Redefining Modernism and Postmodernism

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Edited by

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PREFACE

Literary and cultural studies in the later twentieth century were very much shaped by debates of modernism and postmodernism as labels for successive periods, but also for two different, competing interpretations of recent cultural history. While modernity was considered by some theorists, such as Jürgen Habermas, as an "unfinished project" that is still relevant and awaiting the full realization of its historical promise and potential, it was radically critiqued and questioned by postmodernist thinkers as a humanist illusion of progress which merely hides strategies of dominance and power as are manifest in structures of logocentrism, patriarchy, colonialism, or economic and cultural exploitation. While modernism and postmodernism were thus considered by some as binary opposites, they were regarded as interconnected by others for whom the postmodern critique of dominance, hierarchy, and conformism was only possible through an implicit, often unadmitted reference to the categories of the subject, truth, and the Real which postmodernism had supposedly discarded. In the twenty-first century, the shock waves that were sent through the global system on political, cultural, economic, and ecological levels by terrorist attacks, regional conflicts, poverty, the financial crisis and the threat of environmental disaster have in turn influenced and reshaped the epistemic and philosophical interpretation of cultural evolution. What is at stake is the question of how and to what extent the tradition of modernity—which includes enlightenment ideas of knowledge, of human rights, of personal self-determination, of the humanizing value of philosophy and art, of tolerance between religions and cultures, ideas which in a way constitute central achievements of human civilization—can be newly defined in a situation where the problematic aspects of these achievements have rightly been exposed, but where they nevertheless appear to be crucial for any responsible assessment of contemporary world culture and its future perspectives.

This question is highly relevant for the dialogue between different global cultures and regions, and for the dialogue between the Western and the Islamic world in particular. Even though this dialogue is not an explicit focus of this volume, it has repercussions throughout the present collection of essays as it informs the ways in which the modernism/postmodernism debate is redefined in the contributions. The book is a selection of papers

delivered at the International Cultural Studies Symposium, *Redefining Modernism and Postmodernism*, in Izmir, Turkey, in April 2009. Thereby, this volume brings together scholars from various countries who renegotiate and redefine the interrelated categories of modernism and postmodernism in a series of essays that cover a broad range of cultural issues and artefacts. It is the shared assumption of the contributors that while the labels of modernism and postmodernism may have lost some of their ideological and innovational force, they continue to represent important categories for interpreting historical, cultural and aesthetic processes from the twentieth into the twenty-first century.

Along with essays by scholars from various countries, the contributions of Turkish scholars help to redefine modernism and postmodernism in important and mutually illuminating ways. This reflects in itself a significant cultural and scholarly process of dialogue, negotiation, and redefinition, which is not only relevant for the situation of literary and cultural studies, but for a critical reassessment of literary and cultural studies around the world. Modernism and postmodernism appear as shifting, transformative categories, which can no longer be seen as dichotomies, but as interconnected ways of making sense of a constantly changing world, a world which always transcends the categories that are applied to it. The essays examine the ever-shifting boundaries between modernism and postmodernism from a broad variety of perspectives, shedding new light on literature, literary theory, philosophy, politics, religion, film and art.

—Şebnem Toplu & Hubert Zapf

PART I:

TRANSFORMATIONS OF MODERNISM AND POSTMODERNISM IN THE TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY

CHAPTER ONE

CULTURAL ECOLOGY, POSTMODERNISM, AND LITERARY KNOWLEDGE

HUBERT ZAPF

Reconsidering Modernism and Postmodernism

In the evolution of literature and culture in the second half of the twentieth century, the shift from modernism to postmodernism seemed to mark a major new and irreversible stage. In sometimes moderate, sometimes also polemical opposition to its modernist predecessor, postmodernism presented itself as a more open-minded, democratic, and culturally pluralistic alternative to the elitist, essentialist, Western and male-oriented era of modernism. Instead of the grand narratives of modernity, which despite the experience of fragmentation and alienation continued to construct a unified view of the world and the self based on the stabilizing power of reason, reality, and the human subject, postmodernism emphasized the decentering and endlessly differentiating forces of discourse, history, and the individual self, destabilizing all attempts at totalizing systematic thought, and replacing overarching teleological concepts with the heterogeneous multiplicity of cultural and personal narratives. Against an exclusionary ideology of the aesthetic, and of the canonization of great works of art as sites of eternal human truths, postmodernism celebrated itself as an intertextually open, inclusionary, and epistemologically self-aware form of critical thought and creative practice, in which a constant revision and rewriting of the canon was part of its innovational agenda.

