous enough pun, is only a servant. Like language itself, he is Seyton (Satan) *by being* a servant.

6. Malcolm urges Macduff to "give sorrow words" *(4.3.209)* lest he destroy himself with grieving. But to release oneself from sorrow by venting it into the not-self of language is to betray identity in its full sorrow. Macduff knows this: "I must also feel it as a man" *(4.3.221)*. Instead of words and tears, he desires revenge in the immediacy of the sword.

7. Note that the two murderers recognize the third of their number by his "just" recitation of Macbeth's instructions. Despite their crime, one finds the murderers pathetic, even pitiable. Why? Because they, unlike Macbeth, are the end of the line, power and language together extend no lower, and they can never become, like Macbeth, conscious in the true metaphysical sense.

8. Quoted and discussed in a footnote to the scene in Furness' edition of the play.

9. Indeed, being a play, all the characters, however evil or noble, speak. To degrade speech as such is already a ridiculous project at one level. Similarly, writing a drama itself is somewhat ambiguous, for the immediacy of performance, as Macbeth himself will note in act V, is profoundly qualified at least by the existence of a prior script.

This is why this essay does not discuss the privileging of speech over writing but rather a distinction, identical in import, between immediate thought and language as a whole.

10. Deconstruction is neither an option nor a choice; it is more certainly not a demonstration of a state of affairs which can now, in retrospect, be assumed and passed over. Where would such a transgression leave us? Certainly not with a mildly unusual essay like this one.

However, the failure of metaphysical language qua metaphysics can, in itself, accomplish 'along the way', certain performative effects, historical instanciations and even successes of a different order. Such a 'success' is *Macbeth*.

11. The obvious comparison is with Plato's allegory of the cave. The similarity and yet reversal of imagery is striking. However, one would need to devote considerable exposition here to any equation of Macbeth's argument with Plato's.

12. It was, of course, essential to begin at the beginning precisely because, in this play, the beginning is also the introduction of irreversible time.

13. Perhaps the Romantics who so valued Shakespeare's genius (understood in the Kantian tradition) sensed this underlying affinity.

14. *Poetics* chpt. 9. Poetry, to the extent it is inspired, is a noble activity. This is a commonplace in the history of literature.

FROM HISTORY TO HISTORIES: SOME PRELIMINARY NOTES

Andrew Benjamin

The question of history is not an isolated topic rather the problems raised by it are at the centre of contemporary philosophical debates. Jean-François Lyotard has posed the major problem in the following question;

> *can we continue today to organise the crowd of events that come from the human and non-human world by subsuming them under the Idea of a universal history.*[1]

At this stage no attempt will be made to pursue Lyotard's own answer, for what must be examined first of all is that which is at stake in the actual formulation of the question. Lyotard is not simply opening up the problem of the Enlightenment's heritage, he is also posing the question of history in relation to the categories of identity and difference. Universal history, while it finds its most active formulation in the Enlightenment and especially in the writings of Kant, is premised upon the subordination of difference to identity. This subordination can take place in at least two ways. Differences are explained either in terms of having been generated by an identity, or in terms of a covering and hence transcendental identity. The important aspect of both these conceptions of identity is that in being named they come to adopt a status that is no longer simply descriptive of a belonging together of differences, but one which has an independent self-identity and therefore one in whose name actions may be taken and to which can be attributed purpose, destiny and aspirations.

There are many paths along which the relationship between history and identity and difference can be pursued, however all that will be attempted here is a general discussion of the historical, and a brief consideration of some of the problems at play in writing the history of philosophy. Special emphasis will be given to the conception of text and textual analysis implicit in Foucault's study *Les mots et les choses*.[2]

Perhaps a way of starting these considerations would be to begin with the general question: of what is a history written? The immediate difficulty with it however is that any answer already assumes the identity of the object. Writing the history of psychoanalysis for example would seem to assume that the identity of psychoanalysis was known in advance. Even if it were argued that the history of psychoanalysis, or indeed any other object, is comprised of those acts or practices done in its name, such an argument would only serve to compound the problem for it leaves open the question of what will guarantee the accuracy of any one use of the name. How would it be possible to distinguish between the pre-psychoanalytic and psychoanalysis proper except by reference to a pre-given identity? The example of pyschoanalysis could be extended to cover a vast range of possible objects.

A number of further questions only seem to deepen the morass. The most important concerns whether or not the identity of a particular object can ever emerge? In other words despite the existence of moments that enable there to be developments in the history of thought, there remains the question of whether the emergence of any particular discipline is the emergence of a delimited domain having a specific or essential identity?

It is of course quite clear that the possibility of there being an essential identity is in the long run bound to the existence of a transcendental quality that would give to each instance of a particular discipline its identity. The consequence is that the transcendental quality while accurately naming an instance of any one particular discipline would be extra-historical in the sense that it would be an abstraction that could be used across historical periods. The existence of these difficulties means that the question of the object of history - or to be more precise of a history - is as yet far from adequately formulated.

A way of rescuing the question of the object of history might be found in a recourse to chronology and therefore to a type of determinism. The power of chronology is that it brings with it an obvious ordering principle. However it also demands assent to the following assumption, namely, that history take place chronologically. In other words that chronology is the temporal sequence proper to history. Chronology provides therefore the means to divide the historical past and thereby to give to each division a chronological identity. A text or act located chronologically is for that reason given an (historical) existence. The practice of history would become the gathering

and sorting of all texts and acts within the same chronological location. The consequence is that the problem of the status of the object of history would seem to be resolved because now the object is delimited and its historicity is both established and defined by its having a chronological specificity. The history of nineteenth century medicine, for example, becomes the medical practices and texts of the nineteenth century. Or the history of eighteenth century philosophy is the history of philosophical activities in the eighteenth century. However the problem only seems to be resolved because difficulties emerge the moment it becomes important to define and delimit the specificity of the particular object; eg: What is medicine in the nineteenth century? What texts and practices should be included and what excluded? The same problems are also at play in the example of eighteenth century philosophy. Here it is a matter of deciding which texts are philosophical and which texts are not. What set of criteria would be used? Would it be in terms of an all encompassing definition that existed at the time(ie: in the eighteenth century), or would it involve the interpolation into the circumscribed chronological domain of a different ordering principle, one which exemplified the concerns of the domain itself? In the case of the latter this would, by definition, deny the force or claim of chronology as that which provided the specificity of the historical object. The transgression of chronology would render it functionally inoperable as the determiner of the historical and it therefore could no longer be the fundamental component in the designation and identification of the historical. Even in the case of the former where there is no apparent denial of chronology there would still be no way of deciding what comprised the internal and external aspects of a particular object because all that could be taken as providing the definition was a text or series of texts that were already involved in establishing the distinction between, for example, medicine and non-medicine or philosophy and non-philosophy. Furthermore any clash or conflict would be irresolvable without recourse to a form of meta-position which would involve, as has been noted, the denial of chronology and therefore having the related and very important consequence of denying to chronology the possibility of its providing the temporal order proper to history.

Of all the problems inherent in chronology the most interesting is the above mentioned, namely, the commitment to the claim that chronology provides the temporal scheme of history. This is not to deny that the problem of inclusion and exclusion are not of considerable importance. However it presents the same type of problem that has already been encountered in the

first attempt to answer the question, of what is a history written? Any answer necessitated prior knowledge of the identity of the historical object, but more than that it necessitated that the historical object have a discreet and essential identity. In other words that it was *one* thing and its being understood would involve the knowledge of its unique nature.

The existence of chronology is not in question. The problem is simply whether or not the temporality of history is provided by chronology. To the extent that chronology is taken seriously then a backward and forward chronological movement could not underwrite let alone provide the basis of an interpretation. Texts of the eighteenth century could not be played off against texts of the twentieth century in order that the former provide the means for reading the latter. A respect for chronology involves a recognition of the possibility of influence but not of allowing an interpretive interplay in which the concerns of, for example, an eighteenth century text are allowed to provide an interpretive grid for the reading and interpretation of a twentieth century text. Chronology demands that the relationship between objects of interpretation separated chronologically be expressed in a language and involve an interpretive chronological distance.

The language of interpretation that takes chronology as providing the temporality of history, must be a language that continually deploys the terminology of, "influence", of the "precursor", "an early form of" etc. All such terms and expressions, establish and maintain connections between the distant and the distinct but do not transgress chronology. In fact their viability and interpretive power depends upon the retention of chronology.

If there is a problem inherent in the interrelationship between interpretation and chronology it is not in the possibility of chronology providing the basis of *an* interpretation but of it providing the basis of *all* interpretations. The recourse to chronology is a *possible* move however it is obvious that there are other forms of interpretation than ones based on chronology. The recourse to chronology does not seem to resolve the problem of the status of the historical object because it poses more questions and problems than it either answers or resolves. Not only are there the same problems concerning the identity of the particular historical object there is also the fact that chronology exhausts neither the possibility of interpretation nor possible different configurations of the historical.

While an attempt can still be made to find a resolution to the problem posed by the status of the historical object by entering upon an examination of further and different conceptions of the historical, the real question is: what does the existence of different and perhaps even incompatible conceptions of the historical, and therefore of history, entail for the meaning of the term "history" and for the practice of writing a history? Put another way what does the existence of different and perhaps internally problematic conceptions of history have on the demand to be historical? In sum what are historical studies and why are they historical.

The force of this question - at least initially - lies not in the possible answers that could be given to it but in the actual consequences that stem from being able to pose it. The question needs to be taken in two parts. The first concerns the existence of historical studies and the second the reason for describing such studies as historical. The important aspect of the first part of the question is the acknowledged plurality of history. It is not simply that there are many histories but that there can be different histories of the "same" event or period. It is clearly the case that in the latter possibility there could be conflict. Each history could compete to be the history of the event of the period in question. The competitive nature of histories, and here competitive may even attest to the incompatibility of some of these histories, means that some justification has to be provided for why a given history is the history of the object in question. In other words a particular history must seek some type of theoretical justification for its being a history, where of course the theory in question is in some sense intrinsic to the history itself. Each history will involve, therefore, a critical dimension that on the one hand serves to differentiate it from other contenders, by providing the means to differentiate itself, while on the other it defines (self-referentially) the nature of the historical, and thus that which counts as the specific object. Finally, it would also provide an internally regulated way of discovering and evaluating evidence. This last point is very important in that it not only indicates that evidence only exists for a specific conception of history but that what counts as evidence is not extrinsic to that conception but rather is established by it. If only to this extent the object is structured by the theory underpinning the history in question. Therefore to what extent the object could exist "outside" the structure of a specific history is itself both an open and problematic question.

