Doktori (Ph.D.) értekezés

After de Man: Transformations of Deconstruction in Contemporary Literary Theory

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Debreceni Egyetem

BTK

2011

AFTER DE MAN: TRANSFORMATIONS OF DECONSTRUCTION IN CONTEMPORARY LITERARY THEORY

Értekezés a doktori (Ph.D.) fokozat megszerzése érdekében
az Irodalomtudományok tudományágban

Írta: Somogyi Gyula okleveles magyar nyelv és irodalom – angol nyelv és irodalom szakos tanár

Készült a Debreceni Egyetem Irodalomtudományi doktori iskolája
(Angol-amerikai irodalomtudományi programja) keretében

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„Én Somogyi Gyula teljes felelősségem tudatában kijelentem, hogy a benyújtott értekezés a szerzõi jog nemzetközi normáinak tiszteletben tartásával készült. Jelen értekezést korábban más intézményben nem nyújtottam be és azt nem utasították el.”

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INTRODUCTION

AFTER DE MAN: TRANSFORMATIONS OF DECONSTRUCTION IN CONTEMPORARY LITERARY THEORY

> "I had a feeling that the interpretation of this part of the dream was not carried far enough to make it possible to follow the whole of its concealed meaning. If I had pursued my comparion between these three women, it would have taken me far afield."
> (Sigmund Freud, *The Interpretation of Dreams*)

The title of the dissertation deliberately evokes the brief, yet all the more revealing closing chapter of Martin McQuillan's monograph about Paul de Man's contributions to literary theory and critical thinking. In this chapter, McQuillan delineates three possible interpretations of the word "after": coming after de Man in a historical sense; influenced by de Man's way of thinking; and "going in search of" the meaning of de Man's texts" (McQuillan 113-114). My dissertation proposes to analyze the ramifications of all these three aspects of "after," what it means to "come after" de Man, whose texts now seem unavoidable for critics dealing with contemporary literary theory. He had a considerable impact on the ongoing theoretical debates about literature, philosophy, rhetoric, textuality and even history. Many think that the most important significance of his oeuvre lies in pointing out how the ambivalent structures of rhetoric operate in every act of language, not only in literary texts. However, as there are many excellent monographs written about the topic, the dissertation does not want to give an extensive analysis of de Man's texts, instead it wants to read different theoretical texts driven by the aim of inflecting rhetorical deconstruction with other trends in contemporary literary theory, for instance psychoanalysis, feminism, trauma-, or legal studies. I am convinced that these encounters can be best examined in the texts of some of de Man's former colleagues and students: Shoshana Felman, Barbara Johnson and Cathy Caruth. All of these thinkers demonstrate different paths of how we can reread de Man's notion of rhetoric, all of their texts are trying inventively to transform his approach with other fields and discourses. In other words, much like in Sigmund Freud's famous "Irma Dream," three women are in the focus of the dissertation, the comparison (and difference) between these threm constitutes my field of inquiry.

Tracing the kinds of permutations de Man's strain of deconstruction went through in these texts, the dissertation revolves around the encounter of four different theoretical and

critical discourses: deconstruction and psychoanalysis, deconstruction and feminism, deconstruction and trauma studies, deconstruction and legal studies. My thesis is that through certain crucial notions, all of these thinkers are trying to create a dialogue between different theoretical positions that, as Johnson suggests, "remain skeptical of each other" (Johnson *World* 4). Their rethinking of transference, female desire, the figure of apostrophe, the notion of trauma and justice can all be read as examples of this effort. The dissertation also aims to show that these "hybrid" discourses (I am using Homi K. Bhabha's term here) are not mere revisions (that is, corrections) of de Man's theory of language and rhetoric, but different ways of explicating and interrogating certain key notions and problems within deconstruction.

My use of the term "deconstruction" in the title and throughout the dissertation might be slightly misleading. It could suggest that the thesis treats deconstruction as a unified set of theories about philosophy, rhetoric or literature, in this way reducing the various differences between philosophers and critics associated with this movement. It could even evoke an expectation that Jacques Derrida's texts will also be kept in the foreground, only to fail to keep such a promise. It should be better named, following Jeffrey Nealon and Robert Eaglestone, "deconstructive criticism," which they use to name "The acts of deconstruction characteristic of [J. Hillis] Miller and Paul de Man" (Eaglestone 65, cf. Nealon 1268), thus when I write "deconstruction" it is to be understood as a shorthand for "deconstructive criticism," narrowed mostly to de Man's "rhetorical deconstructive criticism." This clearly indicates that the dissertation would only like to formulate valid claims about the afterlife of this branch of deconstruction, and at least partly explains why I had to leave out an extensive treatment of Derrida's oeuvre, whose fields of interest since de Man's death often overlapped with the three critics studied in the dissertation.

After recognizing such a plurality within deconstruction itself, we must also note that the relationship of deconstructive criticism to each of these other discourses is rather different, and is not without peculiar controversies and fundamental disagreements. Thus, the dialogue that is going on in the texts I am going to analyze always presupposes an interpretive effort. Sometimes de Man's texts and notions lend themselves more easily to these encounters, establishing this dialogue sometimes requires a more dynamic approach. For example, ever since Jacques Lacan's "linguistic" contribution to psychoanalysis, the discourses of psychoanalysis and deconstructive criticism can be brought to the final denominator of language and rhetoric, regardless of how different their views about language may be. However, in the case of feminism and deconstruction, there seems to be a more essential disagreement about the notion of the subject, language, and politics. Despite the obvious points of controversy and disagreement, throughout the dissertation I will point out how these

different theoretical/critical discourses are intertwined in each other. This "inter-implication" (Felman "To Open" 9) of discourses—however paradoxical it might be—is perhaps the most exemplary in the development of Felman's oeuvre.

While the dissertation demonstrates a series of encounters between five different theoretical discourses (deconstruction, psychoanalysis, feminism, trauma and legal studies), its method is mainly influenced by the close-reading strategies of deconstruction. I am writing here about texts that claim to be deconstructive, but the thesis will also try to apply the lessons gained from them to pinpoint not only their crucial insights, but their possible blind spots as well. To each of these chapters, I will attach a reading of a literary text, which should shed further light upon, and will try to rethink the theoretical problems delineated in the main chapter. In this way, the readings are not intended to be mere illustrations of the theoretical insights, but will offer a chance of thinking them over again from a different (literary) perspective to supplement the abstractions of theory with a concrete historical counterpoint. With some exceptions, all of these texts come from 19th-century American literature: in the case of deconstruction and psychoanalysis, I will analyze Edgar Allan Poe's "The Man of the Crowd"; in the chapter about deconstruction and feminism, Poe's treatment of "the most poetical topic" will be my subject; two pieces, Ralph Waldo Emerson's texts about the death of his son, Waldo, and the parable of Tancred and Clorinda from Torquato Tasso's *Jerusalem Delivered* will illuminate the encounter between deconstruction and trauma studies; and last, but not least Herman Melville's "Bartleby the Scrivener" will shed further light on the encounter between deconstruction and the law.

Even though many nuanced and interesting readings of de Man's work have been published recently, very little has been written about the dissertation's topic that would exceed the boundaries of a review or an essay. This is partly a result of the fact that two of the oeuvres examined in the thesis are still in the making even today: while Johnson died on 27 August 2009, both Felman and Caruth continue to explore new topics and ideas, constantly renewing their own practices of reading. The dissertation wants to call attention to the importance of a serious theoretical engagement with their texts as heirs to a mode of reading which was heralded as "dead in literature departments" (Nealon 1266) in Jeffrey Nealon's "The Discipline of Deconstruction" (1992). Yet, very much like Poe's female figures, deconstruction seemingly refuses to die and returns in various shapes and under various guises (cf. Johnson *Wake* 17-18). This research too, then, proposes to deal with the "afterlife" or "haunting" of deconstruction, how its textual close reading strategies with all their insights and blind spots were scattered, or disseminated into different kinds of discourses within literary theory operating through contextual methods. I believe that the texts of Felman,

Johnson and Caruth also proceed through an interaction between deconstruction's strictly textual reading and contextual methods, often revealing how these two ways of reading should not be considered opposites, they rather presuppose each other.

I am aware of the fact that each one of these or interfaces studied in the thesis demands to be examined in a separate work, given the vast theoretical and critical complexities involved in them. Yet, I am fully convinced that by exploring the parallels and differences between these "hybrid" discourses, I will be able to point out several important aspects of the ambiguous afterlife of deconstruction. In order not to lose critical focus, I decided to concentrate on the texts of Felman, Johnson and Caruth to show the lessons that can be gained from their fascinating approaches. These authors contributed to a different degree to the topics covered by the dissertation, it is Felman's oeuvre, which provides a stable point of reference, she has written extensively about all these fields examined. In the chapter about deconstruction and psychoanalysis, I mostly write about Felman; the chapter examining deconstruction and feminism focuses on Felman and Johnson; the texts of Felman and Caruth will be selected for the extensive analysis of deconstruction and trauma theory; while all these three critics will be dealt with in the closing chapter about deconstruction and legal discourse.

If we take a look at the Hungarian critical scene, we may note that from the second half of the 1990s and especially in the 2000s, there emerges a growing awareness of recent trends in psychoanalysis, feminism, trauma and legal studies, which was partly shown in the appearance of *A posztmodern irodalomtudomány kialakulása* (2002), selecting and publishing for the first time many invaluable texts from different trends in postmodern literary theory. This broadening of critical horizons went hand in hand with a profound critical interest in de Man's legacy, somewhat predating, but mainly starting from György Fogarasi's translations of de Man's *Allegories of Reading* in 1999. Perhaps the best example for such a serious critical engagement with de Man's texts is Zoltán Kulcsár-Szabó's *Tetten érhetetlen szavak* (2007), which touches upon various key issues in de Man's oeuvre, like language, history or the ethics of reading, which concepts will also return many times in the dissertation as well. A text from Felman and Johnson was included in Antal Bókay and Erős Ferenc's *Pszichoanalízis és irodalomtudomány* (1998), which includes a chapter on psychoanalysis and postmodern literary and thus it could be seen as a psychoanalytic supplement to *A posztmodern irodalomtudomány kialakulása*, whereas György Kalmár's *Szöveg és vágy* (2002) demonstrated how effective a reading strategy can be when it is inspired by both deconstructive and psychoanalytic notions. I believe that both *Sétáló agyak* (1998) edited by Orsolya Drozdik and *A feminizmus találkozása a (poszt)modernnel* (2006) edited by Nóra Séllei, as well as Séllei's other books, proved very important in communicating the encounter

between feminism and (post)modernism, which foregrounded many key aspects (like the question of the subject) that proved crucial for Felman and Johnson as well. László Sári B.'s *A hattyú és a görény* (2006) was a unique contribution to the critical debates with its complex interest in issues of gender, politics and ethics. We can trace a similar, though mostly American-oriented ethical perspective in György Túry's *Amerikai etikai kritika* (2009), which focuses on the ethical criticism of Martha Nussbaum and J. Hillis Miller. The relevance of trauma studies and the need to engage with its critical field have been made all the more relevant to Hungarian literature when Imre Kertész received the Nobel Prize for Literature in 2002: Péter Szirák's monograph about Kertész (2003) and Anna Menyhért's *Elmondani az elmondhatatlant* (2008) has greatly enriched our critical vocabulary with nuanced approaches to the relationship between trauma, literature and survival. Perhaps the investigation of the encounter between law and literature is the least familiar from Hungarian critical discourse, though Tamás Nagy, Attila Simon, István Szilágyi H., or Anna Kiss have already taken the first steps in this field as well. By no means is the above list meant to be complete overview, and it should rather be seen as a "personal history": without these books, I doubt that the dissertation would have been the same, and through its close scrutiny of the oeuvres of Felman, Johnson and Caruth, I imagine the thesis as also contributing to the discussion opened up by these important volumes and critics.

A word on the structure of the dissertation: while the table of contents might suggest that these encounters I am writing about constitute distinct fields of inquiry that influenced deconstruction in a temporal succession, the material seems to resist such clear-cut linear structure. This becomes most apparent in the chapter on trauma, but it is palpable elsewhere too. For example, some texts of Felman dealing with feminist issues were already published in her first book, most of which I read in the chapter on psychoanalysis. These feminist texts were published as a separate volume only later, when Felman's theoretical frame for trauma was already established. Or another example might be Johnson's rereading of the relationship between feminism and deconstruction, which takes place through a figure (apostrophe) that is negotiated between law and literature. These examples suggest that there is a complex interrelationship or dialogue going on between deconstruction, psychoanalysis, feminism, trauma and legal studies.