Meanwhile, in the twenty-first century, the apparently irrevocable triumph of postmodernism has itself been historicized and relativized by various new developments in politics, culture, and in literature itself. First of all, the binary opposition to modernism begins to appear somewhat less convincing than in the heyday of self-confident proclamations of postmodern newness. Modernist writers such as Stein, Joyce, Woolf,

Kafka, Faulkner, Beckett or Brecht, clearly anticipated postmodern developments, while contemporary writers have tended to reconnect to modern and indeed to realist or romantic styles. Influential philosophers and theorists of the modernist period, also, such as Hegel, Marx, Nietzsche, Freud, Bergson, Bakhtin, Benjamin or Adorno, continue to be of relevance into the postmodern era, demonstrating that neither modernism nor postmodernism can be regarded as monolithic literary and cultural movements. Secondly, the shortcomings and self-contradictions of postmodernism itself became the subject of sharp criticism from various angles; from political theorists, who pointed out what Terry Eagleton called "The Illusions of Postmodernism", above all the discarding of the categories of truth and the "Real", which in this view deprived postmodernism of the possibility of convincing cultural analysis, political critique, and ethical agency; from scientists, who challenged postmodernism's epistemological relativism and its sweeping critique of Western rationality; from psychologists, who diagnosed the darker aspects and schizophrenic tendencies of postmodernism's celebration of the plural self and of its abolition of the difference between reality and fiction; and last but not least from writers and literary scholars themselves, who increasingly felt that the postmodernist dissolution of the world into the text, of the self into signs, of life into its simulacra had become a dogma itself and had helped to close up literature and literary studies in that much-cited prison-house of language from whose labyrinth of discourses there seemed to be no way out into history, reality, and life. While no clearly recognizable new episteme has replaced it, there have been different tendencies after the linguistic turn of postmodernism, variously described as a historical, political, iconic, spatial, ethical, or ecological turn of cultural studies, which have pointed in directions beyond the predominant assumptions of postmodernism.

Transdisciplinarity and Literary Studies

In this essay, I would like to make a few comments on this new, not yet clearly defined epistemology of contemporary cultural and literary studies "after postmodernism", and specifically focus on the question of how the place and function of literature can be newly assessed within this dynamic and increasingly globalized development of contemporary knowledge. One of the major impacts of critical movements like new historicism, poststructuralism, or discourse analysis on cultural studies towards the end of the twentieth century was to question the special status of literary texts in relation to other forms of texts and cultural media, and

to take them, at best, as illustrations of social, political and historical processes, but more often than not as manifestations of an elitist ideology of art which had to be deconstructed from an emancipatory perspective of the "equality of all discourses". The strange consequence of this had been an emigration of literary scholars from their own discipline into the exile of various other disciplines, from which they tried to newly constitute and legitimize the terrain and relevance of their scholarly work-history, politics, sociology, psychology, ethnography, media studies, art history, and so forth, whereby the problem emerged that there were already specialists working in these fields, who had their own ways and competence of dealing with the issues that primarily occupied cultural studies, such as class, gender, race, ethnicity, or sexuality. While cultural studies certainly contributed to a necessary broadening and interdisciplinary opening of the humanities, they were at the same time in danger of becoming eclectic, ideological, or simply the transmitters and interpreters of knowledge provided by other disciplines.

To be sure, there is no question that contemporary literary studies must position itself in the wider context of an inter-and transdisciplinary field of contemporary knowledge, and can never return into the ebony tower of an illusory autonomy of art, which immunizes its deeper truths against the collective deceptions and aberrations of history. However, it is crucial for the productivity of this interdisciplinary dialogue that it does not simply subordinate literary studies to other disciplines, to which it delegates the authority of its own truth claims. In this context, it is useful to turn around the perspective for a moment and look at the development in other disciplines of the Humanities and Social Sciences, in which there is a notable tendency towards an increased attention to literary texts as models for the experiential concretization and methodological differentiation of their inherited codes of knowledge. Thus, in religious studies, the awareness of the textual and literary dimension of sacred scriptures has led to a shift of focus to questions of language, metaphor, narrative, and genre, which, interestingly enough, is connected with an increased awareness of interreligious and transconfessional issues. The dialogue of religious studies with literature has clearly become more important in recent decades, and it is instructive to see that wherever this is the case, dogmatic versions of religious thought are becoming questionable, because the recognition of the textual mediatedness of even the most sacred scriptures prevents any fundamentalist assertion of absolute truth claims.

Philosophy, too, especially philosophical ethics, is an instructive example of the contemporary transdisciplinary reassessment of literature. There is a remarkably strong tendency in recent ethical theory to look to

literature as a site of exploring ethical issues in particularly relevant and illuminating ways. As ethical theorists such as J. Hillis Miller, Paul Ricœur, or Martha Nussbaum have pointed out in their different ways, ethical issues seem to require the fictional mode of narrative, because the ethical is a category which resists abstract systematization and instead needs concrete exemplification of lived experience in the form of stories which allow for the imaginative transcendence of the individual self towards other selves. Ethics in this sense is not the same as morality, but rather involves a critique of moral systems as far as they imply fixed, conventionalized, and impersonal rules of thought and behaviour. The models of human interaction staged in literary narratives provide a mode of communicating ethical issues in such a way that they simultaneously resist conventional moralizing. This form of literary ethics has incorporated postmodern notions of the text into the discourse of ethics, dismantling the universalist and exclusionary anthropocentric bias of traditional ethics, and instead foregrounding plurality, diversity, and dialogicity as new ethical orientations.[1] At the same time, however, it has moved beyond the postmodern paradigm of self-referential textuality in that it has reinstituted the agency of the individual subject, the interpersonal dimension of mutual responsibility, and the recognition of the alterity of the other as indispensible values and assumptions of any ethical discourse.