The existence of histories however is not just the existence of a plurality of different and possibly conflicting histories, nor is it simply the claim that history is discursive, it is rather that to be historical - to offer a history - involves, of necessity, making a claim from within a discourse. It is to advance a discursive position in relation to the object of history. However there is more than this at play, for as has been indicated, it can also be argued that the object only ever becomes the "object" because of the existence of a particular theory. In other words it is the theory that constitutes the object qua object. This point is neither new nor remarkable and yet it is precisely this point that underlies the move from history to discourse. Indeed it is because of this point that the question which opened this paper - ie: of what is a history written? - becomes even more difficult to answer.

To begin with the question seemed problematic because any answer had to assume the identity of the object. It is now the case that the possibility of there being an object that is external to a history is no longer self-evident. However does this amount to saying that texts and documents that make up, for example, the record of seventeenth century French voyages to China and contemporary writings about China only exist within a particular conception of history and therefore they do not exist as independent objects external to their history? Furthermore could it not be argued that these voyages took place, as a point of fact; the writings exist, again as a point of fact and as such they form the basis of any history? The result of which would be that not only do they exist prior to any history having been written of them, but they are external to it insofar as they form the basis of it. Even if these questions are modified in order that they do not depend on an external empirical reality but only on an extra-discursive dimension, it remains the case that they still posit a domain outside discourse that in turn positions discourse as an inside. If the distinction between the inside and the outside exists in relation to history then introduced into historical studies is the question of truth. For even if the nature of the outside is not spelt out in any detail (nature, that is, rather than content) the outside must be attributed a reality that can be either reproduced or transgressed in the joining of the outside and the inside. The connection is of course the practice of writing history. The distinction between the inside and the outside commits the practice of history to relating the truth. The writing of history *must* adopt the narrative structure proper to this task. Writing is now bounded by an imperative as well as being truth-functional.

The question must be asked of course, what is the truth about seventeenth century voyages to China by French explorers and the subsequent interest in China displayed by philosophers and theologians? Is it the truth that these events took place? Or is the truth related to an attempt to win and secure trading routes and then with the subsequent ideological defense of these undertakings? Or is the truth to do with the problems the existence of the Other poses for the development of political absolutism on the one hand and philosophical theories advancing universal rationality coupled to a conception of universal Man on the other? Does the truth involve one or more of these possibilities? Clearly there are other candidates that could provide the answer to the question of what, in this instance, is the truth.

How is the possibility of different answers to be understood? Prior to responding to this question it must be noted that if the possibility of truth is taken seriously then the existence of different answers means that there are a number of false answers to any one question. The existence of truth must entail that answers other than the one which is true are either false or fail to answer the question. The distinction between the inside and the outside therefore, not only brings a criterion of truth it also brings a criterion of evaluation. Having indicated this further implication of the inside/outside distinction it is essential to return to the problem posed by the existence of different responses to the question of what comprises a specific historical truth. The urgency lies in the fact that truth is linked to the inside/outside and therefore to the possibility of the non-discursive or extra-discursive.

It is of course only in terms of the acceptance of truth that the existence of a plurality of responses means that a decision must be made between the true and the false. The problem here is that each answer is true and as such all questions of truth and falsity are relative. What could then decide between particular answers? The only viable responses to this question is via recourse to the theoretical dimension inherent in and articulated by each answer. In other words this is not a problem concerning "facts" but the theory that gives the "facts" their particular structure. Even in cases where it appears that the debate or conflict concerns the existence or not of evidence this is, despite appearances, the articulation of a theoretical position insofar as it is only in terms of a certain epistemology (here advanced within and as a particular conception of history) that evidence is construed as "at hand" and furthermore as that which will solve disagreements. It is therefore only in terms of certain discursive position that evidence has a neutral existence.

The consequence is that the existence of different answers to a question that invites truth undermines the possibility of truth for it highlights the discursive nature of historical claims and thereby serves to dissolve the distinction between the inside and the outside.

The problem is not therefore whether or not certain events took place but that the writing of history does not involve the unmeditated description of something that exists outside the process of description. It is rather that the event, indeed any event is always already discursive. However this does not amount to claiming that during the siege of Stalingrad people did not suffer or that barricades were not built during the Paris commune or that the French did not explore China in the seventeenth century. Nor does it involve the more general claim that history is impossible, it is rather intended that history is viewed as discursive, history as a universal vanishes to be replaced by strategic histories. History understood in Enlightenment terms gives way to a proliferation of discourses. Even though this is the consequence of the demise of the Enlightenment project further consideration still needs to be given to the details of this particular move.

It has already been suggested that the question - what are historical studies and why are they historical? - should be answered in two parts. The first part concerning the existence of historical studies has, to a certain degree at least, been answered. The second part namely the reason for describing such studies as historical has yet to be answered. Admittedly an answer has been adumbrated by the preceding discussion of history nonetheless an adequate one is still to be supplied. It will be in answering this question that it will be possible to trace in greater detail the consequences and implications of the move from history to discourse.

The immediate response to the question of why is a particular study historical is neither to do with methodology nor with the nature of the object of study (except of course in extreme circumstances) but can only be made in reference to the temporality of the object. History studies the past. It may be the wish of certain historians that the past serve a specific purpose in the present nonetheless it remains the case that the temporality of history involves a relationship between the present and the past. However the relationship has a specific structure which above all involves the expression of the past in the present. History thus understood involves recovery as a fundamental part of its practice. There are however a number of recent

developments in the writing of history, mostly associated with Michel Foucault, which have tried to offer a different approach to the writing of history. Instead of viewing history in terms of the re-expression of the past in the present Foucault has attempted to establish the radical difference between the past and the present and moreover to emphasise difference between elements of the historical past. Foucault has gone as far as to provide a methodology for the new history. The importance of Foucault's undertaking and his use of discourse as a fundamental part of it, means that it is vital to dwell on his adventure. Instead of addressing this problem in general, problems in writing the history of philosophy will provide the focus of discussion.

The history of philosophy has, with a few important exceptions, concerned itself with presenting and providing a contemporary consideration of the viability and relevance of what are characterised as previously held philosophical positions. It is the attachment to viability that is thought to differentiate the concerns of the history of philosophy from the history of ideas. It is thus for example that E. M. Curley writes in his preface to his *Descartes Against The Skeptics:*

> *my book is partly concerned with understanding what Descartes said and partly concerned with what Descartes said is true. I think the historian of philosophy must have this double concern with truth. He must take considerable pains to discover what his authors views and arguments actually are.*[3]

In a vein similar to Curley, Bernard Williams in his *Descartes: The Project of Pure Inquiry* describes his approach as one which:

> *Prefers the direction of rational reconstruction of Descartes' thought, where the rationality of the construction is essentially and undisguisedly conceived in a contemporary style."*[4]

Williams and Curley are both concerned with an unspecified truth which for Williams can be obtained via an interpolation of Cartesianism within the categories of the "contemporary". The nature of these categories and what ever it is that makes them contemporary apart from a crude temporal or chronological equivalence between contemporary and "now", remains an

unanswered question. There are however a number of implicit and important assumptions at work here.

The activity that Williams calls "reconstruction" is thought to be unproblematic insofar as the Cartesian texts are envisaged as allowing for and therefore in some way authorising a reconstruction. If such a reconstruction is possible it involves another, though this time implicit assumption that there is not simply a conceptual compatibility between the Cartesian texts and the "now" (which after all would have to be the sine qua non of any reconstruction) but that the reconstruction does not alter the Cartesian nature of Descartes' texts. If this is the case then it indicates that there is a conceptual consistency at least from Descartes' to Williams' "now" whose existence, perhaps ironically, obviates the need for any distinct awareness of the historical. Williams' attempt to write part of the history of philosophy is premised on effacing the historicity of thought. Even if this problem is left to one side it is still clear that Williams' concern for "rational reconstruction" and Curley's attempt to elucidate the exact nature and veracity of Descartes' position assumes both the giveness and unqualified totality of the Cartesian texts and in so doing passes over the question of the ground of the texts themselves.

The appeal to truth and "rational reconstruction" leaves unresolved the problem of the basis of the initial construction itself. This approach to the history of philosophy has been challenged by Foucault. The starting point of Foucault's approach is summed up by Ian Hacking in his 1973 Dawes Hirst lecture:

> *the space of a philosophical problem is largely fixed by the conditions that made it possible.*[5]

This is not a straightforward historical point concerning the cultural or social origins of a particular philosophical problem. Possibility both in the work of Hacking and Foucault refers to a specific discursive configuration within which a particular philosophical position or problem can be both held and seen *as* a problem or position. Foucault has provided the methodology for such an approach in his *Archaeologie du savoir* and an application of it in his seminal study *Les mots et les choses.* In focusing on what he calls the "conditions of possibility" Foucault is not thereby including an extrahistorical or extradiscursive aspect guiding his analysis. To ask the question, "how is it

that it is ?" is to assume as Foucault does that these is an intradiscursive component that orders discourse and thereby grounds its discursive nature. Opting for truth and "rational reconstruction" as providing the way into an explanation and understanding of what are admitted to be historical texts is to assume that they are in some sense outside the domain of investigation and thus they allow for that particular form of investigation undertaken by the historian of philosophy. This means of course that truth and "rational reconstruction" have to be understood as extrahistorical categories which are not themselves part of the process that will come to be studied by the historian. The consequence is that Curley and Williams in taking the Cartesian texts as given to investigation are thereby committed to a reading, not in terms of how the texts are structured but how they come to be structured by the contemporary categories of truth and "rational reconstruction". In taking the texts as given what is automatically occluded is the chance of an analysis of that which guides the texts' effectuation, i.e., its coming into being.