The first chapter of the dissertation tries to unravel the intricacies of the dialogue between rhetorical deconstruction and psychoanalysis that is developed in the texts of Felman. For Felman the meeting point between these two discourses is the concept of *transference*, the key metaphor of psychoanalytic reading, the examination of which enables us to displace the

conventional, hierarchical relationship between psychoanalysis and literature as well. In my reading of the psychoanalytic notion of transference, I will point out its double structure, revealing it as a process that partakes in the contingent rhetorical operations at work in any given text (the transference of the text), and also as a process that tries to resist this former recognition in order to bring the process of reading to a close (the transference of the reader). As the texts of Felman point out, this second process creates an illusion which is necessary for reading, yet, the meaning of the text being read can never be fully grasped, it always "take[s] flight" (Felman *Writing* 165). Hence a reading governed by the structure of transference can never be a definitive one as it always participates in, and is a reading-effect of, the rhetorical operations at work within the text. Reading through the dissertation again, this chapter seems less critical than the others, more interested in explicating problems than giving a general critique. The reason for this is that these theoretical positions and practical techniques, together with all its blindnesses and insights, comprise the very axioms of my reading strategy. The first literary text being read through these axioms is Poe's "The Man of the Crowd." The analysis follows the short story's struggle with the notion of unreadability as it passes through various kinds of transferences (both within the text and in the critical reception) to arrive at a historical-ideological understanding of the deconstructive / psychoanalytic notion of unreadability.

The second chapter explores the interface between deconstruction and feminist theory in the texts of Felman and Johnson. It starts out from an examination of the theoretical position Felman embraces in *What Does a Woman Want?* in which she visualizes the female reader and female desire as a deconstructive force which can reveal the internal ambiguities and incongruities that reside within a (male) text, be it a literary or a philosophical one. I suggest that reading this concept together with Luce Irigaray's notion of mimicry [*mimétisme*] can offer us a way to critically analyze the performance of Felman's texts, as her view seems to only to "rename" and appropriate the effects of rhetoric in the guise of "female desire," which appears problematic from a deconstructive point of view The second part of the chapter focuses mostly on Johnson's essay entitled "Apostrophe, Animation, and Abortion," where the author examines a subject which seems to promise the establishing of what de Man called "the convergence of referential and figural signification" (de Man *Allegories* 208), politics and rhetoric, and with the help of which she can rethink the reductive view of the relationship between feminism and deconstruction. This subject, which is profoundly ethical in its nature, is the problem of *abortion*, the meaning of which is negotiated between the discourses of law and literature (in this case, more precisely, lyric). Johnson suggests that these debates surrounding abortion seem to hinge on the structure of a figure, *apostrophe*, which is

precisely the trope of giving (figural) life, animation and presence to something dead, inanimate, or not present. As opposed to the seemingly straightforward (and reassuring) structures of apostrophical address encountered in male writers' texts (Baudelaire and Shelley), Johnson shows that the poems of Gwendolyn Brooks, Anne Sexton, Lucille Clifton, and Adrienne Rich reveal a rather unstable structure of address. However, this claim is problematic from a deconstructive point of view: in a way similar to Felman's proposal concerning female desire. The stability and instability of apostrophical address here seems to be in one to one correspondence to the binary structure of sexual difference, even though the structure of address can be shown to be similarly unstable in the texts of male writers as well. Through the reading of Poe's poem entitled "The Sleeper," his "The Philosophy of Composition," and two short stories, "The Fall of the House of Usher," and "Ligeia," the next sub-chapter tries to think through the ambivalences of rhetoric and gender pointed out at the end of the main chapter. It analyzes the encounter between feminist and deconstructive critical approaches to Poe's theory of aesthetics and his literary practice. While both Felman and Johnson seem to appropriate the ambivalences found in rhetoric to the feminine, Poe's texts demonstrate that the ambiguities involved in the rhetorical figures of apostrophe and prosopopeia are no less problematic in the case of a "male author." In a rhetorical reading, it can be shown that the death of the other (the "beautiful woman") does not stabilize the discourse of the self and that a "purely" deconstructive reading runs the risk of reinforcing the traditional separation between aesthetics and politics, the problematic nature of which feminist theory have often pointed out.

In the third chapter of the dissertation, I will try to illuminate how the oeuvres of Felman, Johnson and Caruth can be regarded as substantially contributing to an "ethical turn" of deconstructive criticism, which, through trauma theory, emphatically foregrounded questions of reference, history, politics and responsibility. In the light of recent discussions of de Man's texts (for example Kulcsár-Szabó's monograph), these issues have always been in the center of his attention and it is in terms of his rhetorical theory that Caruth and Felman grasped the experience of trauma and the Holocaust, demonstrating a continuity in the history of deconstructive criticism. Trauma theory invented and conceptualized itself through the double perspective of deconstruction and psychoanalysis in the early 1990s and took both of these theories "beyond themselves": it is precisely because of this profound ethical involvement that I chose to deal with trauma studies in a separate chapter than psychoanalysis. After contextualizing trauma theory within the framework opened up by the ethical turn, I am examining three problems: the role of literature and art in trauma theory, deconstruction's conceptualization of history as trauma, and trauma theory's implicit

doubleness; then supplement these theoretical issues with the reading of literary and philosophical texts. I argue that Felman's concept of literature, or the "literary thing," has a crucial place in trauma theory: the literary imagination provides us a way of relating to another's suffering; literature as a testimony counteracts forgetting; through prosopopeia, it gives a face to the other disfigured by history; and through apostrophe lets the other address us and remind us about the ethical obligations of reading. Trauma theory also constituted deconstruction's return to history, reconceptualized through the notion of trauma which subverts the intuitive relationship between consciousness and history. In this chapter I read "history" as a traumatic return of the real that inevitably shapes the texts and oeuvres of Walter Benjamin, Sigmund Freud, or de Man. To open up trauma theory to recent critiques, I return briefly to the relationship between feminism and trauma theory in Felman's two books about these topics, to point out how they write two parallel narratives about trauma, which can be regarded both as its "monumental history" and its "critical history" understood in a Nietzschean sense. In the last section of the chapter I am tracing the relationship between recognition and foreclosure through reading Emerson's mourning for his son, Waldo. Emerson's journal entries and letters testify to both a profoundly felt pain over his loss, as well as the impossibility of mourning. His philosophical essay "Experience" talks about his inability to mourn, revealing a distance between the pain he felt over his loss and the antebellum ideological constructions of mourning. As a counterpoint to the philosophical, the literary—his poem "Threnody"—acknowledges pain and becomes an attempt at mourning. Yet the elegy shows consolation as dependent upon a phenomenalization of voice (the "deep Heart"), which proves to be hollow, leaving the pain of loss unresolved, in excess of Transcendentalist philosophy. Nowadays many critics also draw attention to the fact that trauma theory with all its ethical potential might itself be haunted by the foreclosure of gender, class, or racial traumas, so this chapter ends with reading the parable of Tancred and Clorinda in Tasso's epic *Jerusalem Delivered* in order to reveal how the blind spots of trauma theory can be pointed out from a complex gender / postcolonial perspective.

The fourth chapter of the dissertation revolves around the notion of law and justice as it was traditionally conceptualized as a suturing of the wounds of symbolic or very real violence. The texts of Felman reveal different models of the relationship between law and literature, namely literature as a supplement to the law, or literature being a rupture of the legal framework. Johnson's texts focus on the relationship between sexual politics and the law, and the notion of legal personhood, similar to the one that can be shown to inform Caruth's texts about law and literature as well. The reading attached to this chapter proposes to examine Melville's "Bartleby the Scrivener," which seems to involve many of the concepts

that I write about earlier: the notion of unreadability and transference; the ethical question; literature as a rupture of the legal framework; literature as a supplement to law; and the notion of legal personhood.

The closing chapter tries to sum up the most important aspects of the critical oeuvres being read throughout the dissertation, pointing out their contribution to, and significance within contemporary literary theory, addressing how they can reinvigorate deconstructive practice. However, I also suggest that the real stakes of these critical concepts are only revealed in the process of reading: if read in conjunction with literary texts, these theoretical concepts also reveal an unexpected historical dimension that also needs to be addressed, providing more lessons to be learnt. The editors of the *Yale French Studies* special issue devoted to "The Lesson of Paul de Man" predicted that from this unique lesson "new directions for literary study will continue to emerge." Given the examples of Felman, Johnson and Caruth, I believe they were absolutely right.

CHAPTER I. DECONSTRUCTION AND PSYCHOANALYSIS

PSYCHOANALYSIS AND RHETORICAL READING: FELMAN, LACAN, DE MAN

> "The impossibility of reading should not be taken too lightly." (Paul de Man, *Allegories of Reading*)

Many critics think that Lacanian psychoanalysis had one of the most influential impact on Anglo-American literary theory in the seventies, eighties and nineties (Bennett 181), providing a strong counterpoint to the hegemony of American ego-psychology. Since then American literary theory and philosophy has been trying to integrate this new way of reading Freud into its own tradition. According to Vincent B. Leitch, it was Eugenio Donato who first introduced Jacques Lacan's texts at The Johns Hopkins University in the 1960s, which was followed by many thematic issues of renown periodicals.[1] (Leitch 289) Nowadays Lacanian psychoanalysis forms a crucial part of the discourse of not only literary theory and literary criticism, but cultural studies, feminism, new Marxism, postcolonial theory, as well as film studies, to name a few distinct fields of inquiry. Still, Shoshana Felman warns us in her book *Jacques Lacan and the Adventure of Insight* that "we can by no means take it for granted that Lacan's »exemplary lesson of reading« has in any way been learned, let alone assimilated" (Felman *Adventure* 20). In this part of my thesis I will demonstrate how Felman's fascinating books read Lacan's "exemplary lesson of reading" together with Paul de Man's notion of rhetoric, creating a dialogue between the French and the American critical heritage. I will attempt to delineate the most important points of this "conversation" to point out the lessons that can be learnt from them. I hope to demonstrate the possibilities that such a double perspective involving psychoanalysis and deconstruction allows by reading one of Edgar Allan Poe's tales in the next part of the chapter.

The Locus of Speech

Henry James thought that the tone of his writing is determined by his traveling back and forth between Europe and America and he was convinced that the meaning and the undecidability of this "shuttle experience" can best be conveyed through a dynamically

[1] These periodicals include for example *Yale French Studies* 48. *French Freud: Structural Studies in Psychoanalysis* (1972), *Yale French Studies* 55-56. *Literature and Psychoanalysis – The Question of Reading: Otherwise* (1977), *Diacritics* 9 *The Tropology of Freud* (Spring 1979), *MLN* 98 *Lacan and Narration: The Psychoanalytical Difference in Narrative Theory* (December 1983).

changing perspective of writing (Felman *Madness* 18). Felman who is neither French nor American also imagines in a similar way the place where her *Writing and Madness*—the book she called her "most fundamental book of literary criticism" and her "purest book of literary theory" (Felman "Story" 2)—is written from:

> If it were possible to know the place from which one speaks (and the place from which one is silent), I would say that this book speaks from a *plural* place and from a *dialogical* perspective constituted by an intellectual exchange between America and France, between French and English, between the Gallic and the Anglo-Saxon contexts. This exchange necessarily involves the confrontation of two different sets of cultural and ideological assumptions and of two different theoretical and literary fields. (Felman *Madness* 20)

The scene of speech can never be fixed and the book addresses us from such a position of dislocation, which Homi K. Bhabha called in a different context "an exploratory, restless movement caught so well in the French rendition of the words *au-delà*—here and there, on all sides, *fort/da*, hither and thither, back and forth." (Bhabha 1) The two traditions Felman is referring to here cannot be clearly told apart as they comprise together the decentered scene of speech.[2] The two contexts the author is evoking here are, on the one hand, de Man's deconstructive criticism,[3] on the other hand, Lacanian psychoanalysis.

Psychoanalysis was "a subject that de Man shunned" (Felman "Postal" 57), a discourse that he consciously "resisted" (Felman "Postal" 51). In "Postal Survival," an essay acknowledging her "intellectual indebtedness" to de Man (Felman "Postal 56), Felman argues that

> he resisted it as one who was extremely close to it, as one who in a way knew all about it, but chose to say that knowledge in the form not so much of a denial as of a *refusal*, a refusal actively repeated, reasserted, paradoxically enough, not out of blindness to, but out of insight into, the importance of psychoanalysis. […] I take [this refusal] to be nothing other than a complex dialogue with psychoanalysis: a lifelong dialogue engaged, in de Man's writing and in the process of his reading, between de Man's emotional proximity to, and simultaneous critical distance from, the psychoanalytic discourse. (Felman "Postal" 51-52)

[2] This movement between theoretical contexts is also reflected in the translation between languages: *Writing and Madness* is the translation of certain texts selected from Felman's *La folie et la chose littéraire*.
[3] I am using this term based on Robert Eaglestone's *Ethical Criticism: Reading After Levinas*.