In historiography or sociology as well, literary texts such as historical novels, but also other genres, have become important sources of information about the complexities of lived experience in specific historical periods and social conditions. A recent case in point for this new transdiciplinary interest in literature is an article in the *Journal of Developmental Studies* in its 2008 volume by two social scientists from the London School of Economics and an economist of the World Bank; Lewis, Rodgers and Woolcock, entitled "The Fiction of Development: Literary Representation as a Source of Authoritative Knowledge". In the article, the authors put forward the argument that works of literary fiction can contribute in unique ways to knowledge about developing cultures, which is not available in the same way to the "positivist scientific discourse" (3) that is characteristic of developmental studies both in academic writings and in other fact-and-statistics oriented accounts such as by the World Bank or also by NGOs. Well-intentioned as these may be, the authors argue, they still often miss important aspects of the situation of developing countries and regions, because they neglect such factors as personal experience, emotions, cultural memory, and the impact of the modernization process on the values, identities, and concrete lives of

people, and especially of those whose voices are silenced in the official reports and blueprints for developmental programs. Literary fiction is able to convey "the promises and perils of encounters between different peoples; the tragic mix of courage, desperation, humour, and deprivation characterizing the lives of the downtrodden; and the complex assortments of means, motives, and opportunities surrounding efforts by "'outsiders' to help them" (3). Literature thus helps to provide what Walter Benjamin calls "a concept of knowledge to which a concept of experience corresponds" (2), and which the authors see as a necessary counterpart to the generalizing and objectifying disciplinary knowledge on which developmental studies has almost exclusively depended. Literature's power to "effectively convey complex ideas" (4) is considered as an indispensible complementary source of knowledge, which in their view should be taken seriously and be included in the ways in which the current situation of developing countries is to be assessed and their future to be envisioned more adequately. It is this potential of representing the otherwise unrepresented and the statistically ungraspable "other" of empirical science and rational discourse in their symbolic scenarios which gives literary texts a special authority of insight: "The creative imagination of the literary artist often has achieved insights into social processes which have remained unexplored in social science" (4).

Interestingly enough, the authors see this function connected with the artistic power and quality of the literary text: It is the "intensity of perception of the first-rate novelist" which allows him or her to describe "a locale, a sequence of action, or a clash of characters" (4) that reveal concrete conditions of life in specific cultural circumstances, and which through their fictionalization are simultaneously turned into "ideal-typical exemplifications of social processes" (8). It is specifically the formal and literary qualities of texts such as style, language, the skilful use of metaphors, genres, and narrative perspectives, which account for the pluridimensional, both vividly concrete and symbolically generalizable knowledge they provide. The article demonstrates its argument in literary examples relating to different countries and regions such as to Egypt–Nagib Mahfouz's novel *Adrift on the Nile* (1993) and Ahdad Soueif's *The Map of Love* (1999), Nigeria–Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* (1958) and J.G. Ballard's *The Day of Creation* (1987), India–Shrilal Shukla, *Raag Darbari* (1992) and Rohinton Mistry's *A Fine Balance* (1996), Afghanistian–Khaled Hosseini's *Kite Runner* (2003), or Bangladesh–Monica Ali, *Brick Lane* (2003). While these novels render the almost "unbearable hardship and tragedy" of people's concrete lives, they also transcend these particular fates towards a "universal appeal based on a

kind of 'humanism with politics'" (8). Indeed, at the end, the authors argue that in effect such novels have already appeared on reading lists of university courses in the Social and Political Sciences, and as an appendix, they add their own "Recommended Reading List of Literary Fiction on Development", which contains 67 titles of novels that they consider as authoritative sources of knowledge on their subjects. An important aspect of the knowledge produced by these texts is thus their potential of being both highly culture-specific *and* transcultural: they contain an ethical power which makes it possible for the self to imagine the experiences of others, and for cultures of sharing the imaginations of other cultures.

Postmodernism and Cultural Ecology

Another example for this transdisciplinary significance and positioning of literature and literary studies is the field of Cultural Ecology. It is within this framework that I would like to elaborate a little on the specific forms and functions of literary knowledge. Just as in the case of the new ethics, the ecological paradigma has evolved out of the postmodern episteme, as Linda Hutcheon has observed, representing like postmodernism a response to the "crisis of modernity", its "ordering impulse of rationality, the totalizing power of system" (161). Ecology is likewise a reaction to the dialectic of enlightenment and to the reverse side of the technological-economic progress of modern civilization, specifically to its devastating consequences for the environment and for the vital interrelationship between culture and nature which is necessary for the survival of humanity as well as of the global ecosystem.