While the approach taken by Curley and Williams is limited in relation to Foucault and therefore Foucault's approach can be seen as a significant advance, it is itself not without problems. In *The Order of Things* Foucault describes his procedure in the following way:

> *What I am attempting to bring to light is the epistemological field, the episteme in which knowledge, envisages apart from all criteria having reference to its rational value or to its objective forms* grounds its possibility *and thereby manifests a history but which is not that of its growing perfection but rather that of its* conditions of possibility*: in this account what should appear are the configurations within the space of knowledge which have given rise to the diverse forms of empirical science". (my emphasis).*[6]

Within what Foucault calls the "Western episteme" he identifies three distinct epistemological fields whose conditions of existence are described in terms of ruptures and breaks. These ruptures are related to the ordering of what can be known and the way an ordering mechanism is essential if knowledge is to be possible. The procedure followed in *The Order of Things* is the identification of a large number of discursive events in order that these discontinuities can be located and their nature and consequence established. Foucault is here committed to a type of realism as he works within the

assumption that there have been a vast number of "things said" the possibility of which is a certain conception of order at work within and thus constituting the nature of a specific discursive configuration.

This approach differs from a conventional one insofar as it refuses to view one conception of order from within another. In Foucaultian terms this is precisely what Williams and Curley undertake as they approach one ordered discourse, Cartesianism, from within another, namely truth and "rational reconstruction". What is attempted by Foucault is an investigation of the ordering process itself. In other words an investigation of what he describes as the "true experience of order and its modes of being". The only way to avoid the place of pre-existing conceptions of order is by an analysis of the possibility of order itself.

The problem inherent in Foucault's approach concerns the way in which the relationship between text and conditions of possibility is constructed. The text is explained in terms of what guides and accounts for its specific mode of appearing. It becomes a symptom or more exactly a signifier where what is signified are its conditions of possibility. The episteme is therefore the signified while the various texts - or "things said" - that evidence a particular episteme are the signifieds. Within an episteme there may of course be differences between signifiers in respect of their mode of appearance but not on the level of the signified. The differences between, for example, Hume and Descartes are generated and sustained by an underlying identity, namely the same conditions of existence. This does not deny the presence of differences however it does highlight the fact that they are only explicable in terms of the identity (the signified) that comprises their conditions of existence. In regards to this particular example, the identity is the Classical episteme.

One of the most important consequences of this construal of the relationship between text and conditions of existence concerns the status of the text (or signifier) itself. It is not difficult to imagine that the fundamental characteristic of any sign - where sign is understood as the totality encompassing both the signifier and the signified - is the coherence and unity of both elements. The signifier must have a unity on the level of its mode of appearance in order that it be the signifier of and for a particular signified. This does not mean that the mode of appearance of a particular signifier cannot itself be the site of a debate concerning that appearance. It is rather

that the unity of purpose must be attributable to the signifier; where of course the purpose is explicable in terms of the underlying signified. The signifier as unity is essential in order that the coherence of the sign can be maintained.

While it is quite clear that the relationship between the signifier and the signified as outlined above is arbitrary in the sense that there can be differences between signifiers that have the same signified, it nonetheless remains the case that the nature of the signified must determine the narrative form of the signifier(s). This determination is essential *if* the signifier is both to evidence the signified as well as having an individual mode of appearance. The structure of the sign in *La logique de Port Royal* for example must be both evidence of the role of representation within the Classical episteme as well as having the narrative form that enables and facilitates its being read in that particular way. While the interpretation of the signifier may be open to debate what must be precluded from debate is the capacity of the signifier to function as a signifier for the above mentioned signified.

The utterance or signifier is itself the site of a textual project that in turn is grounded by a specific set of conditions of possibility (the signified). The only likelihood of the text being a site of diversity is if it is grounded in and hence governed by a unified signified. In either case the text remains a unity delimited by a specific project. However the project exists on two different levels. The first is the project of the signified; a project stated and enacted by the signifier. The second is the project stated by the signifier (ie: the text or "things said") that while conditioned by the signified is itself a separately identifiable project.

If it is the case that a particular text is to be analysed in terms of a specific set of conditions of possibility understood in Foucault's sense, then it must also be true that the text's project, in the second sense of the term project, must be fulfillable. Were it not to be then the impossibility of the project would entail that the concepts deployed throughout the text would lose the significance attributed to them by the project itself. The consequence would be that it would no longer be possible to understand the relationship between conditions of existence and text in terms of an identity giving relationship between the signified and the signifier. The test would become the interplay of different and perhaps incommensurable utterances. To the extent that this possibility is realised, the Foucaultian conception of the text becomes increasingly less tenable. The problem becomes even more acute when it is

realised that with the three epistemes identified by Foucault in *The Order of Things* all texts have the same conditions of existence. The conditions differ in relation to each other however within a particular episteme they are the same. The consequence is that the only possibility that texts may differ in relation to each other within a specific episteme is dependent firstly on the texts themselves being a unified and coherent totality and, secondly, on the difference between them being explicable in terms of an underlying identity. Even though the identity is itself the consequence of a discontinuity between the epistemes, within a particular episteme it functions as the ground of difference.

There are therefore two problems with Foucault's approach as exemplified by *The Order of Things*. The first concerns the conception of the text as a unified totality and the second concerns the conception of identity as the ground of difference. The first problem cannot be discussed in detail here. However, it is perhaps sufficient to note that one of the aims of a great deal of contemporary literary theory and philosophy has been concerned to analyse texts in terms of an aspired for and yet impossible unity. At this stage it is the second problem that is of interest.

While there are important differences between Williams, Curley and Foucault what they have in common is a shared conception of the relationship between identity and difference. This is not a claim about their actual interpretations nor about their own self-conception of their respective tasks. For Foucault difference is only ever explicable in terms of identity. This is clear from the way in which he conceives of the relationship between texts and their respective conditions of possibility. In the case of both Williams and Curley, given that the *modus operandi* used in the respective interpretations of Descartes is as far as they are concerned generalisable to cover all the activities of the historian of philosophy, all philosophical texts, despite their differences, can be evaluated in terms of truth and "rational reconstruction". As that which guides and structures both the identification of truth as well as "rational reconstruction" is the same in all instances this will mean that not only are these categories extrahistorical, as has already been argued, but that they also provide the identity in terms of which difference is both to be explained and understood. Texts are false or differ in relation to each other as a consequence of "rational reconstruction". While this is not Foucault's position it can nonetheless be argued that all three are committed to the more general position that difference is explicable in terms of identity. Where of

course identity is construed as existing outside of the text in question and hence functions as the ground of difference. The important distinction between them is that for Foucault identity is understood in terms of necessarily generalisable conditions of existence, while for Curley and Williams identity is provided by the extrahistorical categories of truth and "rational reconstruction".

While more needs to be said about the work of Foucault and in particular the development from archaeological to genealogical analysis it is nonetheless clear that his work is articulated in terms of an identifiable and dominant structure of signification. The presence of this structure within a given episteme is in turn articulated in terms of a classical and hence metaphysical conception of identity and difference. However if the retention of this conception establishes the limit of Foucault's method of interpretation in *The Order of Things* does this also mean that the concept of possibility is also thus limited?

The practical consequences of the structure of signification deployed in archaeological analysis is that the text had to exist as a unified and coherent totality that enacted as well acted as evidence for a given episteme. The problem therefore is whether or not the concept of possibility is inextricably bound up with a conception of text as a unity having an internal coherence demanded by a specific structured relationship between signifier and signified. For Foucault this structured relationship meant that the text's project (the project of the signifier) was necessarily one that could be fulfilled. Fulfilment in this instance is commensurate with the practice and life of the text. This restricts archaeological analysis to taking the text at its word and thus it is condemned to a type of interpretive realism in which it is not merely that the project of the text can be fulfilled but that the text has to be read as the fulfilment of that project. Not only must this obviate any concern with considerations of style it also demands that the coherence and unity of the text are both natural and unproblematic as well as being explicable in terms of and reducible to its conditions of existence. It is precisely these consequences that are rendered impossible by the move away from a natural conception of the sign in which there is always a recoverable origin, to a conception of signification where the "origin" while present can never be recovered. The irrecoverability of the origin marks the shift from modernism to post-modernism. A development that finds its most eloquent expression in the Freudian conception of the unconscious. The impossibility

of a return to the origin does not preclude the existence of conditions of possibility however what it does is undermine a naturalistic conception of the relationship between signifier and signified. The move away from the natural sign allows for the possibility of explaining the unity and coherence of the object of interpretation in terms of suppression and repression and hence introduces a dynamic of power into the life of the signifier. Unity and coherence become therefore one effect of this dynamic.

It is the impossibility of the natural sign and therefore of a return to a recoverable origin that makes the contemporary practice of history problematic. The absence of an origin that can be retrieved is explicable in terms of the absence of an identity (and an implicitly universal identity) in terms of which difference can be explained. The practice of interpretation therefore becomes strategic, where strategy is determined by the place taken in relation to the dynamic of power. Each place is not determined by something "real" but the "real" is itself internal to and thus constituted by the strategy in question. An appeal to the real rather than the "real" must be understood as a move within a particular interpretive strategy one that cannot be opposed by adducing further evidence but only in relation to the dynamic of power. The impossibility of universal history serves to distance the interplay of origin and truth and thereby to underlie the unavoidably discursive and political nature of histories.

Footnotes

1. Jean-François Lyotard. 'Histoire Universelle et Difference Culturelles.' in *Critique*, Mai, 1985. p. 559. My translation.
2. Translated into English as *The Order of Things*. M. Foucault. London. 1970.
3. E.M.Curley. *Descartes Against the Skeptics*. Oxford. 1978. pp.ix-x.
4. B.Williams. *Descartes: The Project of Pure Inquiry*. London. 1978. p.24.
5. I. Hacking. 'Leibniz and Descartes: Proof and Eternal Truth', *Philosophy Through its Past* ed. T. Honderich. London. 1984. p.271.
6. Foucault. op cit. p.xxii.

CRITICAL RATIONALISM AND POLITICS

David Miller

This paper illustrates by means of a short series of readings (*[1]-[5]*) from some of his main works the substantial unity that exists between Popper's epistemological and methodological ideas and the version of democratic liberalism expounded in *The Open Society and Its Enemies*. This unity, I maintain, goes well beyond the doctrine, prominent in *The Poverty of Historicism*, of the unity of method in the natural and social sciences, though that is not excluded. A much more central thread running through Popper's philosophy is his unwavering disavowal of all appeals to authority, whether scientific, epistemological, or political. This rejection of authoritarianism does not compel us to reject what the authorities say, but it does oblige us to assess ideas and social institutions on their individual merits and demerits, and not in terms of their ancestry or in terms of the abstract general principles that they are supposed to embody; in short, we should evaluate ideas in much the same way we try to evaluate other human beings. In science this means that we should judge hypotheses by what they say, rather than by their credibility. In social life we should judge institutions by what they achieve, rather than by what we think they should achieve.