The photograph reproduced at the end of Felman's most recent collection of essays, *The Claims of Literature*, becomes highly symbolic given the context and aims of Felman's earlier texts: taken during Lacan's visit to Yale University in November 1975, the picture shows Felman standing between de Man and Lacan, interposing between them, and at the same time linking them. It was de Man who introduced the prestigious guest to the audience at Yale in a speech that Felman finds "unique in that it is the only text in which de Man implicitly acknowledges his closeness to, rather than—as it is usually the case—explicitly states his distance from, psychoanalysis." (Felman "Postal" 52) Like this picture, most of Felman's earlier writings try to approach literature through rhetoric and psychoanalysis. These two traditions show considerable parallels, yet they can never be reconciled without conflicts: for example, ever since Lacan's "linguistic" contribution to psychoanalysis, the discourses of psychoanalysis and deconstruction can be brought to the final denominator of language; yet Lacanian psychoanalysis postulates the existence of an unconscious which is structured as a language, while for de Man, language is thought to work mechanically without any regard for human subjectivity. Because of this, the dialogue between them can only be agonistic, it decenters and displaces *both* contexts (Felman *Madness* 20, Felman *Question* 4). Felman refers to this mutual displacement as *translation*, which concept has generated a lot of interest and research in both psychoanalytical and rhetorical contexts (Felman *Question* 4, Felman *Scandal* 59).[4]

Double epigraphs

Besides language, perhaps the other common denominator between psychoanalysis and deconstruction is their mutual emphasis on the impossibility of reading, which nevertheless has certain pressing ethical imperatives as well.[5] (Felman "Postal" 52-53) This implicit link is also illustrated in the double epigraphs that appear in *Literature and Psychoanalysis: The Question of Reading*: *Otherwise*, a volume of essays edited by Felman. The first of these quotes is from Lacan's *Le Séminaire, livre XX: Encore* (29, 37), the second is taken from de Man's "Semiology and Rhetoric" (de Man *Allegories* 19).

[4] The locus classicus of translation in rhetorical thought is de Man's "»Conclusions«: Walter Benjamin's »The Task of the Translator«" (collected in the *The Resistance to Theory*); Dennis Porter's "Psychoanalysis and the Task of the Translator" also deals with this problem from a psychoanalytical point of view.

[5] In Felman's opinion, "all texts narrate the impossibility of reading as the point of failure *out of which* they *demand to be read*, out of which they inscribe a paradoxical imperative to read." (Felman "Postal" 53-54)

> This is what analytical discourse is all about: what can be read. What can be read beyond what the subject has been incited to say. […] In analytical discourse, the signifying utterance is given another reading than what it means. (Jacques Lacan)
>
> Reading is dramatized not as an emotive reaction to what language does, but as an emotive reaction to the impossibility of knowing what it might be up to. (Paul de Man)

For de Man, reading involves an emotive reaction which is closely connected to experiencing an impossibility: reading means encountering the unpredictable mechanisms of rhetoric, which make it impossible to reach a reassuring closure.[6] Lacan faced the questions of reading, language and rhetoric from a psychoanalytical perspective: for him, "the unconscious is structured like a language" (Lacan *Seminar III* 167) and this language is "the discourse of the Other" in the conscious self (Lacan *Écrits* 190). Felman is convinced that Lacan's reading of Freud demonstrates how the discovery of the unconscious stemmed from an unprecedented act of reading, which necessitated a radically new practice of reading: Freud's

> first interest was in hysteria […]. He spent a lot of time listening, and while he was listening, there resulted something paradoxical, a *reading*. It was while listening to hysterics that he read that there was an unconscious. That is, something he could only construct, and in which he himself was implicated (quoted by Felman *Adventure* 22-23).

Psychoanalysis, whose most important task is reading, reading the discourse of the patients, proceeds from a performative reading experience, it is itself a *reading-effect*: the "primal scene" of psychoanalysis is the scene of reading. The unprecedented experience of reading constitutively preceded the theoretical foundations of psychoanalysis which tried to explain it, yet it was unable to fully grasp its implications (Felman *Adventure* 24).

Analytical discourse in Lacan is about what can be read, but the nature of this reading is quite extraordinary as it is not the conscious enunciation that matters but the unconscious desire that speaks through it:

[6] Interestingly enough, there is a little detail missing from this quote as the original one goes like this: "reading is dramatized, *in the relationship between Marcel and Albertine*, not as an emotive reaction to what language does, but as an emotive reaction to the impossibility of knowing what it might be up to." (de Man *Allegories* 19, emphasis added) Thus the observations on reading are taken from an interpersonal relationship, which is a gendered relationship as well, but here this aspect is excluded. This omission in the volume edited by Felman is quite symptomatic, as it is only later, in *What Does a Woman Want?* that she embraces an openly gendered, feminist standpoint towards literature and theory. I will deal with this problem in detail in the second chapter of my thesis, "Deconstruction and Feminism".

> The analyst is called upon to interpret the excess in the patient's discourse – what the patient says *beyond* what he has been incited to say, beyond the current motivation of the situation; and the analytic meaning is then a displacement of the meaning of the patient's discourse, since it consists in giving what has been pronounced *another reading*. The analytic reading is thus essentially the reading of a difference that inhabits language, a kind of mapping in the subject's discourse of its points of disagreement with, or difference from, itself. (Felman *Adventure* 21)

Analytical reading always involves a *displacement* then, the displacement of meaning: the reading of the difference inhabiting language, as Lacan visualized the unconscious "not as hidden but on the contrary as exposed—in language—through a significant (rhetorical) displacement." (Felman *Adventure* 45) The analytical situation warns us that no enunciation can be reduced purely to its statement (Felman *Scandal* 52, Unoka 228): in the slippage between statement and enunciation, grammar and rhetoric, constative and performative we can recognize the traces of unconscious mechanisms. And this space where reading takes place is also the space of *transference*.

Transference and Rhetorical Reading

Despite Charles Mauron's claim that the most important difference between therapeutic analysis and psychoanalytic literary criticism is the absence of transference from the latter, Felman is convinced that transference does have a crucial role in literary readings too:

> Transference (rethought in a new way) actually does define, but in a different way, the specificity of the literary experience; that transference, of all the concepts of psychoanalysis that have relevance to literature and literary criticism, is at one the most important and suggestive, and, paradoxically, the least explored. I will hold (and attempt to demonstrate) that we enter the literary text only *through* transference: through the lure of rhetoric. I suggest, then, that in literature (but perhaps in psychoanalysis as well), the notion of transference must be rethought in terms of a theory of rhetoric. But at the same time rhetoric must itself be rethought, reinterpreted, in terms of the analytic conception of transference. (Felman *Madness* 30-31)

As opposed to seeing transference as a signifier of difference between therapy and criticism, Felman views it as a crucial part of psychoanalytical as well as literary experience.[7] An analysis of the process of transference gives us a chance to rethink the relationship between literature and psychoanalysis and, at the same time, the concept of literariness itself. Felman's realigned notion of transference already goes beyond its psychoanalytical definition, it is not only a thematic, but an innately rhetorical phenomenon.[8]

There is a certain duplicity in the history of the concept in psychoanalytic theory. On the one hand, Josef Breuer and Freud first used the notion of transference [*Übertragung*] in *Studies on Hysteria* (1895) where it meant certain "false connections," which substituted the analyst for the original objects of desire (Breuer and Freud 390). It was the task of the analysis to do away with these delusions which were created during the analytical sessions. The "Dora-case" ("Fragment of an Analysis of a Case of Hysteria," 1905) brought about a shift in the evaluation of the concept: it no longer went directly against psychoanalytical treatment, but became a crucial part of every case. Despite the fact that its repetitive structure does not enable the patients to consciously remember what they should, this repetition does offer a way of exploring the repressed content in its background. On the other hand, in *The Interpretation of Dreams* (1900) transference is similar to the psychic process of displacement: unconscious concepts can only enter the preconscious if they transfer their cathected psychic energy to a different "day's residue" (Freud *Interpretation* 353) revealing transference as a general mechanism of psychic life (Laplanche and Pontalis 455-462).[9]

That is why Felman claims that transference is both "the rhetorical function of any signifying material in psychic life," as well as "the repetitive structural principle of the relation between patient and analyst" (Felman *Madness* 182, cf. Chase "Transference" 212-213). Transference in the former definition refers to the rhetorical mechanisms of the texts, while the latter is a necessary side-effect of reading. The transference of the text, just like rhetoric in de Man's texts, is an endless chain of rhetorical displacements, which does not let meaning fossilize, yet the transference of the reader gives an illusion of stability,

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[7] From this perspective, Felman's approach resembles Meredith Anne Skura's concept of transference described in *The Literary Use of the Psychoanalytic Process*. Skura's book includes a chapter about "Literature as Transference: Rhetorical Function," where she regards transference as a series of rhetorical exchanges between tellers and listeners. However, I feel that there is a difference between how Felman and Skura views rhetoric: Felman's use of the term clearly implies de Man's deconstructive criticism, regarding transference as trope and persuasion, while Skura's concept of rhetoric seems to involve only its persuasive aspect.

[8] For an extended rhetorical reading of transference, see Cynthia Chase's "Transference as Trope and Persuasion" which interprets this concept in terms of de Man's writing. I believe that Chase and Felman represent two different ways of inflecting deconstruction and psychoanalysis, as Felman interprets de Man in Lacanian terms, while Chase reads Lacan from de Man's perspective.

[9] For more on these interpretations of transference, see Russell Grigg's "Signifier, Object, and the Transference," Humphrey Morris's "The Need to Connect: Representations of Freud's Psychical Apparatus," and Chase's "Transference as Trope and Persuasion."

presupposing a meaning that exists despite the erratic nature of texts. Cynthia Chase translates these two different interpretations of transference with de Man's familiar vocabulary of statement and utterance, cognitive and performative, trope and persuasion to point out that "the function of transference as persuasion—the text's rhetorical designs upon the reader—obscures the status of the text as a pattern of signs, its status of as transference as trope." (Chase "Transference" 214) The repetitive aspect of transference emerging in the relationship between the patient and the analyst eclipses the recognition of the patient's discourse as rhetoric. Based on these different, yet intertwined definitions Felman can reinterpret the conventional relationship between psychoanalysis and literature, and theorize the concept of the *reading-effect* (Forrester 265-266).

"To Open the Question"

Felman identifies the most important problem with the typical interpretations of literature and psychoanalysis in the "and," which, despite being a coordinating conjunction, rather suggests a subordination between these concepts.[10] Psychoanalysis and literature are usually not on the same level, psychoanalysis is called upon to interpret literature: psychoanalysis "occupies the place of a *subject*, literature that of an *object*" (Felman *Question* 5). Felman compares this structure to the Hegelian relationship of the master and the slave delineated in *The Phenomenology of Spirit* (1807), the only outcome of which can be the recognition of the supremacy of the master: "literature's function, like that of the slave, is to *serve* precisely the *desire* of psychoanalytic theory" (Felman *Question* 6). This situation might be satisfactory for analysts, but not for literary critics and theoreticians: what this kind of psychoanalytic interpretation misses is precisely the literariness of the texts they are reading: "literature could perhaps even be defined as that which remains in a text precisely *unaccounted for* by the traditional psychoanalytical approach to literature" (Felman *Question* 6). Felman imagines the "literary thing" [*la chose littéraire*][11] as profoundly involved in rhetoric: it is an excess that resists interpretation, questions and subverts the frames of

[10] Jane Gallop analyses in a similar way the function of "and" in the uneasy relationship between feminism *and* psychoanalysis (Gallop *Feminism* 1). Diane Elam also focuses on the "and" in her analysis of feminism and deconstruction (Elam 13). Peter Brooks also problematizes in a Felmanian fashion the conjunction "law and literature" (Brooks "Law" 14).

[11] In the new preface to her *Writing and Madness*, Felman defines "the literary thing" the following way: "It is precisely this dramatization of the irreducibility of the relation between the readable and the unreadable that constitutes what I have called in French *la chose littéraire* – the literary thing" and goes in a footnote to add that it is "not exactly literature as institution: it is, rather, the original, originative drive that makes us read. It is what makes texts literary, what turns them into events, what constitutes their literary life, their continued emotional and rhetorical vitality." (Felman "The Story" 5)

interpretative metanarratives (Jardine 31). Chase shows how the inquiry into the rhetorical structure of philosophical texts led to the recognition of

> rhetoric as the 'other' of philosophy; they explore how an exclusion and at the same time exploitation of literary strategies and rhetorical modes have been vital to the self-construction of philosophical discourse in ways at odds with the truth claims of philosophy. (Chase "Transference" 211)

She claims that psychoanalysis is just like philosophy in the sense that it partakes of rhetoric—and the "literary thing"—, yet it refuses to acknowledge this debt.