This increased attention to ecological questions and to their connection with questions of textuality and culture had already been developing within later postmodern philosophy. Jean-Francois Lyotard's critique of totalizing assumptions and coercive grand narratives implies such references when he links up this critique with a form of "ecology" which aims at discursively empowering the concrete, manifold forms of human life that are overshadowed or even silenced by those dominant grand narratives. Ecology to Lyotard is the "discourse of the secluded", and this "ecological" dimension of discourse is a kind of para-or counterdiscursive power which he locates in language, the text and, indeed, in literature.[2] In Jacques Derrida's deconstructivist philosophy, too, the dissolution of binary oppositions such as between mind and body, culture and nature anticipated an ecological perspective. In the later Derrida, this critique of logocentrism comes to involve a critique of anthropocentrism as well, and the attempt of deconstruction to include the excluded in its discourse is

explicitly extended to the nonhuman, animal world, notably in his essay "The Animal That Therefore I Am (More to Follow)", where Derrida moves "from 'the ends of man', that is the confines of man, to 'the crossing of borders' between man and animal" (2002, 372). The title already sets the explorative, playfully self-reflexive tone of the essay, revising the classical epistemological stance of the knowing human subject–Descartes's "cogito ergo sum" ("I think therefore I am") into a syntactically indeterminate, open-ended, and dialogic process in which the rational cogito is superseded by the living animal as nonhuman other that is established as a basic relation of human existence and (self-)knowledge.[3] To think and speak in such a nonanthropocentric way, according to Derrida, becomes possible less in a philosophical than in a literary mode, because the latter offers the possibility of opening the text to the perspective of "the animal" while remaining aware of its incommensurability. "For thinking concerning the animal, if there is such a thing, derives from poetry. There you have a thesis: it is what philosophy has, essentially, had to deprive itself of. That is the difference between philosophical knowledge and poetic thinking" (2002, 376-377). Derrida here ascribes to literature a special capacity to open the text for the other of nonhuman nature and yet at the same time accept its irreducible alterity.

What this turn towards ethics, ecology, and literature in the discourse of postmodernism implies, is a significant move beyond its earlier positions. First of all, it modifies the culturalist dogma of a purely linguistic constructedness of all objects and forms of knowledge by recognizing a transcultural dimension of "nature" which, even though it is only accessible in textual form, nevertheless represents a necessary frame of reference for the interpretation of cultural phenomena as well. Whether this nature is conceived as external or internal nature, as life-enabling environment or, in the words of Gernot Böhme, as the "aboriginal ground of the *sensuous experience* (as distinct from a merely rational-conceptual understanding) of the world, which is to be integrated via the sense-making consciousness of the body into the overall self-concept of humans" (1989, 15), it forms in an ecocritical view a necessary basis of all culture and knowledge. Secondly, ecological thinking transforms postmodernism by moving beyond difference and heterogeneity towards a thinking in terms of connectivity, of unity in diversity and webs of relationships, which underlie the complex phenomena of life and which are fundamental to any ecology of knowledge.[4] Thirdly, a postmodernism transformed by ecology no longer merely defines itself in opposition to scientific rationality, but rather recognizes the existence of different disciplinary cultures and forms of knowledge that have evolved in the course of

intellectual history and that should be seen as complementary rather than as mutually incompatible forms of approaching the complexities of contemporary life and culture. And fourthly, within this spectrum of cultures of knowledge, literature must be reconsidered not just as part of an undifferentiated universe of discourses, but as a mode of textuality with its own rules and functions, which represents a specifically powerful form of cultural knowledge in its own right.

Cultural Ecology and Literary Knowledge

I would like to suggest here that the paradigm of *cultural ecology* is one such transdisciplinary frame which can help to place literature and literary studies in the larger contexts of contemporary knowledge, without reducing it to a mere illustrative function for other disciplines. Cultural ecology is a relatively recent development within the field of ecological knowledge, which was initiated by Gregory Bateson in the 1970s but has gained considerable visibility in recent years. In his project of an *Ecology of Mind* (1973), Bateson considers culture and the human mind not as closed entities but as open, dynamic systems based on living interrelationships between the mind and the world, and within the mind itself. The "mind" is conceived here neither as an autonomous metaphysical force nor as a mere neurological function of the brain but as a "dehierarchized concept of a mutual dependency between the (human) organism and its (natural) environment, subject and object, culture and nature", and thus as "a synonym for a cybernetic system of information circuits that are relevant for the survival of the species" (Gersdorf and Mayer 2005, 9) (my translation). A fundamental feature of this ecology of mind is a holistic and at the same time open and pluralistic approach to cultural phenomena, which are seen to exist in a constant exchange relationship with natural energy cycles, but they are also characterized by a high degree of independence, functional differentiation, and self-reflexive dynamics. Bateson's methodological move opened up an innovative new area of research, in which cultural processes could be investigated in their structural coevolution with natural processes in a way in which both the interdependence and the difference between natural and cultural evolution were being taken into account.