Selection *[1]* is a recent outline of the philosophy of critical rationalism, to my mind the most uncompromising, and thus the most satisfactory, statement that Popper has yet given. Selection *[2]* exposes the logical inadequacies of most versions of rationalism (including, perhaps, the version there endorsed). Selection *[3]* gives a deadly analysis of the various paradoxes of sovereignty (see also *Wollheim [1962]*), liberty, and tolerance. These selections all illustrate the influence of logical and methodological ideas on political ones. Selection *[4]* provides a lesson in the other direction. The success of Western democratic institutions makes it plain that we are not forced to choose between despotism and anarchy; likewise, there is room for a theory of knowledge that is neither authoritarian nor barrenly sceptical. Selection *[5]*, in conclusion, ties the epistemological and political ideas together, and stresses the dualism of facts and standards, or of facts and proposals. That facts may fall short of standards, and that we can make proposals to remedy

such shortcomings, is held by Popper to be a prerequisite of any critical attitude, and thus of the liberal tradition.

That we are liable to make mistakes in all that we attempt is a commonplace these days. But fallibilism *[5, pp.375f.]* is little more than a prelude to critical rationalism. We cannot of course expect to avoid all errors, especially when we do not quite know what we are trying to do; but it is an aversion to incorrigible error, not error itself, that is the distinguishing mark of the critical rationalist (see *Miller [1983], p.10*). This unreadiness to countenance errors that cannot be remedied leads at once to the demand that hypotheses affecting to be empirical be empirically falsifiable (*Popper's criterion for the demarcation of empirical science from logic, mathematics, and pseudo-science*); it leads also to the demand that programmes of social or political (or, for that matter, climatological) reform be modest enough to be kept under control, and if necessary themselves reformed (*piecemeal engineering*). Oddly enough, a persistent objection to critical rationalism is that the advocacy of great boldness in science, that is, of highly falsifiable hypotheses, is inconsistent with the advocacy of care and restraint in our dealings with the lives and well-being of others. It is as though one were to accuse a vegetarian of inconsistency for adopting different attitudes towards animal and vegetable products; or a meat-eater of inconsistency for not also engaging in cannibalism. The objection was recently aired by Gellner in Ryan's broadcast *[1985]*. It is also in *Ackermann [1976]*, where an attempt is made to resolve it. There are, it must be admitted, people who think that they can predict to a nicety the side-effects of grandiose social experiments, but not much that we know about social life suggests that they are right. In any case, this objection should not be confounded, though sometimes it is, with the even odder complaint (*Ackermann, p.158*) that 'Popper the revolutionary in physical theory seems Popper the conservative in social theory'. If Popper has ever shown a preference for unadventurous social theories (and not just for small-scale social experiments) it is, I imagine, because he (like some others) has a preference for theories that are not outrageously false, and therefore not outrageously dangerous. (Milford has drawn my attention to an appealingly adventurous, but apparently not dangerous, proposal for educational reform made by Popper himself in *[1985], p.117*.) It must not be supposed that methodological preferences and epistemological preferences are bound to coincide.

Without at all withdrawing what is said above about the salient points of critical rationalism, I shall now try to characterize this philosophy (which, I should note, I wholly sympathize with) somewhat differently, as the doctrine that all ideas, whether speculative hypotheses or practical proposals, must be treated on their own merits, in terms, that is, of what they say or what they imply, and in no other way. By this I do not of course mean that an idea is to be the judge in its own cause. That would be loopy. (But compare *Ayer [1956], p.75*: 'it hardly seems troubling that inductive reasoning should be left, as it were, to act as judge in its own cause.') In other words, if an idea, say a scientific hypothesis, sets out to tell us what part of the world is like, that is, to be true, then we must evaluate it by how well it does this, how accurate it is, how near it is to the truth *[5, pp.376f.]*. (Truth is here taken in its usual objective sense. That no unexceptionable theory of approximation to the truth yet exists is an undeniable source of anxiety, but in the interests of simplicity I set these serious difficulties aside here. For an informal survey see my *[1982]*.) Likewise, a social reform should be judged by its success in bettering the lot of those (if any) it was designed to help. These proposals may seem to be crashingly obvious. Yet virtually all traffickers in the theory of knowledge disagree with them.

If you volunteer some novel hypothesis to a philosopher, he will ask you not whether it is true but what your reasons or grounds are for believing that it is true. If you propose some course of action, he will ask for your evidence for believing that it serves your purpose. This way of responding is what is called being rational. *Uncritical rationalism* is Popper's label for the view that 'any assumption which cannot be supported either by argument or by experience is to be discarded' *[2, p.230]*, and he observes that it is logically quite untenable. But more devastating even than its proclivity to self-discard is the way in which uncritical rationalism focuses attention on entirely the wrong issue: on what our arguments are for thinking that an hypothesis is true, rather than on whether it is true. Critical rationalism, in contrast, holds that if we are keen to lay our hands on the truth then a true hypothesis backed by no evidence at all is better than a false one backed by a lot of evidence. This in no way involves a repudiation of rationality. Arguments, and the consideration of evidence, are crucially important parts of the method we use (fallibly) to sift the true from the false; but they do not form any part of the eventual conclusion. On this view rationality is manifested in the respect paid to reasoning, and in the deployment of reason. It has nothing to do with the production or the provision of positive reasons (*Miller [1987], [2001]*).

Working hard may be the best method of preparing for an examination. But it is not the job of a board of examiners to decide, or even to care, which candidates have worked hard.

The correct response to the questions *What is your evidence?, How do you know?*, and the like is *Never you mind. Is what I am asserting not true? [4, pp.21, 26]*. In other words, it invites the sceptic (for only sceptics ask such questions) to abandon the frivolity of epistemology and to investigate the empirical, mathematical, philosophical, or social problem that is at issue. This is what was meant when I said above that *ideas are entitled to be treated according to their individual merits and demerits*. A hypothesis that sets out to say something true deserves criticism only if it fails to say something true. Why should we reproach it for falling below some different standard, for example for being incredible, or unsupported, or blasphemous, or an insult to the intelligence? We may indeed criticize it for not solving the problem it set out to solve. But again, that is to judge it entirely on what it says, and not on anything else.

What is essential, of course, if we are to eliminate errors, is that such criticism should be possible. We quite rightly object to being asked to handle hypotheses that are not open to criticism; not for being in error, but for not allowing us any opportunity to institute improvements. We cannot risk encumbering ourselves with mistakes that we are powerless to correct. Note, however, that this requirement of criticisability in our hypotheses is not an epistemological evaluation, but a methodological one.

This is *the critical approach [1, pp.23-25]*: hypotheses are put forward as candidates for the truth; their claims to be true, or nearly true, are subjected to unsparing criticism; if they survive the criticism, which may consist of empirical tests, comparisons with other theories, and internal logical investigation, they are not discarded; if they do not, they are. A discarded hypothesis is judged, perhaps falsely, to be false; an undiscarded one may be conjectured to be true, though there exists not the slightest reason to think that it is true. But that does not matter. What does matter is whether the hypothesisis or is not true; and, to a lesser extent, whether it solves a pressing problem. But we do not eliminate any hypothesis as a contender for the truth merely because it solves no problem. (The truth is sometimes a bit dull, not to say disappointing.)

The epistemologist's response to this line of thought is usually to say that it is the scientist's task to investigate individual hypotheses, not the philosopher's; the philosopher operates on a more elevated plane, searching for general features of theories that will ensure, or virtually ensure, their truth. Now, were there any properties that provided such a guarantee, we would doubtless make use of them. But there don't seem to be any. And once it is accepted that the possession of some property gives no guarantee of the truth of an hypothesis, we have no option but to examine it without reference to that property; and once we do that, the property is of no further relevance to our inquiry. It is an all or nothing affair. Properties eliminated in this way include the source or origin of the hypothesis *[4, pp.24f.]*, the colour, sex, or race, or the economic or political habitat, of its proposer, how well it is empirically supported, and (I stress) how thoroughly it has been empirically tested. There is, in brief, no job to be done here by anyone who dislikes dirty hands. This is not to prevent us from proposing hypotheses (sometimes called heuristics) that tell us that ideas of one kind are more promising than those of another; but such heuristics are of no use as tests for truth if they are not themselves true, and seldom more useful if they are true. The possibility always exists that this time it is Lysenko who has brought home the bacon and Einstein who has laid an egg.

It may be thought that by emphasizing in this manner the need to consider scientific theories individually, and to judge them on what they say, critical rationalism is in danger of squandering all the advantages we associate with scientific knowledge; namely universality, predictive power, and generality. But this is not the case. What is important about universal statements is that they contradict singular statements: this means that they can be tested by singular statements, but also that they can be used to rule out singular statements. We may therefore use some scientific hypothesis to exclude some entertained possibility, and yet admit that the hypothesis used may itself later have to be excluded. In practical affairs, in particular, we use science all the time to tell us what courses of action we ought to avoid, while fully acknowledging that the advice we get may turn out to be wrong. Among epistemologists there is a fondly nurtured fantasy that we use scientific theories in practical affairs as a source of positive advice. It is repeatedly suggested, for instance, that we build bridges on the basis of our scientific knowledge. But the idea that there is any one scientific theory, or even any collection of them, that instructs us how a bridge may be built across the

Channel (say) quite ignores the trivial logical point that universal statements proscribe but do not prescribe: as stressed in *The Poverty of Historicism*, 'it is one of the most characteristic tasks of any technology to point out what cannot be achieved' *(p.61)*. *Medawar [1985], pp.72f.*, rightly observes that from the constructional point of view 'a television set ... is not within the effective comprehension of any one mind' (which might be compared with the comment due to Hayek that is approvingly cited in *The Poverty of Historicism, p64, n.1.*). But the same thing is true even of a humble tin of baked beans. There is simply no such thing as the scientific knowledge needed for the manufacture of a television set or a tin of beans; no amount of science will tell us how to tackle the job - there are countless ways that will succeed. All that science can do is to remind us of what we had better not do.