Felman pinpoints the exact place where literature exceeds the limits of psychoanalytic readings:

> There is one crucial feature which is constitutive of literature but is essentially lacking in psychoanalytical theory, and indeed in theory as such: irony. Since irony precisely consists in dragging authority as such into a scene which it cannot master, of which it is not aware and which, for that very reason, is the scene of its own self-destruction, literature, by virtue of its ironic force, fundamentally deconstructs the fantasy of authority (Felman *Question* 8).

Irony is thus something that is constitutive of literature, but is lacking in theoretical approaches: psychoanalysis can only incorporate it as a blind spot which threatens to subvert the whole system. Just like for de Man, irony for Felman is about the moment of aporia narrating the impossibility of reading and understanding (de Man *Aesthetic* 166-167). Irony is always an excess that cannot fully be grasped within the limits of a non-ironic theory: "literature still functions as a *trap for psychoanalysis* when psychoanalysis tries to »explain« or master it, to catch the unconscious in the (literary) act" (Felman Madness 30) as irony, instead of "closing off the tropological system, […] enforces the repetition of its aberration." (de Man *Allegories* 301)

Felman examines psychoanalysis from a literary perspective, but, as we have seen in the case of irony, this does not simply mean the reversal of positions of power, but an attempt to expose its illusory structure and show how literature and psychoanalysis are *implicated* in each other:

> Psychoanalytic theory and the literary text mutually inform—and displace—each other; […] there is no longer a clear-cut opposition or a well-defined border between literature and psychoanalysis: psychoanalysis can be intraliterary just as much as literature is intrapsychoanalytic. The methodological stake is no longer that of the *application* of psychoanalysis *to* literature but, rather, of their *interimplication* in each other. (Felman *Adventure* 49, cf. Felman *Question* 8-9)

Literature and psychoanalysis cannot be separated from each other, their relationship is not structured by a spatial opposition of outside/inside as "they are really traversed by each other" (Felman *Question* 10): psychoanalysis uses literary proper names to name and invent itself—for example Oedipus-complex, Narcissism, etc. (Felman *Question* 9)—, and it is through a highly poetic prose style resembling Mallarmé's prose poems that Lacan proposes his most influential hypotheses. However, we must not fall into the trap of identifying literature with psychoanalysis as "each is contained in the other as its *otherness-to-itself*, its *unconscious*. […] in the same way that psychoanalysis points to the unconscious of literature, *literature, in its turn, is the unconscious of psychoanalysis*" (Felman *Question* 10).

Analytical Reading

Psychoanalytical reading is about interpreting the excess of the discourse of the patient, and Lacan's radical lesson of reading is that interpretation takes place in both participants of the analytical session:

> The unconscious, in other words, is not simply that which must be read but also, and perhaps primarily, that which reads. The unconscious is a reader. What this implies most radically is that whoever reads, interprets out of his unconscious, is an analysand, even when the interpreting is done form the position of the analyst. (Felman *Adventure* 21-22, cf. Felman *Madness* 164, Füzesséry 73)

Reading, then, is not only the task of the analyst, but also happens in the patient, so the hierarchical structure recognizable in psychoanalysis can be subverted because of the postulation of the unconscious, which was supposed to give authority to psychoanalysis as a discourse of power: "literature tells us that authority is a language effect, the product or the creation of its own rhetorical power: that authority is the power of fiction; that authority,

therefore, is likewise a fiction." (Felman *Question* 8) This makes the relationship between the critic and the text being read a little more complicated. Even though

> 1) the work of literary analysis resembles the work of the psychoanalyst; 2) the status of what is analyzed—the text—is, however, not that of the patient, but rather that of a master: we say of the author that he is a master; the text has for us authority—the very type of authority by which Jacques Lacan indeed denies the role of the psychoanalyst in the structure of the transference. Like the psychoanalyst viewed by the patient, the text is viewed by us as "a subject presumed to know"—as the very place where meaning, and *knowledge* of meaning reside. With respect to the text, the literary critic occupies thus at once the place of the psychoanalyst (in the relation of interpretation) and the place of the patient (in the relation of transference). (Felman *Question* 7)

Critics are analysts as they try to read the texts, yet, at the same time, patients as they read through their unconscious, which reading is determined by structures of transference they might not fully be aware (Chase "Transference" 214). The text affects the readers, a reading comes into existence and this interpretation is structured by the text's rhetoric.

It is thus an error to imagine the bond of the text and the critic as a one-sided interpretative relationship. But why does Felman call transference itself an error, "a rhetorical error *par excellence*" (Felman *Madness* 29)? Slavoj Žižek calls our attention to the fact that, according to Lacan, meaning as such is never given, and "to *produce* new meaning, it is necessary to *presuppose* its existence in the other." (Žižek 185) Lacan claims that

> If the unconscious has taught us anything […] it is first of all this: that somewhere, in the Other, 'it' knows. 'It' knows because 'it' is supposed by those signifiers the subject is constituted by […]. The very status of knowledge implies that some sort of knowledge already exists, in the Other, waiting to be taken, seized. (quoted by Felman *Madness* 201)

Producing new meaning presupposes the illusion that it is not created by us, but it can be found somewhere if we keep looking hard. This is a necessary illusion called by "the mystery of transference." And for Lacan, one of the cornerstones of transference was the subject presumed to know, which comes into existence because of the decentering effect of the unconscious. The unconscious is an experience of drifting away from our being, our truth,

which truth is, paradoxically, supposed in the other, the subject presumed to know: "he is presumed to know what no one can escape: meaning as such." (Felman *Madness* 179) "This knowledge is of course an illusion, but it is necessary one: in the end only through this supposition of knowledge can some real knowledge be produced." (Žižek 185)

Felman introduces her "To Open the Question" with a quotation from Rimbaud's *A Season in Hell* (1873): "love has to be reinvented" (Felman *Question* 5). Thus the pretext and the model of rethinking the conventional relationship between literature and psychoanalysis is the rethinking of love, and the most important concept in this process is transference, which was restated by Lacan in terms of love:

> I deemed it necessary […] to support the idea of transference, as indistinguishable from love, with the formula of the subject presumed to know […]. The person in whom I presume knowledge to exist, thereby acquires my love […] Transference is love […] I insist: it is love directed toward, addressed to, knowledge. (quoted by Felman *Madness* 202)

Transference as love and an allegory of reading unites the language of affection and epistemology, suggesting that in the analytic situation knowledge always comes into existence in an interpersonal relationship. And from de Man we know that, similarly to transference, love "is structured like a figure of speech" (de Man *Allegories* 169) as it is "a figure that disfigures, a metaphor that confers the illusion of proper meaning to a suspended, open semantic structure."[12] (de Man *Allegories* 198) Transference as love is a rhetorical illusion necessitated by the closure of reading.

What is at stake here is the reconceptualization of interpretation and understanding. Lacan is convinced that

> Interpreting is an altogether different thing than having the fancy of understanding. One is the opposite of the other. I will even say that it is in on the basis of a certain refusal of understanding that we open the door onto psychoanalytic understanding. (quoted by Felman *Adventure* 108)

[12] De Man elsewhere calls this "figure that disfigures" anthropomorphism, which "freezes the infinite chain of tropological transformations and propositions into one single assertion or essence" (de Man *Rhetoric* 241). Chase associates the concept of anthropomorphism to the purely performative act of transference.

The practice of reading delineated by Felman is different from conventional psychoanalytic readings as she thinks that "The history of reading has accustomed us to the assumption—usually unquestioned—that reading is finding meaning, that interpretation can dwell only on the meaningful." (Felman *Adventure* 45) Due to the signifying mechanisms peculiar to the unconscious, we need to question the primacy of meaning and the signified. We need to break with the old reading methods to recognize the new possibilities within psychoanalytic reading as "for Lacan, what is analytical par excellence is not […] the *readable*, but the *unreadable*, and the *effects* of the unreadable. What calls for analysis is the insistence of the unreadable in the text." (Felman *Adventure* 46) Such a reading must be attentive to the thematic as well as the rhetoric dimension of a text:

> It should be noted that the expression "Freudian reading" is *itself* an ambiguous expression that can refer either to Freudian *statements* or to Freudian *utterance*: a reading can be called "Freudian" with respect to *what it reads* (the *meaning* or thematic *content* it derives from a text) or with respect to *how it reads* (its interpretative *procedures*, the techniques or *methods* of analysis it uses). (Felman *Madness* 164)

Felman is here talking about the difference between thematic and rhetorical readings. We have to notice that these two types of readings both presuppose each other. This new reading method is not about throwing out thematic readings for purely rhetorical readings, but about illustrating the dynamic tension between these two different dimensions, through which the effects of the unconscious can be traced. Rhetoric is supposed to be "nothing other than a mode of contradiction in the text. […] rhetoric is never external to the theme: it resides in it, pervades it, but in so doing decenters it, articulates it otherwise. Within the theme, rhetoric is a discourse that is radically other." (Felman *Madness* 89) Much like how literature and psychoanalysis are implicated in each other, the thematic and the rhetorical dimensions cannot be separated unproblematically. It is through rhetorical displacements that thematic content is always in flight, explaining why Felman's strategy of reading aims to uncover the structure of the question of reading instead of finding a simple answer to it.[13]

[13] "Our reading […] would thus attempt not so much to capture the mystery's solution, but to follow, rather, the significant path of its flight; not so much to solve or answer the enigmatic question of the text, but to investigate its structure; not so much to name and make explicit the ambiguity of the text, but to understand the necessity and the thetorical functioning of the textual ambiguity. The question underlying such a reading is thus not »What does the story mean?« but rather »How does the story mean?« How does the meaning of the story, whatever it

According to de Man "Writing always includes the moment of dispossession in favor of the arbitrary power play of the signifier and from the point of view of the subject, this can only be experienced as dismemberment, a beheading or a castration" (de Man *Allegories* 296). Felman does not experience this kind of "dispossession" as a loss, rather as a possibility, claiming that meaning "can only be inscribed in the gap left by its own disappearance, by its own castration." (Felman *Madness* 88) Constructing meaning is always an arbitrary inscription in a place where it can no longer be found. Hence, instead of the "meaning" of a certain text, Felman prefers to use "effect," or "impact," which suggests that, even though their "meaning" is not necessarily established, texts can, and do have (unconscious) "effects," or "impact" upon their readers and critics.

The Theory of the Reading-Effect and the Possibility of Literary History

A reading that is created through transference owes its existence partly to unconscious processes, of which the reader is not fully aware. Because of this, the rhetoric of the text and the critical discourse cannot be clearly separated, as criticism, instead of grasping the meaning of the text, often repeats and acts out rhetorical errors already inscribed within what it reads. From this general insight into the relationship between literature and criticism, Felman formulated her theory of the "reading-effect" concentrating on the impact of a certain literary text. From this perspective, this theory is comparable to the models of reading delineated in literary hermeneutics, which conceptualized literary history as a history of "reception and impact" (Jauss "Literary" 7). However, because the theory of the reading- effect seems inseparable from a transferential structure and the unconscious in Felman's texts, these two notions that looked similar at first glimpse fail to be fully compatible.[14] Her notion means "a theory of reading centered on a rhetorical analysis and a theoretical examination of the occurrences of transference in both the text and its critical reading." (Felman *Madness* 30) In her view "the discourse of literary history itself points to some unconscious determinations that structure but of which it is not aware" (Felman *Adventure* 50). If we cling to the traditional notion of literary history, we might conclude that if it is driven partly by unconscious desire, because of its personal dimension, it fails to be historical enough. It is not so, however, as Felman's literary theory works with a different theory of history, in which the

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may be, rhetorically take place through permanent displacement, textually take shape and take effect: take flight." (Felman *Madness* 165, cf. Felman *Adventure* 49-50)

[14] See Jauss's *Toward an Aesthetic of Reception* and his "Literary History as a Challenge to Literary Theory" for more information about reception theory.

impossibility of conscious understanding still allows history to be written; but it will be riddled with gaps and ambivalences that testify partly to the unconscious preconceptions and processes through which the narrative came into existence.