In Peter Finke's wide-ranging project of an Evolutionary Cultural Ecology, Bateson's ideas are fused with concepts from systems theory. The various sections and subsystems of society that have evolved especially in the modernization process since the eighteenth century are described as "cultural ecosystems", with their own processes of

production, consumption, and reduction of energy–involving physical as well as psychic energy. This also applies to the cultural ecosystems of art and of literature, which follow their own internal forces of selection and self-renewal, but also fulfil an important function within the cultural system as a whole. From the perspective of this kind of cultural ecology, the internal landscapes produced by modern culture and consciousness are equally important for human beings as their external environments. Human beings are, as it were, by their very nature not only instinctual but cultural beings. Literature and other forms of cultural imagination and cultural creativity are necessary, in this view, to continually restore the richness, diversity, and complexity of those inner landscapes of the mind, the imagination, the emotions, and interpersonal communication which make up the cultural ecosystems of modern humans, but are threatened by impoverishment from an increasingly over economized, standardized, and depersonalized contemporary world.

By taking up such cues, as I have tried to show in my book *Literature as Cultural Ecology*, literature can itself be described as the symbolic medium of a particularly powerful form of "cultural ecology", in the sense that it has staged and explored, in ever new scenarios, the complex feedback relationship of prevailing cultural systems with the needs and manifestations of human and nonhuman "nature", and from the paradoxical act of creative regression has derived its specific power of innovation and cultural self-renewal (Zapf 2002, 2006). Literature draws its cognitive and creative potential from a threefold dynamics in its relationship to the larger cultural system–as a culture-critical metadiscourse, an imaginative counterdiscourse, and a reintegrative interdiscourse. It is a textual form which breaks up ossified social structures and ideologies, symbolically empowers the marginalized, and reconnects what is culturally separated. In that way, literature counteracts economic, political or pragmatic forms of interpreting and instrumentalizing human life, and opens up one-dimensional views of the world and the self towards their repressed or excluded other. Literature is thus, on the one hand, a sensorium for what goes wrong in a society, for the biophobic, life-paralyzing implications of one-sided forms of consciousness and civilizational uniformity, and on the other hand, a medium of constant cultural self-renewal, in which the neglected biophilic energies can find a symbolic space of expression and (re-)integration into the larger ecology of cultural discourses.

The vital interrelatedness between culture and nature has been a special focus of literary culture from its archaic beginnings in myth, ritual, and oral story-telling, in legends and fairy tales, in the genres of pastoral

literature, nature poetry, and the stories of mutual transformations between human and nonhuman life as most famously collected in Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, which became a highly influential text throughout literary history and across different cultures. This attention to the culture-nature-interaction became especially prominent in the era of romanticism, but continues to be characteristic of literary stagings of human experience until the present. Indeed, the mutual opening and symbolic reconnection of culture and nature, mind and body, human and nonhuman life in a holistic, and yet radically pluralistic way seems to be one significant mode in which literature functions and in which literary knowledge is produced.

Let me briefly look here as an example from contemporary literature at a short poem by the American poet A. R. Ammons, in which this mutual interdependency is explored in miniature:

Reflective

I found a
weed
that had a
mirror in it
and that
mirror
looked in at
a mirror
in
me that
had a
weed in it[5]

The poem establishes a mutual relationship between the speaker and a phenomenon of nature, a weed, which is neither beautiful nor sublime nor in any other way impressive, but rather insignificant, useless, and irrelevant, an inconspicuous organism that does not fit into the utilitarian forms of order and significance that human civilization has imposed on domesticated nature. The weed is an image of "wild" nature outside the anthropocentric dominance of civilization, which, however, is shown to be intrinsically interconnected with the human subject. The speaker and the weed are connected by the image of a mirror, which has been a central cultural metaphor of human knowledge and self-knowledge in the classical and enlightenment periods, but is employed here in such a way that the subject-object-position is reversed and the phenomenon of nature is turned from an observed object into an observer of its own reflection in the human subject. In a playful defamiliarization of conventional perceptions,

the text reconnects the minimalist symbol of wild nature with the cultural symbol of civilizational self-reflection in a complex act of (self-)knowledge in which the process, which is in turn reflected in the mutual mirroring of words and phrases in the text's formal composition. What the poem thus illustrates in its reciprocal dynamics is that the knowledge generated by literature as a medium of cultural ecology is self-reflexive and relational at the same time.