Justificationists are prone to pose the question *How can you be so sure [what is your reason for thinking] that your policy will work successfully?*, to which the right answer is simply *I am not so sure [I have no reason for thinking] that it will. Pray tell me what I would gain from being sure of [having a reason to expect] success?* No sensible answer has ever been given to this question.

We do not rely on scientific hypotheses when we act, we exploit them. (This truism, which is little recognised, I should like to call the *slavery theory of applied science*.) When the hypotheses we exploit are false, we unwittingly increase the danger, always appreciable (since we never fully understand the situation we are in), that we shall act in an unsuitable manner. That is why we try to eliminate hypotheses that are false. (This solves the pragmatic problem of induction.)

All this applies with redoubled force to attempts to change, or to arrest change in, social and political institutions. Whether we like it or not, things have to be done, and people have to be given the job of doing them. But there are no scientific theories telling us how to achieve our goals, and even those that tell us what we should avoid give us not the slightest assurance that our efforts will succeed. There are around, admittedly, various historical, moral, metaphysical, and plain mischievous theories that purvey such promises, but even if some of them happen to be true (which hardly registers as a serious possibility) there is nothing gained by not investing them with the maximum distrust. If such a theory is true, after all, it will not be any the less true because we suspect it. (This is not to deny that confidence in a government,

or in acurrency, may be crucial to its survival. But such confidence is not an epistemological matter; indeed, it usually amounts to the very unconfident adoption of some guarded prediction concerning the conditions under which the government or the currency will survive.) And if the theory in question is not true, our wariness will keep us alert to its failings, and allow us to adjust to them, and correct for them, in good time.

That we should not allow a universal theory to ride ruthlessly over the stark fact of its falsity, or, for that matter, allow facts to establish a tyranny of their own (as they are encouraged to do by instrumentalists and pragmatists), may be thought of as the epistemological version of the theory of checks and balances *[3, p.122]*. According to this theory, political power is not incapacitated by being unsecured. Theories, likewise, do not lose their power to tell the truth simply by not being able to guarantee or to compel the truth. That there is an assured path to the truth has its analogue in the various absolute theories of sovereignty. It is a reasonable criticism of such theories, as it is of all theories that claim to be beyond dispute (and only of those), that there could be situations in which they disintegrate. *Who should rule?* is a question that admits of a non-paradoxical answer, just as does the question *What is true?*. But the only rational response to the question *Who should rule, whatever he decides to do?* is *He who always makes the right decision*. It is like being confronted with the question *Which theory is the true one, come what may?*, to which the only rational response is *The set T of all true sentences*. (Contrast *[3, note 6]*.) This is a fair answer, even a correct one, but it is clearly not an effective one.

In conclusion, let me say a word about the dualism off acts and standards, or of facts and proposals *[5, pp.383-386, 392f.]*, which, I noted above, is a fundamental prerequisite of any critical approach to society. Critical rationalism is, both methodologically and politically, interventionist, in that it obliges us to introduce reason into a world that lacked it. If reason, or if criticism, could be reduced to matters of fact, the introduction of reason would serve no purpose (for a start, there would be no purpose, but even if there were, it would be impossible to serve). This is why indeterminism, but not mere indeterminism, has for long been closely allied with critical rationalism. It is an enduring myth that there is no middle path between changeless law and lawless change (see *Objective Knowledge, p.227*, and also *The Open Society and Its Enemies, Chapter 25, n.27*). It is a path that we must be prepared to hack out for ourselves, and to tread.

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Readings

[1] 'The Critical Approach: Solution of the Problem of Induction', sections I-V, in *Realism and the Aim of Science, section 2, [pp.18-30]*.

[2] *The Open Society and Its Enemies*, volume 2, Chapter 24, sections I and II, including notes 7-8 *[pp.224-231, 353-356]*.

[3] *The Open Society and Its Enemies*, volume 1, Chapter 7, sections I-III, including notes 1-7 *[pp.120-127, 263-266]*.

[4] 'On the Sources of Knowledge and of Ignorance', sections I-VI, XIII-XVII, in *Conjectures and Refutations, [pp.4-9, 21-30]*.

[5] 'Facts, Standards, and Truth: A Further Criticism of Relativism', sections 1-16, in *The Open Society and Its Enemies*, volume 2, Addendum 2, *[pp.369-393]*

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Review
of

HEIDEGGER ET "LES JUIFS"
by J-F Lyotard.

(Paris: Galilée, 1988)

James Williams

> *And in any case a verdict of not proven cannot be avoided.*
> (*Heidegger et "les Juifs"*, hereafter H.e.l.J, p88)

In French jurisprudence there is a specific term for designating the termination of a court case due to insufficient evidence; such cases are said to end in a *non-lieu*. In these cases, the prosecution cannot provide sufficient evidence to convince the judge that a secure verdict can be arrived at. The court finds itself to be incapable of reaching a judgement of which it can be certain and it returns a verdict of "neither innocent nor guilty." Thus, in the case of a verdict of *non-lieu*, inappropriate or insufficient evidence makes the judgement incompetent. The tragedy is that this incompetence is transferred onto the defendant; neither found guilty nor innocent, the defendant remains tainted by the original charge.

When one comes to write on a book titled *Heidegger et "les Juifs"*, one is also dragged into the long history of the "Heidegger case": Is Heidegger's philosophy accomplice to Nazi politics? Lyotard's book attempts to answer that very question and it is therefore difficult to avoid passing judgement on Heidegger. Yet I will avoid giving an answer or even a consideration of the "*cas Heidegger*" in the context of a trial; this avoidance must be achieved without condemning Heidegger to the limbo of a *non-lieu*. However, in the context of a book that ponders the implications of a philosopher's gesture of silence, Heidegger's silence upon the extermination of the Jews, the attempt to avoid judgement through silence appears to be futile, even pathetic. But let us not forget that to 'avoid' a sentence means to quash it and not to return a *non-lieu*. How can the sentence following the Heidegger case be

quashed before a verdict is found? By quashing the judge's appointment. I am obliged not to judge Heidegger.

Events in the Heidegger case forbid me from making moves towards its consideration. Such events so exceed my powers of imagination and understanding as to render me incapable of recognizing the charge from the point of view of judgement; they betray my necessary ignorance of the historical and emotional facts of the case and hence command me not to become involved in a trial.

> *All formulae are dangerous. They force that which is said to the exteriority of a hasty opinion and can easily corrupt thought. But they can also come to our aid, in giving impetus and support to an enduring meditation.* (Heidegger, *On the Way to Language*, p197)

There is something of Heidegger's dangerous formulae both in judgements and apologies, but only the latter allows an enduring meditation. For judgement curtails apology - once judgement is passed the case is shut and the defence must become silent. When a book is judged to be heretical it is burnt; from that moment on, to attempt its apology is a difficult task indeed.

> *Given that this discourse will be surrounded by fire I quickly recall that Helvetius' book,* De L'Esprit, *was burnt at the foot of the great stairway of the Palais de Justice on the tenth of February 1759 on order of the Paris parliament, after the King took away its "privilege" and Pope Clement XIII forbade its reading in any language.* (J. Derrida, *De L'Esprit*, p14)

To refuse to pass judgement on Heidegger is in fact to read *Heidegger et "les Juifs"* correctly; the book is not a judgement but an apology, and to read it in any other way is to do it an injustice. We must, however, remember that an apology is not only "the pleading off from a charge or imputation", but also the "justification, explanation or excuse, of an incident or course of action"; it is in this latter sense of the word that Lyotard's work is an apology. He does not seek to refute or uphold accusations, but rather, to explain and interpret events through an analysis analogous to a Freudian psycho-therapeutic *anamnesis*:

> *...couch verbalisation, with the aid of free association, undoes obsessive images, recurring dreams, habitual rites, lapses, failed acts, by naming their lost origin...* (Lyotard, *Que Peindre?*, p55)

Heidegger et "Les Juifs" is in many ways an unusual work. It is therefore important to explain why it stands apart in style and tone from much of Lyotard's *oeuvre*. The style and tone of *Heidegger et "Les Juifs"* is first announced, and is best reflected, in its title. *Heidegger et "Les Juifs"* sets the topic for the book in a careless and confrontational manner, and indeed, the book itself is hurried and acerbic. The expression "the Jews" in the title signifies neither the Jewish nation, nor the real Jews, nor Zionism, but rather those among us hostage to a law, the law that teaches us that we always forget the forgotten by remembering it (this law will be explicated in greater detail later in this review). This signification ("the Jews") is open to misinterpretation and could quite easily cause offence; it betrays the speed in the writing of the book through its lack of care and combative tone. The book is hurried because it is an immediate response to the re-opening of the discussion of Heidegger's political and social entanglement with Nazism that followed the publication, in France, of Victor Faria's book, *Heidegger et le Nazism*. Faria's book caused the French press to concentrate, once again, on the "*cas Heidegger*"; outrage in the press forced French Heideggerian philosophers into a heated semi-philosophical exchange with anti-Heideggerians. This philosophical journalism led, in turn, to a philosophical debate and to the publication of books by Heideggerians explaining or justifying their relationship to Heidegger and the "*cas Heidegger*". Jean-François Lyotard's book is his contribution to the more thoughtful debate on Heidegger and Nazism; his inclusion in the discussion follows on from his concern in the event of Auschwitz. The re-awakening of the outrage and anguish concerning Heidegger and Nazism is an event that Lyotard reacts strongly to in the context of his later philosophy; he analyses the strong sentiments involved in the case in an analysis that takes the form of an *anamnesis* of the buried tensions and omissions in Heidegger's work that led to his political involvement with Nazism ("the greatest stupidity of his life") and to his post-war silence.

The book is divided into two sections, a section of theory and a section of practice. This division is surprising in the context of Lyotard's other works, given that he usually presents the theory and practice relationship in an intricate intermingling. The section on theory is included in *Heidegger et*

"Les Juifs" in order to make explicit certain theoretical concepts not previously used together. Lyotard expands on the following concepts in the book:

(1). Forgetfulness and the politics of forgetting and remembering.
(2). *Anamnesis* and the dynamics of Freudian *Nachträglichkeit.*

These concepts are considered in terms of the more familiar ideas of:
(3). The Kantian sublime.
(4). The aesthetic aporia: the representation of the un-representable.
(5). Adorno's negative dialectics, his theory of micrologies and avant-garde art.