How can these unconscious traces be found, in other words, how can this theory of the reading-effect be turned into a praxis? She claims that

> by locating what seems to be unreadable or incomprehensible in this effect; by situating the most prominent discrepancies or discontinuities in the overall critical discourse […] the most puzzling critical contradictions, and by trying to interpret those contradictions as symptomatic of […] the unconscious. (Felman *Adventure* 50)

If readings are governed by transferential/rhetorical structures, literary texts often contain the seeds of the errors that are necessarily acted out by various (mis)readings.[15] From this perspective, Felman's critical enterprise also has to face its impossibility, as it claims that no reading can be definitive, every reading contains certain blind spots from which we can expose its systematic errors, resulting in an infinite chain of critical "corrections," which structure closely resembles de Man's famous dynamic between blindness and insight (de Man *Blindness* 106).[16] Its axiom is that each reading is symptomatic, so this strategy of reading focuses its attention on ambiguities, discrepancies, paradoxes and aporias, which all refer to the "other scene" of the production of meaning, the unconscious (Felman *Adventure* 108, cf. Davis "Introduction" 854). Readings proceed from points that resist understanding, where the text seems to differ from itself (Felman *Adventure* 45, Felman *Scandal* 136, footnote 63). Such points can be found both in literary texts as well as critical narratives and we can suppose transferential structures at work behind them. Critical texts can be analyzed as reading-effects, or transference-effects which is

> the *dynamic interpretant* of the text (*interpretant* in Peirce's sense: not a person, but an *effect*—of the signifier, or of meaning). The theory of rhetoric thus finds itself

[15] As Barbara Johnson writes, "literature stages the modes of its own misreading, making visible the literarity of the heart of theory and rendering the effects of its project o understanding unpredictable. The rhetorical subversion of theory by its own discourse does not, however, prevent it from generating effects; indeed it is precisely the way theory misses its target that produces incalculable and interesting effects elsewhere." (Johnson *Critical* xii)

[16] Dominick LaCapra also notes transference's entanglement in the structures of blindness and insight: "problems and processes active in the texts or artifacts we study are repeated in displaced and often disguised or distorted form in our very accounts of them" (LaCapra *Representing* 111).

> transformed and renewed, opening onto a general theory of the reader and of reading: a theory of the reader as a participant in a living transferential drama, as an unconscious textual *actor* caught without knowing it in the lines of force of the text's "pure rhetoric," of the *addressing power* of its signs, and of their reference to interpretants. Reading, in this way is here rethought, reformulated as the blind *repetition*, the performative enactment of the *rhetoric* of the text (and not of its meaning). (Felman *Madness* 31)

Governed by transference, the readings that critical discourses come up with are "dynamic interpretants," which notion comes from the semiologist Charles Sanders Peirce, who, just like de Man, argued that grammar and rhetoric are not continuous categories, there is a tension between them (de Man *Allegories* 8-9, quoted in Felman *Madness* 24). The interpretant is a third element breaking the binary system of sign and its object, necessitated by understanding.[17] This does not mean, however, that the interpretant could be equated with meaning as such: it is a reading, which is by definition inconclusive, as it can only proceed from signs to other signs, instead of leaping from signs to meanings. This is what Peirce calls "pure rhetoric," a process through which meaning always escapes our grasp. He used the notion of the interpretant to illustrate the tension between grammar and rhetoric, and by calling the reading-effect a dynamic interpretant, Felman also hints at the possibility that it is also structured by that very same tension of grammar and rhetoric. A reading is part of a transferential system of repetition, which forces the reader to unconsciously act out the rhetoric of the text it reads: "any speech act produces an excess of cognition, but it can never hope to know the process of its own production (the only thing worth knowing)." (de Man *Allegories* 300, cf. Felman *Scandal* 67)

Hence, a reading governed by the structure of transference can never be a definitive one as it always participates in, and is a reading-effect of, the rhetorical operations at work within the text. From these initial axioms, the next logical step for Felman was to analyze literary history in a transferential relation to the texts it reads (cf. *Claims* 7) as hers is "a literary theory anchored precisely in the practice of interpretation and primarily responsive to the singularity of texts." (Felman "The Story" 2) The author superbly demonstrated the critical potential involved in such an enterprise through her reading of James's *The Turn of the Screw*, and through the reading of the vicissitudes of Edgar Allan Poe's literary appreciation. In both these texts, Felman shows how certain recurrent motifs in literary history

[17] The notion of the interpretant can be compared to the Lacanian concept of the Symbolic which breaks the imaginary unity of the self and the other by introducing a third element: language.

are inevitably shaped by the rhetorical ambiguities of the text. In *The Turn of the Screw*, the founding ambivalence of the story (are the ghosts "real"? or are they just the "projections" of the governess's mind?) splits the history of reception into two different types of reading: a psychoanalytic one that reads the story as a symptomatic text and "sees the governess as a clinical neurotic deceived by her own fantasies and destructive charges" (Felman *Madness* 145); and a "metaphysical, religious, or moral" reading, which emphasizes the role of the supernatural, and "sees the governess as a sane, noble savior engaged in a heroic moral struggle for the salvation of a world threatened by supernatural Evil" (Felman *Madness* 145), and which tries to "save" the text from psychoanalytic reading, just like the narrator tried to save the children from the ghosts (Felman *Madness* 147). Instead of "solving" the central mystery of the text, Felman is mostly interested in the dynamic tension between these two irreconcilable perspective as a symptom of the impact that the story had on its various readers, which impact also tells a lot about the transferential structure of reading in general.

In *Jacques Lacan and the Adventure of Insight*, Felman reads Poe "as a symptom of poetry" (Felman *Adventure* 27), noting the various disagreements and contradictions in the critical narratives written about his oeuvre, for example, his French critical acclaim as opposed to his neglect in American literature (Felman *Adventure* 30), or that his texts were often read through a psychoanalytical perspective (Felman *Adventure* 32). She is convinced that "this critical disagreement is itself symptomatic of a poetic effect, and that the critical contradictions to which Poe's poetry has given rise are themselves significant of the nature of poetry." (Felman *Adventure* 28) Interestingly enough, Poe's poetry never appears in Felman's essay, it is only evoked through the effect it produced in various critical accounts. As opposed to "Madness and the Risks of Practice," "The Case of Poe" outlines a general theory of how a reading might emerge: by locating in a poem "a signifier of poeticity and to analyze it functioning and its effects" in conjunction with the examination of the unconscious transferences of literary history (Felman *Adventure* 50).

Conclusion

This chapter tried to unravel and interpret the intricacies of the dialogue between rhetorical deconstruction and psychoanalysis. I argued that the meeting point between these two discourses is the concept of *transference*, the key metaphor of psychoanalytic reading, the examination of which enables us to displace the conventional, hierarchical relationship between psychoanalysis and literature as well: psychoanalysis can no longer offer a meta-

position that is called upon to interpret literature since the interpretive discourse is itself inhabited by "literariness." In my reading of the psychoanalytic notion of transference, I pointed out its double structure, to reveal it as a process that partakes of the contingent rhetorical operations at work in any given text, and also as a process that tries to resist this former recognition in order to bring the process of reading to a close. As the texts of Felman point out, this second process creates an illusion which is necessary for reading; yet, the meaning of the text being read can never be fully grasped, it always "takes flight" (Felman *Madness* 165), escapes us. Nevertheless, even though their meaning is escapes us, literary texts do have an impact: they provoke reading-effects in their readers, which constitutes a historical dimension of interpretation that the reader is not fully aware. In the next part of my thesis, I will write about one of Poe's short stories about the impossibility of reading, "The Man of the Crowd" further to illuminate the encounter between deconstruction and psychoanalysis in terms of unreadability and literary history.

"ER LASST SICH NICHT LESEN": THE UNREADABLE IN EDGAR ALLAN POE'S "THE MAN OF THE CROWD"

Edgar Allan Poe's texts have often been in the centre of critical debates, in fact, his short story, "The Purloined Letter" has generated one of the most fascinating encounters between psychoanalysis and deconstruction. (Eisemann 5, Kalmár "Az ellopásban" 181) Jacques Lacan and Jacques Derrida both read this short story and came to very different conclusions: for Lacan, the letter was the allegory of the signifier (Johnson *Critical* 115), while Derrida used Lacan's reading of the story for an overarching critique of psychoanalysis. Some years later, it was Barbara Johnson, who in her ingenious study of the debate (published in *The Critical Difference*) argued that "In all three texts, it is the *act of analysis* which seems to occupy the center of the discursive stage" (Johnson *Critical* 110) and showed how the readings of both of these French thinkers are influenced by a transferential structure always already inscribed within the text, and of which they are not fully aware.

Beginning with Charles Baudelaire, and reaching its peak with the texts of Lacan and Derrida, the approach labeled as "French Poe" primarily focused on the linguistic and psychic dynamics of Poe's texts and thereby largely ignored or obscured their historical context. In *The American Face of Edgar Allan Poe,* Shawn Rosenheim and Stephen Rachman argue that these readings failed "to recognize that Poe's most extravagant literary maneuvers were usually based in the specific cultural and political climate of antebellum America" (Rosenheim and Rachman xi), and all the essays collected in that volume propose to read "The American Face of Edgar Allan Poe," to contextualize his works as deeply involved in American culture. Just like how Shoshana Felman's texts are written through a "shuttle-experience" between the French and the American contexts, this chapter tries to work out ways to face Poe from such a double perspective: French and American, psychoanalytic and deconstructive, theoretical and historical. To shed further light upon the interface between deconstruction and psychoanalysis, and to substantiate and rethink the theoretical concepts of the previous chapter, this part of the dissertation proposes to examine Poe's "The Man of the Crowd," which, on the thematical level, happens to be an allegory of (the impossibility of) reading, that is, an "allegory of unreadability" (Mieszkowski 30). While "The Purloined Letter" presents a detective with a brilliantly successful act of analysis, "The Man of the Crowd" stages failed acts of reading, and shows the analytical powers of the mind at their limits. Yet this resistance to interpretation evokes a certain compulsion to meaning: in spite of its impossibility, a (mis)reading still comes into existence both within the story and in the

various critical texts it has generated, revealing a transferential structure at work, on the one hand, within the text (between the narrator and the man of the crowd) and, on the other hand the between the short story and its critical accounts (the critics and the tale). My reading of the case, however, does not intend to stop here. The recognition of the impossibility of reading in "The Man of the Crowd" is only a first step in demonstrating how this deconstructive / psychoanalytic notion of unreadability, when read through certain 19th century narratives and concepts (like the city sketch, or the gendered notion of the flaneur), reveals a historical dimension, or a historicity that even this contemporary theoretical notion (unreadability) seems to be determined by.

The Rhetorical and the Analytical

The plot of Poe's short story is relatively simple: having just recuperated from a serious illness, the narrator is sitting in a coffee house in London. Basking in his newly acquired acuteness of the senses, he can read texts as clearly as the expressions on people's faces hinting at their true personality. After a while, he notices a man who proves to be a lot more difficult to decipher. For this reason, he starts following the man around the city just to realize that he is always going round and round in the city without any apparent purpose. Faced with such a meaningless itinerary, he concludes that the man must be a criminal. The story thus sets out to valorize the powers of reading, but it ends up being a cautionary tale about the possible pitfalls of interpretation.

After the opening frame of the narrative, the unnamed narrator of "The Man of the Crowd" relates how his story began:

> Not long ago, about the closing in of an evening in autumn, I sat at the large bow window of the D—— Coffee-House in London. For some months I had been ill in health, but was now convalescent, and, with returning strength, found myself in one of those happy moods which are so precisely the converse of *ennui*—moods of the keenest appetency, when the film from the mental vision departs—the αχλυς ος πριυ επηευ—and the intellect, electrified, surpasses as greatly its every-day condition, as does the vivid yet candid reason of Leibnitz, the mad and flimsy rhetoric of Gorgias. Merely to breathe was enjoyment; and I derived positive pleasure even from many of the legitimate sources of pain. I felt a calm but inquisitive interest in every thing. (Poe "Man" 388)

After a long illness, which many of Poe's characters have gone through, the narrator is finding both his physical and especially his mental powers to be returning. Such a change in his intellectual capabilities is reinforced by different aspects related in this paragraph, legitimizing his role as an ideal reader of the world around him: a Greek quote from Homer; the juxtaposition of Leibnitz and Gorgias; and the very fact that he is sitting in a coffeehouse in London.