It is surprising to see to what extent those metaphorical patterns which, according to Gregory Bateson, connect natural and cultural phenomena, are instrumental in shaping the aesthetic conceptions of writers from different periods. With remarkable intensity, writers have focused on the boundary of the culture-nature relationship as a source of poetic knowledge and creativity, and as the textual site where ecological concerns and the ethical self-reflection of the human species are brought together. I just mention a few examples from my field of American literature, the leaves of grass as a signifier of both natural and sociopolitical processes in Walt Whitman's poetry; the deconstructive energies of nature towards human-made walls as a symbolic force of breaking up automatized forms of communication in Robert Frost's "Mending Wall"; the wave as a symbol of natural, erotic, spiritual, and poetological energy flows in Gary Snyder's "Regarding Wave"; or the spiral movement of the eagle's flight as an epiphany of human self-knowledge and compositional principle in the Native American Joy Harjo's "Eagle Poem". In none of these cases is human life simply reduced to its biological origins; rather, its kinship with other forms of life, its "Siamese connexion with a plurality of other mortals" (254), as Melville formulates it in *Moby-Dick*, is taken as a starting-point for a radical, both fascinating and unsettling human self-exploration.

In narrative prose writing, Thoreau's *Walden* is of course the Ur-text of American ecological literature, and beyond the minute factual descriptions of the natural environment, his explorations of the multiple correspondences between the ecosystem of Walden Pond and the human observer are particularly intense when he focuses on the lake as a medium of deeper self-knowledge: "A lake is a landscape's most beautiful and expressive feature. It is earth's eye, looking in to which the beholder measures the depth of his own nature" (Thoreau [1854]1971, 141). Indeed, if one looks from here at the canon of American literature, one can see that Thoreau is particularly explicit, but by no means alone in this ecological interest, and that some of the major texts of American literature are, in an important sense, parables about this troubled yet life-sustaining interrelationship between culture and nature. In Melville's *Moby-Dick*, for example, the vital but also unfathomable interrelationship between the human and

nonhuman world is staged in the epic encounter between man and whale and is epitomized in the humanized head and philosophical features of the white whale as an alter ego of the human narrator. In Mark Twain's *Huckleberry Finn*, the flow of the Mississippi river becomes a metaphor of the fluidity of life and of experiential and textual openness counteracting the ideological ossifications of Victorian society; in Kate Chopin's *The Awakening*, the rhythm and "voice of the sea" provide a symbolic energy subverting the restrictive power of gender conventions; in Ernest Hemingway's *The Old Man and the Sea*, the recognition of the mutual kinship between the protagonist and the great fish form an ethical principle of the narrative, in Leslie Marmon Silko's *Ceremony*, the hybrid, half human, half animal trickster figure of spiderwoman becomes the story-teller and inspiring force of the shamanistic healing process of the ceremony, which is necessary for overcoming the destructive consequences of war and nuclear technology; and in Toni Morrison's *Beloved*, the regenerative power of water is connected with the returning spirit of the dead daughter and thus, paradoxically, with the return of memory, story-telling, and life after the traumatizing experience of slavery.

Literature is thus a distinct form of cultural-ecological knowledge which integrates but also transcends empirical, factual, and quantifiable forms of knowledge including scientific versions of ecology. It enables the imaginative exploration of dimensions of lived experience within the vital culture-nature-relationship that are not accessible in the same way to other forms of knowledge. In their depragmatized world of the imagination, literary texts can bring into play a plurality of different aspects and experiences, and, as the physicist Hans Peter Dürr observed, they can reconnect what is isolated and disconnected in the natural sciences and can thus account more truly for the complex interrelatedness of the world. (Dürr 1995, 96-119) This function, of course, is not restricted to individual texts, but extends to different modes and genres of writing, and whereas early forms of ecocriticism proclaimed the realist, nonfictional mode as the true genre of environmental writing, a cultural-ecological view of literature insists on the specific potential of the genres of imaginative writing that have evolved in literary history. All of the texts I have mentioned clearly transcend the mimetic-realist mode towards a highly imaginative, aesthetically complex and epistemologically self-aware form of writing, in which they find the semiotic space for the exploration of the complex interrelationships between culture and nature, between human consciousness and the biocentric life processes which they perform. What has also become clear is that a cultural-ecological approach describes a potential and function of literature which is shared across periods and

cultures. While taking into account the wide diversity of styles, forms, genres, and movements in literary and cultural history, it also emphasizes the transnational dimensions and global interconnections of literary knowledge at a time of its production and reception in the context of a worldwide literary community.

Notes

[1] See e.g. Robert Inglehart, 1997, who interprets the shift from modernism to postmodernism, somewhat schematically, as a shift from materialist to postmaterialist values, "[w]hich emphasize human autonomy and diversity instead of the hierarchy and conformity that are central to modernity" in *Modernization and Postmodernization*, 27.

[2] "'[E]cology' means the discourse of the secluded, of the thing that has not become public, that has not become communicational, that has not become systemic, and that can never become any of these things. This presupposes that there is a relation of language with the logos, which is not centred on optimal performance and which is not obsessed by it, but which is preoccupied [...] with listening to and seeking for what is secluded, *oikeion*. This discourse is called 'literature', 'art', or 'writing' in general" (Lyotard 2000, 138-9).