Lyotard also includes some of his more topical and less theoretical preoccupations, such as:
(6). The role played in and by the hegemony of capital in the numbing of an individual's capacity to receive constitutive impressions.
(7). The intrinsic involvement of "Judeo-christian" religions and values in the hegemony of capital.

L' anesthésie pour lutter contre l'amnésie.

For Lyotard, forgetfulness is a "fact" of the act of remembering; that which is forgotten is always forgotten and cannot be retrieved from the depths of memory. The necessary state of forgetfulness and its effect - that something must always have been forgotten - lead to an ethical law similar to the Kantian Fundamental Law of Pure Practical Reason; Lyotard calls this "the Law" ("*La Loi*"): "Always remember that something is always forgotten". It is to this law that "the Jews" are obliged. To be hostage to the Law is to be compelled not to recognize the apodicticity in metaphysics and politics; because that which is forgotten can never be remembered and is heterogeneous to representation, certainty always implies doubt. There is also, apart from the Law, another form of forgetfulness: forgetfulness in representation, the belief that insists that representation can sublate the Law in memorials to that which must not be forgotten. It is this second form of representation that is implied in the foundation and perpetuation of a political state. Memorials allow a community to efface any doubts concerning its legitimacy by packing doubt into the certainty of myth. In packing shame and

doubt into the noble and just through an act of remembrance, a society covers up the hetereogeneity at the foundation of its state and transgresses the Law:

> *And thus that politics forgets heterogeneity, which is not only heterogeneous to the Self but heterogeneous in itself, foreign to that form of temporality (of remembrance), which did not enter it and which we do not remember nor can remember through that mending packaging gesture.* (H.e.l.J., 21)

The persecution of the Jews is a manifestation of the process of mythification; western anti-semitism seeks to rid the state of a source of doubt and shame through the affirmation of its "native" myths. Nazi extermination is the extreme state of anti-semitism in that it seeks to rid the state of even the trace of extermination, even the crime itself is hidden so not even the memory of it can sow the seeds of doubt and shame. "The Jews", hostage to their Law, are called to respect that which is forgotten; they are called forward by the Law to look back toward the condition of originary heterogeneity. They cannot, though, represent that condition, for this would transgress the Law by packaging the forgotten in representation; the Law of "the Jew" is here very close to Kant's description of the sublime Jewish commandment in the Old Testament, *Exodus* 20; "*tu ne feras point d'image taillée*" ("Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven images").

In order to theorise remembrance outside representation, Lyotard appeals to the Freudian notions of *anamnesis* and *Nachträglichkeit.* In Freudian analysis, the unrepeatable, unpresentable past can be articulated not as a paradox - as in a metaphysics of subjectivity dependant on the subject as the focus for all evident vision - but as an unpresented original *choc* inflicted on the psyche. The Law first enters the psyche as a disturbance of its powers of representation, as such it is an event that cannot be recalled or sensed. Instead, that original *choc* is re-enacted through a feeling of fear and anguish, *Nachträglichkeit*, which descends from the original disturbance:

> *The "too early" of a first shock to the system, which it does not feel, and the "too late" of a second shock where something is felt that cannot be stood.* (H.e.l.J., p42)

The feeling of *Nachträglichkeit* cannot be analysed through an analysis of its cause because its real cause is unpresentable. Analysis must become

anamnesis. The traces of the first, original, disturbance must be tracked back from the event that triggered off a particular *Nachträglichkeit*, for example the spider of phobia. Similarly, "the Jews" uncover the Law through an *anamnesis*, which starts from the moment where they feel that the Law is transgressed, and tracks back through the succession of events and images that led to the feeling of transgression. *Anamnesis* is how the foundation of western "spirit" - in humanism, Christianity, technology, biology, etc. - can be resisted without appeal to a theory of memorial and remembrance:

> *It (writing) develops in the after-shock, but does not attempt to be symptomatic, a simple phobia, a raw forgetting of an unforgettable secret. It "works", not like a dream censuring the secret, dressing it up, but as an anamnesis, to which it is analogous, unmasking its disguises (...) in order to disclose itself.* (H.e.l.J, p64)

Lyotard transfers Freudian *anamnesis* to a theory of the art of the avant-garde. The Kantian sublime is the aesthetic analog to Freud's *Nachträglichkeit*. In the feeling of the sublime, the absolute as magnitude or force cannot be restricted by representation, but through a feeling of pleasure and pain we sense the excess that cannot be apprehended. Hence, the sublime allows for an artistic theory of *anamnesis*:

> *That nodal point of Kant's thesis is the seed for the contemporary state of sensibility anticipated in modern art, that which we name the avant-garde.* (H.e.l.J., p63)

However the sublime is a feeling and not an aesthetic quality; its importance lies in the limits it sets artists and not as a type or model for artists to strive towards. At this point Lyotard appeals to Adorno's negative dialectics. Adorno realised that art could not be sublime and that in fact the sublime was the limit for art; an art of the avant-garde must show this aporia of art, that the striving to represent the sublime is futile. Art can only communicate the Law by demonstrating its own limit. Avant-garde artists must seek to witness the Law negatively in witnessing the impossibility of representation.

The conjunction of *anamnesis* and avant-garde art is the closest Lyotard has come to a method for the witnessing of original heterogeneity. Modern society drains the psyche with a media bombardment of information that

numbs perception and forces the self to reconstruct itself as a manager, director and owner of information. In this reconstruction the self loses its capacity for intimate self-reflection and must depend on the social-cultural machinery for its self-image. Only violent shocks can pierce the armour of senses impervious to everything except information as an exchange commodity. It is such shocks that contemporary art and literature can exploit to reach within the managerial self and re-awaken its capacity for the Law: an anaesthetising shock to fight amnesia.

Part two of *Heidegger et "Les juifs"* is an analysis of Heidegger's philosophical attitude towards the rise of Nazism and the extermination of the Jews in the light of Lyotard's theory outlined in part one of the book. In this section, Lyotard not only tackles Heideggerian thought but also investigates deconstruction and political aesthetics' capacity to question that thought on its relationship to the Nazi movement. Specifically, Lyotard criticises and distances his reading of Heidegger from that of Jacques Derrida in *De L'esprit*, and Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe in *La fiction du Politique*. Lyotard argues that *anamnesis* and its ability to tune us to the Law is the only analysis that can understand Heidegger's silence on the holocaust without condoning or becoming accomplice to it. This argument is essential to Lyotard's theory because Heideggerian *Destruktion* and Derridean Deconstruction come very close to his own theory of *anamnesis*; he must show that deconstruction of presence in metaphysics transgresses or is deaf to the Law. It has always been important for Lyotard to widen the gap between his thought and that of Derrida; in *Heidegger et "les juifs"* there is the opportunity for him to demonstrate how the deconstruction of the presence of Being is still dependant on a metaphysics of presence for the sustaining of its claims to an uncovering of Being through an archeological survey of the ruins of metaphysics. That dependence comes from deconstruction's incapacity to think outside or away from the limits of representation; this flaw comes from deconstruction's closeness to Heideggerian *Destruktion* and its dependence on the dismantling of metaphysical edifices to uncover Being, instead of relying on the anamnesis of a shocking silence to reveal the Law:

> *The engagement, the waging: to take account of that architectural or anarchitectural necessity without destroying, without taking only negative conclusions. The bottom-lessness of a "deconstructive" and affirmative deconstruction can give one vertigo, but it is not emptiness, it is not the chaotic remainder, the*

> *hiatus of destruction. Inversely, no more is it Heideggerian* Destruktion *even if one must suppose its project.* (J. Derrida, *Psyche*, p518).

The publication of Victor Faria's book on Heidegger and Nazism is the trigger for the re-emergence of an aftershock of the original realisation that great thought can be implicated in great atrocity: "that devastation is called anguish: the greatest thought can lend itself, as such, to the greatest horror". That anguish and its cause, Heidegger's 'Nazism', remind us of a closure in Western thought and politics; the closure is that politics and metaphysics always forget their involvement in the horror of their history. We cannot, though, resolve our anguish in a trial and denouncing of Heidegger's philosophy in its historic and socio-political contexts; this is because his philosophy is perpetually rethinking its contexts to which we wish to identify it - to attempt to cleanse thought through the condemnation of Heidegger is to miss any lesson that can be learnt from our anguish. We must hence question Heideggerian thought as self-questioning to discover how it reviews its own philosophical context. That review takes place as an *anamnesis* of the seduction of language on thought, followed by the attempt to seduce that language in return:

> *The rereading of the philosophical and poetic context wherein that thought takes root, in order to escape from it, operates like the* anamnesis *of that which is hidden in the traditional thought and writing of Europe's West. That rereading goes by the name of deconstruction.* (H.e.l.J., p97)

Deconstruction unveils how philosophy discloses the distress of thought that motivates deconstruction itself, but then, how that same philosophy wraps up that distress in metaphysics. It is therefore the task of thought to deconstruct metaphysics in order to return itself to its authentic task, without presentation of that which is covered or forgotten in metaphysics. Authenticity is to stick to deconstruction and resist the recuperation to present Being in another metaphysics - if we are to find fault in Heidegger's work it is where it itself plunges back into inauthenticity.

Lyotard detects a fall into inauthenticity where Heidegger turns deconstruction into an authentic project; at this point philosophy defines a movement and a region wherein Dasein can project itself authentically - this

is the definition of a political sphere for deconstruction, in sympathy or even in excess of Nazi politics:

> *The* cas Heidegger *is far more serious. The stake of its politics exceeds in fact those of the N S D A P and S A. The harshness that it requires is not commanded by an opinion, a temperament, or by a conjunctural preference, but by Heidegger's most deep thought, that which he wrote of in 1927.* (H.e.l.J., p106)

Heidegger's politics - his political texts of 1933-34 and his Nazi affiliations - are the working through of his thought in *Sein und Zeit*; the thought did not require such a politics but allowed it to be formulated. The terms that allowed the political equivalence are: the co-destiny of *Dasein* in *Volk*, the resoluteness (*Entschlossenheit*) in the power of *Dasein* to project itself towards authenticity, and the leadership (*Führung*) given by the thinker to his people in the project towards their spiritual destiny (*geistig, geistlich, geist*). These terms allowed Heidegger to draw a parallel between the deconstruction of metaphysics and a politics of spirit (*geist*) and work (*Arbeit*). Lyotard recognizes that Jacques Derrida has demonstrated how Heidegger omits to fully deconstruct the words *Geist, geistig* and *geistlich* in order to conspire with metaphysics and retain a politics in deconstruction:

> *Spirit, a region subtracted from deconstructive* anamnesis, *a grey, blind area, which authorises a politics that existential-ontological thought only allowed.* (H.e.l.J., p119)

Furthermore, Lyotard suggests that terms other then *Geist* allow demonstrations similar to Derrida's - for example, the words *Arbeit* or *Volk*, both of which escape from their deconstruction in *Sein und Zeit*, and consequently allow a "hard" politics, based on the forces of earth, land and blood, to be posited in parallel to an existential-ontological philosophy.