The Greek passage in the quote above was taken from Homer's *The Iliad*: in Robert Fitzgerald's translation, these lines are told by Pallas Athena to Diomedes midst the battle of Troy. As an answer to his prayers, the goddess's statue comes alive and tells the following things to the hero:

> 'Courage, Diomedes. Press the fight
> against the Trojans. Fury like your father's
> I've put into your heart: his never quailed—
> Tydeus, master shieldsman, master of horses.
> *I've cleared away the mist that blurred your eyes*
> a moment ago so you may see before you
> clearly, and distinguish god from man.
> If any god should put you to the test
> upon this field, be sure you are not the man
> to dare immortal gods in combat—none,
> that is, except the goddess Aphrodite.
> If ever she should join the fight, then wound her
> with you keen bronze.'
> (Homer 76, emphasis added)

The goddess here gives physical as well as mental powers to her hero: the spirit of his father will help him in battle, and by purging the mortal mists from his eyes, Pallas makes him able to tell the difference that is hidden from others, the true nature of his opponents. A similar knowledge, which proved crucial to Diomedes' survival seems to be given to the narrator of Poe's story as well, with which he can discern important details about the world around him. I interpret this power as, first and foremost, rhetorical, for two reasons: on the one hand, Homer's line "I've cleared away the mist that blurred your eyes" testifies to the performative powers of language and rhetoric that makes things happen through language (a la Austin); on the other hand, it is taken from literature, so it relies on a fiction created in language and

rhetoric. The narrator of the tale thus institutes his authority through the valorization of rhetoric, yet, at the same time, through the abjection of rhetoric that is apparent in the juxtaposition between Leibnitz and Gorgias.

Leibnitz, a rationalist philosopher of the 17th century, believed that the powers of the mind can penetrate the deepest secrets of nature and, as Gerald Kennedy argues, "the narrator appropriately identifies himself with the Enlightenment tradition, for he too seeks a rational, scientific classification of experience." (Kennedy "Limits" 187) As many critics of Poe's story observe, in the earlier version of the text, instead of Leibnitz, we find a reference to the name of the phrenologist George Combe, "who advocated a science that theoretically offered a way to read personality on the basis of outward appearance." (Hayes "Visual" 448, cf. McClintock 50) For phrenologists the body was a signifier whose signified was the true personality hiding behind the accidences of appearance: they were convinced that "the face is the sign of the person, and, second, that that sign can be read" (Eaglestone 74, cf. Miller *Hawthorne* 97). Both the language of reason and phrenology argued for stable references between signifiers (events of nature, bodies) and signifieds (natural laws, personalities), which opened a way for the advent of general truths about the world and human nature.

As opposed to Leibnitz and Combe, Gorgias, a skeptic philosopher of the 4th century BC, gave a central role to rhetoric over reason. (Baym, et al, eds 1381, footnote 5) Such a view, which was later espoused by Friedrich Nietzsche, and rediscovered by deconstruction (both by Derrida and Paul de Man), held that as long as any knowledge is produced within a linguistic universe, the stable references between signifiers and signifieds might come undone due to the random effects generated by "mad and flimsy" rhetoric. In fact, Nietzsche argues in "On Truth and Lies in a Nonmoral Sense" (1873) that even truth is

> A movable host of metaphors, metonymies, and; anthropomorphisms: in short, a sum of human relations which have been poetically and rhetorically intensified, transferred, and embellished, and which, after long usage, seem to a people to be fixed, canonical, and binding. Truths are illusions which we have forgotten are illusions—they are metaphors that have become worn out and have been drained of sensuous force, coins which have lost their embossing and are now considered as metal and no longer as coins. (Nietzsche "Truth" 117)

Nietzsche thus essentially links epistemology to rhetoric, a philosophical insight, which the narrator of the short story, by juxtaposing Leibnitz/Combe to Gorgias, seems to resist. For him, language is a clear medium of thought, offering a chance for interpretive closure. The

story seems to neglect the *rhetorical* for the *analytical*, about which Poe will later write in "The Murders in the Rue Morgue," the tale that inaugurated the genre of the detective story, that

> The mental features discoursed of as analytical, are, in themselves, but little susceptible of analysis. We appreciate them only in their effects. […] [T]hey are always to their possessor […] a source of the liveliest enjoyment. […] [T]he analyst [glories] in that moral activity which *disentangles*. He derives pleasure from even the most trivial occupations bringing his talents into play. (Poe "Murders" 397, cf. Felman *Adventure* 149)

Analysis is conceptualized here as a "moral activity which *disentangles*" invoking the etymological sense of the word, "the undoing of a knot" (Felman "Postal" 71). Indeed, this is what the narrator needs to do, analyze and "undo" the knot presented by the title character, whose unreadability is as much an effect of rhetoric as an effect of history.

These two stories, "The Murders in the Rue Morgue" and "The Man of the Crowd" are related to each other in many other respects, and the first to realize this was Walter Benjamin in his influential monograph about Baudelaire. He calls "The Man of the Crowd" an "X-ray picture of a detective story" (Benjamin *Baudelaire* 48), which reference was later superbly developed by Dana Brand's *The Spectator and the City in Nineteenth-Century American Literature*. Yet we must realize that there is a considerable difference between the two stories: while "The Man of the Crowd" narrates a reading stemming from a failure, the Dupin texts allegorize the triumph of the analytical.

Textuality and the City

The fact that the story sets forth from a London coffeehouse is crucial: in the 19th century London was one of the biggest cities of the world, a trade center as well as a center of information too. And within the cities it was the coffeehouses where one could hear all the recent gossip and read all the papers from home and abroad, making it a public space ideal for people hungry for information, reinforcing "the narrator's role as both a reader and an information seeker." (Hayes "Visual" 448) The narrator feels a "calm but inquisitive interest in every thing" (Poe "Man" 388) and amuses himself

> for the greater part of the afternoon, now in poring over advertisements, now in observing the promiscuous company in the room, and now in peering through the smoky panes into the street.
>
> This latter is one of the principal thoroughfares of the city, and had been very much crowded during the whole day. But, as the darkness came on, the throng momently increased; and, by the time the lamps were well lighted, two dense and continuous tides of population were rushing past the door. At this particular period of the evening I had never before been in a similar situation, and the tumultuous sea of human heads filled me, therefore, with a delicious novelty of emotion. I gave up, at length, all care of things within the hotel, and became absorbed in contemplation of the scene without. (Poe "Man" 388-389)

The analytical gaze finds its objects in texts, the crowd within the coffeehouse as well as outside the busy streets where the observer can watch a whole panorama of contemporary urban life stratified by class. Faces become texts to be read through a rhetorical analogy that Kevin J. Hayes finds to be very fashionable in Poe's age: "reading someone's character is a matter of interpreting a set of personal and cultural signs akin to language—signs such as clothing, facial expression, gesture, demeanor, and voice." (Hayes "Visual" 446) Hayes also argues that in that period, "Language was becoming more and more visible, and cities were starting to be covered with writing." (Hayes "Visual" 453) There were more and more advertisements, street signs and sandwichmen to urge a consumerist attitude that presupposed a widely spread knowledge of reading and writing among city dwellers (Hayes "Visual" 455). All of these contributed a lot to a modern experience of the urban environment. The sandwichmen, who literalized the proverbial readability of human bodies (Hayes "Visual" 459), was even thought to be "a splendid symbol for the dehumanization of modern man." (J. A. Leo Lemay quoted by Hayes 459) Modernity thus embraced writing and textuality as a new possibility of spreading consumer culture, yet as the example of the sandwichman shows, there was a certain unease about such an unprecedented proliferation of signs and signifiers as there was no guarantee of their readability. Reading these signifiers (advertisements, street signs and the faces of the crowd) seemed to require a keenness that the narrator of "The Man of the Crowd" attributes to himself. In such a heightened mood, the narrator is especially successful in reading people at a glance:

> The wild effects of the light enchained me to an examination of individual faces; and although the rapidity with which the world of light flitted before the window,

> prevented me from casting more than a glance upon each visage, still it seemed that, in my then peculiar mental state, I could frequently read, even in that brief interval of a glance, the history of long years. (Poe “Man” 392)

Histories are written on bodies and accurate readings of people’s faces take place in spite of the briefness of the observation.

Once the narrator’s rhetorical authority is established, comes the sight that puts his reading capabilities to the test. A sight that requires more than a cursory glance and absorbs his whole attention:

> suddenly there came into view a countenance (that of a decrepid old man, some sixty-five or seventy years of age,)—a countenance which at once arrested and absorbed my whole attention, on account of the absolute idiosyncrasy of its expression. Any thing even remotely resembling that expression I had never seen before. I well remember that my first thought, upon beholding it, was that Retzch, had he viewed it, would have greatly preferred it to his own pictural incarnations of the fiend. As I endeavored, during the brief minute of my original survey, to form some analysis of the meaning conveyed, there arose confusedly and paradoxically within my mind, the ideas of vast mental power, of caution, of penuriousness, of avarice, of coolness, of malice, of blood-thirstiness, of triumph, of merriment, of excessive terror, of intense—of supreme despair. I felt singularly aroused, startled, fascinated. “How wild a history,” I said to myself, “is written within that bosom!” Then came a craving desire to keep the man in view—to know more of him. Hurriedly putting on an overcoat, and seizing my hat and cane, I made my way into the street, and pushed through the crowd in the direction which I had seen him take; for he had already disappeared. With some little difficulty I at length came within sight of him, approached, and followed him closely, yet cautiously, so as not to attract his attention.
>
> I had now a good opportunity of examining his person. He was short in stature, very thin, and apparently very feeble. His clothes, generally, were filthy and ragged; but as he came, now and then, within the strong glare of a lamp, I perceived that his linen, although dirty, was of beautiful texture; and my vision deceived me, or, through a rent in a closely-buttoned and evidently second-handed *roquelaire* which enveloped him, I caught a glimpse both of a diamond and of a dagger. These observations heightened my curiosity, and I resolved to follow the stranger whithersoever he should go. (Poe “Man” 392-393)

The countenance of this man is entirely different from all the easily readable faces, it resists reading, which makes the face even more fascinating, leading to "a craving desire" to follow the man on his itinerary in London. Yet a sort of (transferential) reading does take place, but it is most likely a projection governed by the unconscious, telling more about the watchful gaze than about its object. This explication can only take the shape of an enumeration of paradoxical qualities, and I argue that these enumerations prove to be paradigmatic in the history of the reception of "The Man of the Crowd" as well. Each of these new ideas *supplements* the qualities referred to before, but, just like the man himself, this enumeration has no distinct aim.[18] Instead of creating a synthesis, it remains an aporetic list of characteristics, much like what de Man elsewhere called "an enumeration which never moves beyond the confines of a set of particulars" (de Man *Rhetoric* 250). Reading his clothes, his body and his face as signifiers seems to deny access to any depth, signs just proliferate endlessly. While literally, as well rhetorically (through enumerations), pursuing the man, the narrator has to realize that "He crossed and re-crossed the street way repeatedly without apparent aim" even though "He urged his way steadily and perseveringly," as if he was intent on reaching something:

> I was surprised, however, to find, upon his having made the circuit of the square, that he turned and retraced his steps. Still more was I astonished to see him repeat the same walk several times—once nearly detecting me as he came round with a sudden movement. […] I was now utterly amazed at his behaviour, and firmly resolved that we should not part until I had satisfied myself in some measure respecting him. […] upon the whole, I was at a loss to comprehend the waywardness of his actions. (Poe "Man" 393-394)

Before encountering the old man, the narrator has been able to read a whole life from the faces of the people he had seen: where they came from and where they are going, what their role and purpose is in society. But the man's itinerary seems a possibly endless route without any meaning, which baffles the narrator's desire for understanding, constituting an experience of the uncanny: "Poe suggests that few experiences are more terrifying than encountering the

[18] I use the notion of the supplement in the dissertation as it was conceptualized in Jacques Derrida's *Of Grammatology*: the supplement, in a first reading, is something secondary, only later added to the original plenitude. The supplement adds certain things and substitutes others (Derrida *Grammatology* 144-145), however, by the necessity of this addition and replacement, the supplement reveals that the original plenitude was never 'complete' in the first place. As Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak quotes: "The supplement »is« and »*addition* [that] comes to *make up* for a deficiency, … to compensate for a primordial non-self-presence.«" (Spivak "Translator's" lxxi) Probably Derrida's most famous example of the supplement is writing (text, absence) as it supplements speech (voice, presence).

unreadable in a world we thought we could read, the unknown in a world we thought we knew." (Hayes "Visual" 465) After following him around the city for a very long time, the narrator finally decides to confront the old man, but he once again fails to read the face of the man (Rachman 57), nevertheless, this failure results in a reading. In the end, the narrator concludes that

> "This old man," I said at length, "is the type and the genius of deep crime. He refuses to be alone. *He is the man of the crowd*. It will be in vain to follow; for I shall learn no more of him, nor of his deeds. The worst heart of the world is a grosser book than the 'Hortulus Animæ,' and perhaps it is but one of the great mercies of God that '*er lasst sich nicht lesen.*'" (Poe "Man" 396)

Coming face to face with unreadability and resistance to meaning, the narrator compulsively tries to reach closure and give a certain interpretation to the story by inscribing the old man into the narrative scheme of a detective story, one of the archetypal narrative types of modernity. We must see though that this reading emerges out of a failed act of reading, such a resistance to reading is what started the chase in the first place: "The purpose of his arduous pursuit, after all, was to discern the old man's identity; failing to accomplish that purpose, the narrator alternatively seeks rhetorical closure." (Hayes "Visual" 460) Jan Mieszkowski also argues that "the meaning of the story is established with no consideration for its parts" (Mieszkowski 32), in other words, the failure of the "analytical" is redeemed by the emergence of the "rhetorical."