[3] Derrida exemplifies this in a dialogue with the reader about a cat and a hedgehog, which intertextually refers to Lewis Carroll's magical literary counter worlds. "Since so long ago, can we say that the animal has been looking at us? What animal? The other. I often ask myself, just to see, who I am–and which I am (following) at the moment when, caught naked, in silence, by the gaze of an animal, for example the eyes of a cat, I have trouble, yes, a bad time overcoming my embarrassment. [...] Although time prevents it, I would of course have liked to inscribe my whole talk within a reading of Lewis Carroll. In fact you can't be certain that I am not doing that, for better or worse, silently, unconsciously, or without your knowing. You can't be certain that I didn't already do it one day when, ten years ago, I let speak or let pass a little hedgehog, a suckling hedgehog (*un nourrisson hérisson*) perhaps, before the question 'What Is Poetry?' For thinking concerning the animal, if there is such a thing, derives from poetry. There you have a thesis: it is what philosophy has, essentially, had to deprive itself of. That is the difference between philosophical knowledge and poetic thinking" (Derrida 2002, 376-377).

[4] See e.g. Jochen Fromm. 2004. *The Emergence of Complexity*. Kassel: Kassel University Press.

[5] A. R. Ammons. 1977. *The Selected Poems 1951-1977*. New York: Norton & Company, 53.

CHAPTER TWO

PHILOLOGY AND THE FUTURE OF SCHOLARSHIP [1]

GEOFFREY GALT HARPHAM

> Consequences of philology: arrogant expectations; philistinism; superficiality; overrating of reading and writing; Alienation from the people and the needs of the people ... Task of philology: to disappear.
> —Friedrich Nietzsche, "We Philologists"

My aim is not just to disclose the roots of modern scholarship, but also to put contemporary thinking in a new and troubling context. Nothing, I will argue, shines a brighter, a harsher, or a more unexpected light on contemporary humanistic scholarship than the history of philology. I will begin by invoking the names of two people deeply invested in philology, the great literary scholars Edward Said, a Palestinian-American, and Paul de Man, a Belgian-American, thinkers who opposed each other on the most basic points of theory and practice, but who shared a single conviction, the necessity for scholarship to return to a foundation of philology. Their agreement on this point came into sharp focus with the posthumous publication of Said's *Humanism and Democratic Criticism*, whose central chapter was entitled "The Return to Philology"—by amazing coincidence the very same title that de Man had used over twenty years earlier for one of his essays. The agreements ran even deeper than the titles. They shared, for example, the same assessment of the state of literary studies, which, they said, seemed to have lost sight of its object, the work of literature itself, so that the discourse of criticism was filled with windy pronouncements about what Said called "vast structures of power or ... vaguely therapeutic structures of salutary redemption" (2004, 61) statements referring not to texts, but, as de Man put it, to "the general context of human experience or history" (1986, 23). They agreed, too, on the reason for this deterioration: the decline of philology in professional training. Criticism without philology, they said, was nothing more than the

professional form of the pleasure principle, and only a return to philology, which Said described as the "detailed, patient scrutiny of and a lifelong attentiveness to" the text, would restore the integrity of scholarship.

Although neither one gave evidence of actual philological expertise, they both suggested, surprisingly, that the roots of their own practices were to be found in this most traditional of all scholarly disciplines. Deconstruction represented itself as a technical practice undertaken in the spirit of philology. Throughout his career, Said argued that the most powerful examples of scholarship were the monumental works by Leo Spitzer, who founded the Department of Latin Language and Literature in Istanbul in 1933; and Erich Auerbach, who joined this department as Spitzer was leaving in 1936, writing his greatest work *Mimesis* there. Auerbach, incidentally, retained a German cosmopolitan sensibility all his life, but Spitzer wrote an essay called "Learning Turkish", which he actually did. In a further coincidence, both Said and de Man wrote their essays a year before their deaths: returning to philology seems to be an end-of-life experience, a kind of deathbed conversion.

Within this broad spectrum of agreement, however, were a series of jarring differences. As a neo-philological practice, deconstruction represented itself as a formal way of reading that involved no judgment or interpretation at all; as de Man had once said, "technically correct rhetorical readings may be boring, monotonous, predictable, and unpleasant, but they are irrefutable" (1986, 19). Said had no interest in being boring or irrefutable; for him, philology was valuable for entirely different reasons. What philology offered, he said, was a view of a particular historical world. In order to grasp that world, one must "[put] oneself in the position of the author", who constructs a counterworld against the "identities [...] given by the flag or the national war of the moment" (2004, 80). To put oneself in the author's position is to immerse oneself in the historical world that author inhabited. The work itself represents a kind of resistance to the real world, a self-liberation from reality. To put oneself in the position of the author is, Said concludes, "fundamentally, an act of human emancipation and enlightenment" (2004, 66). De Man did not see things this way at all. He saw language as a kind of inhuman machine; for him, philology meant focusing on the gearing of language, or what he called "the structure of language prior to the meaning it produces" (1986, 25).