However - Derrida's analysis of the terms that by-pass Heidegger's deconstruction and authorise his politics does not go far enough in its analysis of the shock of Heidegger's involvement with Nazism. Heidegger's silence upon the extermination of the Jews is not a flaw in his deconstruction, it is a fault of deconstruction itself. Lyotard has shown that the Jews were exterminated because they bore witness to that which Western metaphysics wants to forget: the Law that dictates that something is always forgotten.

Deconstruction cannot speak of that extermination, because it seeks to unravel the question of Being in the ruins of metaphysics. Therefore, for Derrida and Heidegger, the metaphysical ashes of Auschwitz are just that, metaphysical ashes, not the manifestation of the Law in its most horrific negation. Heidegger remained silent because his philosophy remained closed to the possibility of the Law. In insisting that liberty and truth follow on from originary Being Heidegger makes this prejudgement: that the Other is Being. Deconstruction can say nothing of the Law because the Law is not original Being nor metaphysical presence; but rather is the obligation that holds an "other" non-metaphysical thought hostage, not to a destiny toward an uncovering of Being, but to a perpetual *anamnesis* of those events that testify to the Law - Whose Law?

> *The Law of that non-people of survivors, Jews and non-Jews, here named "the Jews", of which the being together owes nothing to an authentic first root, but to that sole debt to an endless* anamnesis.
>
> *One then cannot say that Heidegger's thought "leaves open" the question of his silence upon the extermination. It closes that question, hermetically. That silence* is *that non-question, that closure and that foreclosure. "Forgetting" that thought is without beginning and unfounded. That it does not have to let being be, but has to be given to a nameless Law.* (H.e.l.J., p152-3)

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Review
of

THE WAKE OF IMAGINATION: IDEAS OF CREATIVITY IN WESTERN CULTURE.

by Richard Kearney.

(Hutchinson, 1988)

John O'Reilly

"Imagination" is preserved as a question by virtue of the pun in the title of this book. The title refers to the form of the book itself - an investigation in the tracks of imagination - but also its awakening, and its funeral wake. The possibility for this question is the subject matter of the book. Its immediate impetus is provided by what the author calls the postmodern or parodic imagination of our time. In previous times, a book concerned with imagination or creativity would have found itself a space within the delimited category of aesthetics. However a feature of postmodernity is the all pervasive nature of the image - an image which is no longer innocent, innocence itself a victim of the prefabricated image,

> *at the everyday social level, we notice the image taking pride of place over the real, as in Boorstin's humorous anecdote about the contemporary suburban housewife who responds to a neighbour's compliment to her child with the boast: 'Yes he is lovely, but you should see his photograph.'* (p.2)

This psychic colonisation has occurred at the same moment when the traditional philosophical means whereby one could critically intervene have become redundant. Even if this were not the case, in this "civilization of the image" the systematic opposition 'appearance/reality' fails to meet the demands of a culture organised around the 'logic of the simulacra'. An important feature of Kearney's book is that his genealogy of imagination and its mutations situates the issue of postmodernism in a way which pre-empts the objection that it is no different to what has gone before. In a curious way such an objection would confirm precisely the absolute difference of

postmodernism, for the genealogy offered by the author suggests that the governing principle of imagination is its capacity to transform and mutate. The history of imagination, the author argues, is organised around three general paradigms: imagination as mirror, lamp, and looking glass. Each organising principle approximates general epochs. Respectively, the biblical/hellenic/medieval, the Romantic/modern, the postmodern. The author conveys as another general principle that each epoch contains alternative accounts of imagination which are often in direct opposition to the mainstream.

Given the length of the book, I will merely give a sample of how the author deals with two traditions of imagination, the Judaic and the postmodern.

The story - for the author conceives his genealogy of paradigms as based on "a flexible hermeneutic which construes history as an open-ended drama of narratives" *(p.19)* - begins with the Hebraic imagination. It is here that the connection between imagination and creativity is most evident. *Yetser* means imagination in Hebrew. Its root is yzr from which the words *yetsirah* (creation), *yotser* (creator) and *yatser* (create, form) are derived. The biblical understanding of imagination is therefore bound up with the Adamic myth. The prohibition against eating from the Tree of Knowledge can be seen as an injunction against attempting to obtain God-like knowledge, which entails ultimately the power to create. The eating of the fruit can therefore be read as follows:

> *Adam's transgressive act of imagination represents the alienation of God's original creation from itself - the splitting up of the pre-lapsarian unity of Paradise into the antithetical orders of divine eternity and human mortality* (p.40).

The Talmudic reading of the Genesis renders *yetser*, *yetser hara* (evil impulse). The imagination is seen as an instigator of rebellion which situates it therefore in an ethical context. This transgression is the condition for the possibility of the exercise of free choice. Expulsion from Eden is seen by Buber as a journey,

> *out into the boundless possible which he fills with his imagining, that is evil because it is fictitious* (cit. p.43).

The direction given by God to Man (God's way - *Torah*) has been spurned and Man is condemned to wander. There are however alternative readings in the tradition which suggest that the imagination is not essentially evil. If God recognized creation as 'good', the *yetser* can only be evil by virtue of the use to which it is put. There is also of course the whole tradition of the *Kabbala* which invested a sacred power in the imagination. The ambiguity of the creative impulse is the moral of the Kabbalistic version of the Golem legend. This legend provides an interesting analogue with the later Romantic creation, *Frankenstein*. The Golem is a creature created in imitation of the divine act of creation. The author cites a traditional version of the tale in which two individuals construct such a creature. Inscribed on his forehead was *Emeth* (truth); according to the legend such an inscription was on Adam's forehead,

> *Then the man they had made said to them: God alone created Adam and when he wished to let Adam die, he erased the* Aleph *from* Emeth *and he remained* Meth *(dead). That is what you should do with me and not create another man, lest the world succumb to idolatry* (cit. p.54).

The prohibition against worshipping false idols is familiar, and goes on to have considerable success in future speculations on the imagination and its creations in both theology and philosophy. The author devotes an appendix to the "Image of God" debate, focussing on the strict codes governing iconographic representation. There is, however, an alternative account proffering Adam as the original Golem who, when God created him, stretched across the entire world and was shown future generations, their leaders, and their 'wise men'. The Golem is no longer a false idol but that in which,

> *the potential of all historical creation resides, standing at both the beginning and the end of time, holding out the promise of a new and radically transfigured mankind* (p.55).

The author ascribes the general paradigm of 'mimetic' imagination to the mainstream tradition - imagination conceived as a mimetic activity. The Kabbalistic reading of the Golem legend suggests that tradition is not undivided. Furthermore man is not essentially good or evil. The biblical tradition assumes importance for Kearney because, in this tradition,

imagination generates what is regarded as being fundamental to our being: ethics and history. Imagination is at the core of what it is to be human, ethical and historical.

Because much of the book is taken up with a reading of philosophical discourses on the imagination, the author, aware of the tentative nature of the category 'postmodernism', situates it as a cultural practice with the figures of Lacan, Althusser, Foucault, Barthes and Derrida. They form part of what he terms the 'parodic imagination'. In general these thinkers are absorbed into postmodernism by its critics who regard it as a general effect of late capitalism (even to use the term 'late capitalism' is to cede ground). The author is more modest in his claims regarding the heterogeneous texts of these individuals. In different ways - Lacan's dismantling of the fictitious ego; Althusser's break with bourgeois philosophy's myth of man; Foucault's anti-humanist genealogies; Barthes' desacralising of the author; Derrida's mimesis without end - they provide a useful hermeneutic for the diverse aesthetic practices of postmodernism. As the act of creativity and imagination requires a subject/origin, the dismantling of the subject in recent continental philosophy entails an analogous dismantling of imagination. Kearney reads them insofar as they treat the issues of subjectivity and its ex-centricity, origin, self-reflexive theory, and the exteriority of signification, themes which figure prominently in postmodernist artefacts.

The author chooses two literary and two cinematic texts as exemplary of postmodernism - Pynchon's *V*, Beckett's *Imagination Dead Imagine*, Wim Wenders' *Paris, Texas*, and Fellini's *Ginger and Fred*. Kearney reads *V* as an anti-novel, in a quest for its own story. The character *V* is just that, a letter:

> *a shifting multiplicity of masks with no decidable expression: Leda and St Anne, a blood-sucking vampire and Queen Victoria, a perverse Maltese priest, an English convent girl, a plague bearing rat in the sewers of New York, and a Parisian dressmaker who conducts a fetishistic relationship with a ballerina entirely by means of mirrors"* (p.300).

Not only is there dissembling but dis-assembly. The narrative displacement across a dizzying variety of plots (spatial and temporal discontinuity) and styles (one commentator notes nine different parodies of style[1]) effects an

'intertextual collage' which becomes labyrinthine. The two anti-heroes in search of 'V' are the 'century's children'. Herbert Stencil, reflecting Pynchon's fondness for apposite names, is a "paradigmatic figure of the fatherless and traditionless postmodern imagination" *(p.302)*. He labours under the conviction of his secret agent father that everything falls into an 'ominous' pattern. Stencil's interminable search, and the logic which guides it, leads him to the 'ominous' possibility that everything is what it seems - there is no hidden narrative at work. The other anti-hero, Benny Profane, is read by Kearney as exemplifying the ultimate rationale of one axis of Stencil's undecidable dilemma. Benny has given up the quest to make sense of his world; he is thus propelled indeterminately by events into a series of odd-jobs, including alligator shooting in the sewers of New York. As Kearney suggests, he is either a dim witted dullard, a hard nosed realist or of limited imagination. Everything being what it appears to be, Profane learns nothing from experience, or has learnt to learn nothing. The world of *V*, devoid of omniscient narration or 'Supreme Author', runs according to the anonymous laws of entropy. Kearney reads *V* as presenting the reader with an apocalyptic sense of abstract death born out of a "romantic desire to pursue a metaphysical truth which no longer exists" *(p.306)*, or a more mundane apocalypse effected by the absolute randomness of everyday existence. Yet *V* does offer the possibility of a post-metaphysical myth:

> *a myth rickety as the bandstands and the sausage-pepper booths of the street...only a temporary interest, a spur-of-the-moment tumescence* (cit.p.306).