The Lessons of German Books

In the first paragraph of "The Man of the Crowd," the reader faces quite strong assertions concerning reading and telling stories: "It was well said of a certain German book that »*er lasst sich nicht lesen*«—it does not permit itself to be read." (Poe "Man" 388) This German book, that is also referred to in the closing paragraph quoted above, is therefore set as prototype of what cannot be read, a text within a text that cannot be read, a *mise-en-abyme* of unreadability. Through the German quote, the book gains a sense of subjectivity too, because of the confusion of the neuter (*es*) and the masculine (*er*) pronoun (Rachman 73). This unreadability or intransigence can only be properly phrased in another language, in this case, German, labeling the resistance to reading a problem of translation as well (cf. Mieszkowski 30-31).

Based on a note given by Poe at the end of the story, critics usually identify this German book in question with the '*Hortulus Animæ cum Oratiunculis Aliquibus Superadditis* of Grünninger', but they do not agree why the book "does not permit itself to be read" (Poe "Man" 396). The unreadability of the book can be interpreted both in a literal as well as in a figural sense. T. O. Mabbott, the editor of the 1951 version of the text claims that the "German book Poe names correctly, but, purposely or not, ignores the fact that it is a collection of prayers which »could not be read« because it was so badly misprinted" (Mabbott 419-420) and that Poe's information about the book came from William Gowans, "the bookseller, who imported incunabula." (Mabbott 420) Unreadability here is a problem stemming from misprinting, making the book *literally* unreadable. Interestingly enough, such a literal unreadability also appears in the various editions of the text, for example in the hopeless confusion of the German pronouns, which testifies to the double bind of the philological faithfulness to Poe's letters (*er*) as opposed to a faithfulness to grammatical rules (*es*). If we take a closer look at what 'incunabula' means, we find the following in *Webster's Unabridged Dictionary*: 'extant copies of books produced in the earliest stages (before 1501) of printing from movable type,' and 'the earliest stages or first traces of anything,' the latter definition hinting at the possibility that even the very first appearance of the text was inhabited by the difference we can trace in the history of its various publications.[19] As opposed to Mabbott's literal explanation, *The Norton Anthology* argues for a figural interpretation of unreadability: the German book is a "book by John Grunninger printed in Germany around 1500; Poe's idea of it comes from Isaac Disraeli's *Curiosities of Literature*, where it is instanced as containing offensive religious illustrations" (Baym, et al, eds. 1388, footnote 6), a view shared by Patrick F. Quinn too (Nemes 593). Instead of helping the understanding of the text, like good illustrations should, these pictures are not in harmony with the text, disturbing its meaning to a point where it becomes unreadable.

Hayes also engages with the problem of the German book and points out the implications that the word "German" might have had for Poe: "in the literary parlance of the time, »German« often simply meant »Gothic.«" (Hayes "Visual" 461) David Galloway would also agree with this interpretation: we know that in "his preface to *Tales of the Grotesque and the Arabesque*, he [Poe] objected to being taxed by critics for 'what they have pleased to term »Germanism« and gloom. The charge is in bad taste, and the grounds of it have not been sufficiently considered.'" (Galloway, ed. 23) Poe also claimed that "I maintain that terror is

[19] It must be noted that Sigmund Freud used the figure of "new impressions or reprints" and "revised editions" of earlier texts (Brooks *Psychoanalysis* 53) to illuminate the process transference, thus inscribing it into the economy of textuality, writing, repetition and commodification, which, in the vicissitudes of Poe's short story, prove to be the return of difference instead of sameness.

not of Germany, but of the soul" (qtd in Hayes "Visual" 461). In other words, such an interpretation of "German" suggests a denunciation of the gothic mode—a style Poe excelled at—rendering it as unreadable. Based on its gothic elements (cf. Shelden 31-35) we may even think about "The Man of the Crowd" as an instance of the "German" texts that it denounces as unreadable, hinting at the hidden yet crucial role of romantic irony in Poe's texts.

Probably the most important theoreticians of romantic irony was Friedrich Wilhelm Schlegel, who used the notion of *arabesque* (which Poe later used in the title of his *Tales of the Grotesque and the Arabesque*)

> to denote a form characterized by involutions, complex and seemingly aimless digressions, and wanderings back and forth between temporal and spatial settings as well as between levels of narrative reality. This last, the device generally called Romantic irony, is thus to be seen as one element of what Schlegel terms the arabesque. (Immerwahr 84)

Schlegel's seminal essay on irony, "On Incomprehensibility" (1800) also sets out from a similar unreadability, or "incomprehensibility" we encounter in Poe's "The Man of the Crowd," making irony a trope narrating the very possibility of understanding, as de Man would have it. Schlegel's periodical, *Athenaeum* has seen similar bad critique as Poe's tales and he concluded that "the grounds for the incomprehensible must lie in incomprehension" (Schlegel 119). He argues that "one obtains the purest and most splendid incomprehensibility precisely from science and from art, whose very aim is to be understood [*verständigen*] and to make understandable, and from philosophy and philology." (Schlegel 119) In other words, we encounter incomprehensibility and unreadability in its most radical form in modes of writing aimed at understanding and reading, like literature and philosophy. Schlegel even goes a step further and claims that the incomprehensible forms the basis of intelligibility itself, rhyming with various psychoanalytic and deconstructionist approaches:

> But is incomprehensibility actually something so completely reprehensible, so base? I think that the welfare of families and of nations rests on it. If I am not utterly deceived, states and systems, the most artificial works of humankind, are often so artificial that one cannot admire the wisdom of their creator enough. An unbelievably small portion of incomprehensibility is adequate if it is only kept completely true and pure, and no heinous understanding dares to approach its holy confines. Yes, the most precious thing man possess, inner contentment itself is, as anyone knows, ultimately connected

> to such a point, which must be left in the dark, but nonetheless carries and holds the whole. It would lose this power at the same moment that one wanted to resolve it into understanding. Indeed, you would all be quite apprehensive if the whole world, as you demand it, were for once to become entirely understandable. And has not this infinite world itself been constructed by the understanding out of incomprehensibility or chaos? (Schlegel 126)

Both Schlegel and the narrator of "The Man of the Crowd" thus face the very same question of reading and understanding, yet come to very different conclusions. For Schlegel—unless he means it ironically, adding yet another twist to the picture—the lack of comprehension is essential to give way to different structures of understanding, yet the narrator's encounter with unreadability is a moment of baffling connected to the untold terrors of the human heart.

No wonder the second sentence of the tale turns from the question of books, reading and understanding to the ontological problems of narration. How can one narrate the unnarratable? How can we talk about something that resists being translated into a narrative?

> There are some secrets which do not permit themselves to be told. Men die nightly in their beds, wringing the hands of ghostly confessors, and looking them piteously in the eyes—die with despair of heart and convulsion of throat, on account of the hideousness of mysteries which will not *suffer themselves* to be revealed. Now and then, alas, the conscience of man takes up a burthen so heavy in horror that it can be thrown down only into the grave. And thus the essence of all crime is undivulged. (Poe "Man" 388)

Much like how that "German book" is unreadable, there are secrets which may not be narrated, even though they are constitutive of the subject: Lacan, for example, called the unconscious "a knowledge that cannot tolerate, and escapes, in every sense, conscious reflection." (Felman *Madness* 209) Even at the last moments of life, there are things that cannot be told, even in a confession. The various scopes of meaning of the word 'confession' here seems to be irrevocably split between two areas that it links, namely: confessions made at church (which are about *sin*) and confessions made at court (which are about *crime*). Both of these modes of writing (like psychoanalysis) are discourses in which the one who (over)hears has the authority to give meaning to what has been said—the truth of the subject does not reside in the subject of confession only, but is constituted in a dialogue with the confessor (Foucault 62). For Michel Foucault, the ritual of (clerical) confession transforms the

body (through its sexual innuendoes) to narration (Foucault 19-20), but such a confession cannot take place in Poe's narrative, as it is blocked precisely by the *body*: the subjects of the confession "die with despair of heart and convulsion of throat."

If we examine one of the texts Poe was influenced by when writing "The Man of the Crowd," "The Drunkard's Death" from Charles Dickens's *Sketches by Boz*, we may draw very close parallels between them: they seem to be preoccupied with the very same problem, but resolve it differently (Rachman 72).[20] The following lines are introduced to Dickens's text, when the drunkard's wife lies dying in her death-bed:

> It chills the blood to hear the dearest secrets of the heart—the pent-up, hidden secrets of many years—poured forth by the unconscious, helpless being before you; and to think how little the reserve and cunning of a whole life will avail, when fever and delirium tear off the mask at last. Strange tales have been told in the wanderings of dying men; tales so full of guilt and crime, that those who stood by the sick person's couch have fled in horror and affright, lest they should be scared to madness by what they heard and saw; and many a wretch has died alone, raving of deeds the very name of which has driven the boldest man away. (Dickens 555)

For Dickens, these deathbed stories are always interiorities, (psychical) enclosures constitutive of the subject, they are pent-up, they reside below a mask, evoking the notion of the uncanny Sigmund Freud conceptualized through quoting Schelling: a secret that is revealed even though it should have remained a secret (Freud "Uncanny" 345). Whereas in Poe's story, the body obstructs narrative, here they pour forth when the body is overcome by fever, delirium, when the body as other starts to speak. Hearing these tales also elicits a very visceral reaction in their listeners and readers, and perhaps this is why Poe's narrator thinks "it is but one of the great mercies of God that '*er lasst sich nicht lesen*.'" Such a hysterical reaction to what is being heard or read is also acted out in the various critical narratives trying to give a proper meaning to what Poe's story has left unreadable. Encountering meaninglessness criticism transferentially repeats the misreading of the narrator.

[20] While Mabbott calls the relationship between the texts of Dickens and Poe "inspiration" (Mabbott 419-420), Rachman and Félix Martín Gutiérrez go even further: Rachman discusses the literary dynamics of plagiarism in Poe's oeuvre (Rachman 71), while Gutiérrez argues that Dickens's *Sketches by Boz* is "the target of an explicit textual appropriation" in this short story (Gutiérrez 161). Robert H. Byer calls our attention to another possible source for Poe's vision of the crowd, "Bulwer-Lytton's *Eugene Aram*, a narrative of crime set in modern London" (Byer 224).

It seems that "The Man of the Crowd" (the short story) arrested the attention of readers as much as the old man fascinated the narrator within the story: based on its critical accounts the effect of the face of the old man on the narrator is metaphorically transferred to the effect of the short story on its readers. For example Arthur Hobson Quinn notes that "The story made such an impression upon the critic of *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine* when he found it in the *Tales* of 1845, that he selected it for extended treatment." (Quinn 310) While various incongruous and paradoxical ideas arose in the narrator's mind about the nature of the old man (Poe "Man" 392) leading to an endless enumeration of qualities, critics reacted to the effect of the story in a similar way. The old man was thought to be the Wandering Jew, or even Satan himself (Baym, et al, eds. 1381, footnote 1, Winwar 209, Bonaparte "Selections" 120)[21]; the outsider (Galloway, ed. 21)[22]; the double (Kennedy "Limits" 186, Byer 223, 233, Mieszkowski 30); or the story was even read as the *mise en scène* of the father in an Oedipal fantasy (Winwar 209, Bonaparte "Selections" 106).[23] This list could probably be continued with several different types of readings, which would create such an enumeration without any hope for synthesis.