It is strange that the leaders of two such divergent critical movements should have ended their careers and indeed their lives with the same diagnosis of criticism's current state and the same cure; and stranger still that both should have claimed to discover the origin of their own advanced

practices in the retrograde discipline of philology. Strangest of all, however, is the fact that Said and de Man use the same word to denote such utterly different things: intimacy, history, and emancipation for Said, and, for de Man, a harsh and explicit corrective to precisely such humanistic fantasies, as he regarded them. It is as if each has appropriated the term "philology" for his own purposes, without regard to its meaning.

These curiosities invite us to probe more deeply into philology itself; more importantly, they awaken us to the complex of desires, needs, and longings that have troubled and animated literary study and humanistic scholarship in general. It is tempting, reading Said and de Man, to think that one of them must simply have gotten it wrong, but I will argue that they both got it right, and that philology actually answers to both of their accounts: this is the source of its peculiar strength as a concept. De Man thinks of philology as a positive science, a technical and systematic investigation of texts. This understanding of philology dates from the end of the eighteenth century, when F. A. Wolf ([1795] 1985) invented a "new" or "modern" philology by applying to the texts of Homer the methods of meticulous textual scholarship recently developed for the study of the Bible, beginning with the establishment of a correct text. Subsequent philologists inherited Wolf's presumption that the text was a tissue of appearances whose most apparently self-evident features were open to doubt. Scholarship in the wake of Wolf became sceptical and aggressive, even as it confined itself to preliminary matters.

After Wolf, philology developed as an empirical practice of exceptional rigor whose function was to prepare the way for the consideration of questions of meaning and value, which would be achieved by other means. Texts were not things to know, not the bearers of wisdom or truth, but things to know about. Philology concentrated on such activities as marking the first occurrences of words or usages, determining the geographical range of certain linguistic forms, noting spelling variations, describing the sound-structure of words and phrases, and tracking shifts in meaning over time. Philologists counted, measured, and compared; they determined rules or customs, and recorded anomalous instances of verb forms, case terminations, inflections, and moods. Working exclusively on ancient languages, scholars developed methods of comparing grammars and classifying languages into families.

It was arduous work with little scope for synthesis or reflection, a limited and partial, but solid, honourable, and absolutely necessary thing. As one scholar puts it, philology even today consists primarily of "constituting and interpreting the texts that have come down to us. It is a narrow thing, but without it nothing else is possible" (Ševcenko 1990, 6).

Associated with an ascetic life style and deep erudition acquired over decades of labour, philology shaped the pedagogical practices, based on rote learning, recitation, and the examination of linguistic details, of the most prestigious American universities well into the twentieth century. Thus, by affiliating deconstruction with this narrow but indispensable thing, de Man was clearly attempting to cast his own practice not only as a traditional pedagogy, but as a kind of first knowledge that underwrote and enabled all other kinds of understanding.

Philology was, however, also understood in very different terms, as a speculative undertaking oriented toward deep time and distant things. In the passage from 1875 quoted at the beginning of this essay, Nietzsche expressed his contempt for most philologists, whose work seemed to him frivolous and whose lives impressed him as an absurd combination of inconsequentiality and hubris ("task of philology—to disappear"). But writing six years later in *Daybreak* as the philosopher of "untimeliness" he summoned up a beguiling vision of an authentic philological practice:

Philology is that venerable art which exacts from its followers one thing above all—to step to one side, to leave themselves spare moments, to grow silent, to become slow—the leisurely art of the goldsmith applied to language: an art which must carry out slow, fine work, and attains nothing if not *lento*. Philology teaches how to read well: i.e. slowly, profoundly, attentively, prudently, with inner thoughts, with the mental doors ajar, with delicate fingers and eyes.[2]

As a careful reader of Nietzsche, de Man was undoubtedly thinking of this glowing passage when he promoted deconstruction as a way of interfering with the rush to interpretive closure. However, he most certainly did not intend to affiliate deconstruction, as a practice of "technically correct rhetorical reading" with the kind of unfocused rumination Nietzsche describes here. It appears, in short, that de Man has registered only one aspect of philology, but that there is more.

To get at this "more", the part that Said emphasizes, we should return to the context for Wolf's work, the movement of "philhellenism", an enthusiasm for the culture of ancient Greece that was associated with his famous predecessor, J. J. Winckelmann. Winckelmann was the most influential advocate for a view of classical Greek culture as a singularly rich embodiment of certain values—an organic unity of man and nature, a vibrant civic culture, a free and harmonious development of human capacities, and a passionate cultivation of beauty. For the "neohumanists", as they came to be called, Greece and Rome were not merely admirable in themselves, but were inspiring models for German culture and institutions. The very grammar of Greek, they thought, represented a kind of elementary