This myth, according to Kearney, rejects metaphysical quests and:

> *resolves to discover some other kind of meaning in the random debris of the postmodern landscape"* (p.306).

The two films Kearney looks at pose the postmodern dilemma in different ways. In *Ginger and Fred*, Fellini attempts to parodically de-mythologize "the pseudo-world of the television image" *(p.317)*. Fellini's problem is an exaggerated form of the strategic problem presented to would-be deconstructors of postmodern commodification - that of legitimation:

> *What I write is so close to the truth, and at the same time so far short of the totally absurd and degrading truth it represents, that*

> *it is possible, after all, that the viewers of* Ginger and Fred *will simply see it as a documentary, a reportage of what they see everyday on TV"* (cit.318).

This type of parodic imagination has to insinuate itself as close as possible to the 'truth', where proximity itself is called into question. In other words, the manner by which the TV image presents itself as representing reality can only be demystified by putting at risk its own possibility of carrying out such a demystification. So Fellini's parody, by being so close to the degrading truth, is in danger of becoming another media event. It is, as the author points out, paradigmatic of the 'winner loses' logic of deconstruction, and of much of postmodern culture. Kearney reads the film as analogous to the operations of Derrida's "The Double Session."[2] The film tells the story of two ageing variety artists who are hired for a TV 'spectacular'. The show features Ginger and Fred as the 'genuine article':

> *that is, as an authentic* live *representation of Yesterday's* original *Dance Hall presentation. But as their stage names betray, this 'authentic' partnership of Ginger and Fred is itself no more than an 'imitation' of the 'truly authentic' Hollywood stars - Ginger Rogers and Fred Astaire. And the* mise-en-abime *process does not stop here. It is extended further (in fact indefinitely) by our awareness, as spectators of Fellini's film, that Fred Astaire and Ginger Rogers were, in their films of the thirties, themselves purporting to re-enact on the Hollywood Silver Screen a 'live' theatrical dance act. But this supposedly live performance was itself, of course, merely an illusion produced by their films...and so on"* (p.317).

This is where the postmodern fetishising image devours itself as pure exteriority, in a play of undecidablity.

Kearney marks out clearly the omnivorous nature of the mass media culture, citing a recent UNESCO report which warned of the dangers presented by "supranational technology and non-accountable powers" *(cit.p.320)*, and typified by what has been recently described as the 'three minute culture'. One source for this observation is the 'channel-switching' phenomena in the U.S. where over half of the children rarely watch a programme from beginning to end. It is with this in mind that the author approaches Wim

Wenders' *Paris, Texas*. For Kearney this film is a working through of the effects of this psychic colonisation. As Wenders himself remarks, "The Americans have colonized our unconscious...and recreated the so-called 'free' world according to their own image" *(cit.p.324)*. The pivotal human character of the film ('America' obviously figures largely - could it figure any other way?), Travis, appears after four years in the desert to recover a sense of historical continuity from the fragments of his past. He returns to Paris, Texas where he was first conceived, in order that he may become a true son to his dead father, and a true father to his lost son. Travis' plight is,

> *the plight of narrative imagination in a world turned Texan - a world of surfaces increasingly deprived of memory or self-reflection, where fantasy and reality have become so confused and the notion of self-identity so diluted that it no longer seems possible to tell one's own story* (p.324).

The inexorable logic of the image is brought to its limit in the scene where Travis finds his wife working in a peep-show booth. But he refuses to engage in communication constructed around a voyeuristic image (the one-way mirror) and instead talks to Jane via the telephone link. By narrating the story of his past life Jane begins to recognize him. Kearney reads it as follows:

> *They learn the art of mutual dis-possession, as it were, and reach toward a form of genuine communication, however brief, by abandoning the image in favour of the word. Their face to face is verbal not visual. Its very condition of possibility is an unconditional postponement of vision. This renunciation of the image (as commodity possession) also entails a more general renunciation of the American Dream itself (as belief in a messianic origin and end)* (p.327).

The notion of dis-possession is the means whereby Kearney escapes the apparently nihilistic consequences of the postmodern imagination. I will return to this presently. What is of note concerning Kearney's documentation of the postmodern is the thoroughness with which he builds his case. Supplementing his reading of the aforementioned texts, he also surveys postmodernism and computer science, music, art, and architecture. It is quite clear that postmodernism is not only the product of the overworked

imagination of Californian academics, or just an intellectual pastime of those who might otherwise prefer sacrificing women in deserts. Postmodernism appears guaranteed to provoke a reaction out of proportion to the limited claims it is prepared to make. It functions in Kearney's text as a 'heuristic guideline'. It attempts to make sense of 'the civilisation of the image', 'the society of the spectacle' and the impossibility of grand narratives finding critical purchase on these phenomena. The genie of imagination not only escaped from the bottle with Romanticism, it has changed the rules of the game. Simply put, where is the real in postmodernity to which one can appeal? Critics of postmodernism fall into two camps - the minimalists "it doesn't exist, it is an intellectual fashion", and the maximalists, "it is all pervasive , it is regressive and it is nihilistic." The minimalists are in the logic of 'winner loses'. The possibility that it is all 'hype'(-er-real) attests precisely to the "postmodern conflation of imagination and reality" *(p.384)*. Kearney suggests the (*de facto*) postmodern deconstruction of the imagination entails nihilism only insofar as the outcome is read in (by) the governing logic of that which is deconstructed. Moreover, the postmodern imagination marks a move beyond: 1) The pre-modern tendency to repress human creativity in the name of some immutable cause which jealously guards the copy-right of 'original' meaning; and 2) The modern tendency to over-emphasize "the sovereign role of the autonomous individual as sole source of meaning" *(p.33)*.

Kearney's response to questions concerning the sense of the apocalyptic in postmodernity is organised around the question of the ethical. This is not introduced by a sleight of hand, complimenting/supplementing a philosophical lack. Rather it is to be read as a necessary requirement of a possible postmodern philosophy that would be attentive to its own negative possibility as empty simulacra,

> *If interpreted ethically (rather than just epistemologically), the postmodern crisis and its attendant sense of impending catastrophe may be seen as a sort of protest against the inhumanity of our times. And perhaps the recent debunkings of the humanist claims for sovereign subjectivity may themselves be read as a veiled ethical demand for a new recognition of the irreducible alterity of the other"* (p.389).

At worst, the humanist subject can be regarded as both an effect, cipher and producer of systematic power relations. The post-Man is in fact the bearer of a differentiated ethics. For Kearney the dis-possession of the ego-centric subject must be accompanied by an ethical imagination responsible to and for an other. An imagination capable of imagining a past, for "the forgetfulness of past sufferings and aspirations makes life more tolerable under a dehumanizing system" *(p.394)*.

The historical narratives of discontinuity which Kearney would wish to allow the right to speech are not a different set of data or facts yet to be discovered, or revealed, but the "reinterpretation of our cultural memory" *(p.393)*. Moreover, simply unearthing different data rather than a data of difference, remains an expression of violence towards an other.

Any account of this type reduces the scale of the book and, like all good storytellers, the author's ability to tell a tale of imagination.

Notes

1) Tony Tanner, *Thomas Pynchon* (London, Methuen, 1982)

2) Jacques Derrida, "The Double Session" in *Dissemination*, trans. Barbara Johnson (University of Chicago Press, 1981).

Review
of

SENTENCES AND SLOGANS
by J.L.H. Thomas

(Haydon Bridge, 1989)

David Wood

The most decisive, the most elusive aspect of a book is its tone.
(Aphorism 97)

This publication is an advertisement for Zerhall paper, Bembo Narrow Italic print, hand-setting, and for the Alembic Press (of Oxford) which printed this handsome 20 page booklet for the author. It lacks only a sachet of ripe library dust to sprinkle on the volume prior to shelving. For something very distant rings out from this Rochefoucauldian collection of aphorisms, whose title echoes perhaps Nietzsche's 'Maxims and Arrows' (*Twilight of the Idols*). Following the lead of the title, the sub-divisions are all named with ampersanded pairs: 'Art & Artists', 'Reading & Writing', 'Here & Now', 'Oneself & Others' and so on. We are in the world of eternal verities captured in one-liners. Instead of being written by 'a gentleman' as well they might have, their author is a Hegel scholar, an ex-Oxford don, and a freelance philosopher working in Northumberland (which I suppose adds up to the same thing). As an unrefereed publication this will not help his *c.v.*, but as publishing houses become more and more like brewing conglomerates, this exercise of stylistic archaism has something of the same charm as real ale.

As might be expected, some of these aphorisms are trite ('A civilization built upon oil can scarcely be very solid'), some haunting, others simply witty *aperçus*. Individual aphorisms linger:

It is not easy to know how long to look at a picture.

The difficult thing in thinking is not having ideas, but recognizing them as such when they come.

My favourite is:

In order fully to appreciate a book, one needs a memory as good, or as bad, as its author's,

which could supply the basis for a general theory of reading.

There is, however, a very general difficulty in writing a book of aphorisms today. We value in this form explosive new insights. But the very institution of the genre of the aphorism acts against this. And a book of precisely 100 aphorisms subjects these explosions to a tedious serial order, which compounds the difficulty. Worse, many of these aphorisms seem to be repetitions or transformations of earlier ones. Compare: 'We are all strong enough to bear the misfortunes of others' (La Rochefoucauld) to 'We are never readier to help others than when we cannot do for them what they want' (Thomas). Is there a machine for generating variants? How about: 'We are never readier to review a book than when it gives us the opportunity to promote ourselves' (Wood).

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