These critical narratives all try to solve the enigma of the text, just like the narrator's attentive analysis tried to solve the mystery posed by the old man. What they did not realize, however, is that when they give a stable meaning to the unreadable, they repeat the same type

[21] *The Norton Anthology* explains in a footnote that "The Man of the Crowd" belongs to "a tradition of stories about mysterious strangers. A well-known comic antecedent is Irving's *The Stout Gentleman*, where, as in this story, an arresting figure is singled out by the observer in a mundane setting. But behind Poe's conception also lies the legend of the Wandering Jew, who refused to let Jesus (then carrying his cross to Calvary) rest outside his house, and whom Jesus punished by dooming him to wander the earth until the Second Coming; and in the repeated references to the stranger's going 'to and fro' Poe may intend an allusion to Satan, the archetypal criminal who according to Job 1.7 has a way of 'going to and fro in the earth,' and 'walking up and down in it.'" (Baym, et al, eds. 1381, footnote 1) Marie Bonaparte states that "So, too, with the eternal wandering to which the guilty father is condemned. The Man of the Crowd, the Wandering Jew, the Flying Dutchman, and the Wild Huntsman, all, by contrariety, namely immortality, represent their death and the son's deep wish for that death." (Bonaparte "Selections" 120)

[22] Galloway thinks that "Poe shares with Melville and Hawthorne the concept of the hero as a lonely and estranged figure, and in this respect Poe's 'The Man of the Crowd' bears close reading alongside Hawthorne's 'Wakefield' […] Like Hawthorne and Melville, Poe returned repeatedly to the theme of the outsider, and he shared with them a vision of the torment which threatened to engulf the character who stepped out of society." (Galloway, ed. 21)

[23] Frances Winwar notes that "Edgar had drawn the theme from the profoundest springs of his personality. Six years after John Allan's death he, the victim of the old man's avarice and cold blooded calculation, had 'gazed at him steadfastly in the face' and meted out punishment through the immortality of his works, in which Mr. Allan had never believed." (Winwar 209) Bonaparte argues that "The slayer-father, as imagined in the infantile sadistic concept of coitus, here appears as the mysterious unknown, the man of the crowd, 'type and genius of profound crime' as, also, in the orangoutang of 'The Murders in the Rue Morgue.' In one case a dagger symbolizes the piercing phallus, in the other, a razor." (Bonaparte "Selections" 106). Roland Barthes would definitely agree, as for him, "all narrative (all unveiling of the truth) is a staging of the Father (absent, hidden, or suspended)—which would explain the consubstantiality of narrative forms, family structures, and interdictions on nudity, all brought together in our culture in the myth of Noah's nakedness covered by his sons." (quoted in Brooks *Reading* 31)

of misreading that was given about the man of the crowd by the unnamed narrator of the tale. They are repeating, instead of recognizing the structure they are unconsciously inscribed into. One of the most careful readers of Poe, Michael Williams argues that narrators in Poe's short stories are

> frequently confronted by texts that, like the "certain German Book" mentioned at the beginning of "The Man of the Crowd," do not permit themselves to be read […] That is, they resist the recovery of a single definitive meaning authorized by an original voice. Though characters might claim to have established just such a univocal reading—of a text, or of the world as text—the narratives in which these claims are made subvert such interpretive closure, reveal it as a projection of desire or fear, and demonstrate the irreducibility of language. (Williams 632)

In other words, Poe's "The Man of the Crowd," and many of his other short stories, seem to verify the universal notion of unreadability familiar from deconstructive criticism, which notion Felman translated so eloquently into psychoanalytical vocabulary. Seeing its presuppositions confirmed, a psychoanalytically inflected deconstructive reading could stop here, assuming that "there is nothing left for the literary critic to do but reconfirm the relevance of de Man's findings for everything he did not get around to discussing explicitly" (Mieszkowski 33). But I believe that if we consider the literary tradition into which Poe's allegory is inscribed into, we might catch a glimpse of the broader historical significance of the unreadability he is writing about. The "afterlife" of this short story is all the more puzzling: even though it insists on the notion of unreadability, it "forms a point of origins for many of the imaginative and social preoccupations of […] later explorations of modernity and its ideology" (Byer 221), like that of Baudelaire or Benjamin.

Poe's Appropriation of the City Sketch

Historically, Poe's short story grows out of a tradition of city sketches, which were very fashionable during the nineteenth-century, and led to the conceptualization of the notion of the "flaneur" as a social explorer in Baudelaire's *The Painter of Modern Life* and Walter Benjamin study about the French poet. According to Deborah Epstein Nord, in the first years of the century, the sketches "employed eighteenth-century literary conventions of urban description" (Nord 159), and owed much to colonial travel writing (McClintock 120). Charles Lamb claimed that a metropolis, like London, offered an "accumulation of sights—endless

sights" (qtd. in Seed 155) for the urban explorer, and therefore endless topics to ponder. The emergence of this genre also implied a shift in the binary oppositions of "home" and "not home," "familiar" and "unfamiliar": the city, as a home suddenly became unfamiliar or unreadable, and this "bewildering multiplicity of the city" (Seed 160) had to be made familiar again through the act of seeing, writing and reading.

Nord also argues that in the 1820s, the self-reflexive metaphor of the texts written by Charles Lamb, William Hazlitt, or Thomas de Quincey, was the analogy of the theater:

> The image of theater is crucial to urban representation in the early nineteenth century, for it suggests not only entertainment and performance but a distance and tentativeness in the relation between the spectator and the action upon the stage. The urban spectator of this period, whether writer or imagined subject, experienced the sights and people of the street as passing shows or monuments to be glimpsed briefly or from afar. This distance helped obscure and control all that was encountered, however arresting or unsettling, and it helped, too, to insure that whatever did unsettle the urban spectator was not understood as a symptom of some larger social disturbance. (Nord 159-160)

In a letter to William Wordsworth, Lamb also called London "pantomime and a masquerade" (qtd. in Seed 155), and the theater metaphor allowed a social explorer to stage city life as a drama or a spectacle, while keeping a safe distance from what is going on. They saw "the social reality of the city as part of a natural order, a system of social relations that was fundamentally organic and not to be challenged or radically transformed." (Nord 186) The writer was like an ethnographer who did not wish to intrude upon the culture being described and wanted to remain an objective observer.

Dana Brand also describes the notion of the flaneur with a similar theatrical analogy:

> In common French usage, a *flaneur* is someone who, without any set purpose, strolls through and observes the life of a city or town. As Walter Benjamin has observed, the word was commonly used in Baudelaire's time, to refer to member of a class of writers and journalists who, in the *feuilletons*, the serial feature sections of the Paris newspapers, and in books called *physiologies*, wrote sketches of urban life from the perspective of a strolling or panoramically situated observer. According to Benjamin, the flaneur, as a journalistic and literary type originated in the 1830s, when the writers of the *feuilletons* began to represent city life with the same elegant, detached, and leisurely tone they used in their theatrical and literary reviews. At all times insisting

> upon the randomness with which they encountered what they described, the flaneurs, in the city sketches would "watch" and present the crowds on the boulevards, and in the arcades, as if they were watching a performance. They would present themselves as reading these crowds as if they were reading the most innocuous and diverting texts. (Brand 6)

To textually represent modern city life, flaneurs, just like social explorers and the narrator of "The Man of the Crowd," transferred their attention from "theatrical and literary reviews" to "crowds on the boulevards, and in the arcades" and wrote about this "randomness" of the people passing by "as if they were watching a performance." The transition from scripted plays and random city crowds posed a challenge, however:

> In order to produce this effect, they would claim to possess extraordinary powers of interpretation. The flaneur, Benjamin writes, typically presented himself as a "botanist on asphalt," in possession of special languages and keys that made it possible to identify and classify the components of the crowd. He would also often claim to be able to gain access to the history and consciousness of others. (Brand 6)

The flaneur's rhetorical power over the language of theatre and literary criticism has already been established and they transferred this authority to the reading crowds. In other words, this unquestionable authority that vindicated a "metaposition" of reading (cf. Rachman 77), flowed from an illusion created by language itself, resembling the rhetorical power attributed to the narrator in Poe's short story.

Nord argues that from the 1830s on, the genre started to change, and "The city ceased to be simply a theater, a spectacle, a panorama" (Nord 188) examined from a safe distance. From being a purely aesthetical venture, the city sketch embraced social commitment, becoming a "literary means for promoting social change, and for this reason alone it was imperative to press on their readers a sense of connection with the people of the streets." (Nord 186) The trajectory of the genre thus ranges from separation to involvement. As Anne McClintock observes, during the 19th century, the city crowd, especially the poor, were often represented as "dangerous," "irrational, subversive and feminine," "savage" (McClintock 46, 83, 118), hence "unreadable."[24] In a metonymical chain that shows the interrelationship between class, gender and race, McClintock argues that

[24] Byer also thinks that "The mid-nineteenth-century city and its crowds seemed to countless observers the incarnation of unprecedented incoherence and disorder" (Byer 221).

> the crowd became the metonymic symbol of the unemployed and unruly poor; who were associated with criminals and the insane; who were in turn associated with women, particularly prostitutes and alcoholics; who were in turn associated with children; who were associated with "primitives" and the realm of empire. (McClintock 119

Managing and disciplining this "threat" of the city crowd first necessitated representation (McClintock 119): urban space was represented as feminine waiting to be explored by the male flaneur, revealing a gendered aspect of the city sketch that also hinted at its purpose for social containment (McClintock 82, Felski 2). From this perspective, the hidden agenda behind these journalistic sketches written by the social explorers and the flaneur can also be spotted: its purpose was to establish the readability of the modern world where signs proliferate to such a degree that they threaten to flood and envelop us:

> According to Benjamin, such a fantastically gifted urban interpreter existed to assure a literate bourgeois audience that urban crowds were not as illegible as they appeared to be, that social life was not as incoherent as it appeared to be, and that the masses were not as politically threatening as they appeared to be. (Brand 6)

Such a rhetorical power of reading thus stems from the experience or the threat of the unreadable that it tries to cover up as best as possible.

One of the best examples of this latter type of city sketch was Dickens's *Sketches by Boz* (1836-37), which, in David Seed's view, offered "a complex perspective for his reportage, striking a balance between the miscellaneous implications of the term 'sketch' and his social concerns." (Seed 156) Audrey Jaffe also thinks that in Dickens's book "Eighteenth-century benevolence encounters both nineteenth century anxiety about social mobility and a nineteenth-century perception of the poor as requiring government scrutiny and regulation' (qtd. in Seed 159) The relationship of Poe with this tradition is manifold. His positive review of Dickens's *Sketches by Boz* in 1836 shows that he was fascinated with the genre, which helped him to refine his own principles of the aesthetic as well (Poe *Watkins* 204-207, Grubb 215-216). His love of Dickens led to the textual appropriation of certain key scenes and (rhetorical) figures from *Sketches by Boz*, like from "The Drunkard's Death," or "Gin Shops" (Mabbott 419-420, Rachman 76). Poe's description of the urban crowd is thus at best a pastiche, or the plagiarism of Dicken's sketches of the city, about which Rachman concludes

that Poe was himself "a textual *flaneur*, and if Poe's *flaneur*-like narrator is observing anything it is Dickens's text, not the streets of London, Paris, or New York." (Rachman 77) The story is thus communicated through a structure of repetition, leading to an incessant slippage of meaning. Poe's city, as a repetition, is the locus of unreadability, and this "mystification of the city relies on Poe's transfiguration of Dickens's text and the effacement of London's social relations." (Rachman 76) Instead of giving a reassuring picture of the various strata of contemporary life, or protesting against social ills, it stages the aesthetic as a separation from history and a foreclosure of the ethical, and demonstrates the uncanny return of the unreadable. As Robert H. Byer argues, "In its figuration of the crowd, Poe's story represents social life neither as a readable text nor as a recognizable structure of the visible" (Byer 241-242). If we conceptualize the city sketch in its relation to social commitment, in Poe's short story, the historical significance of the genre is eclipsed by the problematics of reading: a shift that is familiar from de Man's *Allegories of Reading* as well.[25]

As one of the prototypical founding narratives of modernity, the city sketch wanted to give a reassuring, readable picture about modern life by exploring contemporary society. In "The Man of the Crowd," which can be read as appropriation of this genre, Poe testifies to the failure of reading and the uncanny return of the unreadable at the heart of the city sketch, the tradition the short story emerges from. Yet if we examine the short story, like Benjamin does, as an "X-ray picture of a detective story" (Benjamin *Baudelaire* 48), Poe seems to resist his own recognition of the experience of the unreadable by creating another archetypal narrative of modernity, the analytical detective story. After staging a violation of the social order by an act of transgression (murder), these stories aim to prove through the act of investigation, which is also an act of reading, that the world can be rationally reorganized once again after the crime that has been committed (Bényei *Rejtélyes* 15, 25). Seeing direct continuity between "The Man of the Crowd" and "The Murders in the Rue Morgue," however similar their preoccupations might be, would risk reinscribing the most radical insights of the tale (the uncanny return of the unreadable) into the metaphysical discourse it has called into question.

Conclusions

If we generalize the transferential logic shown to be at work in "The Man of the Crowd" and, at the same time, in the critical allegories written about it, Poe's tale "resist the

[25] One of the most memorable example of reading as opposed to history occurs in the preface to *Allegories of Reading*, which "started out as a historical study and ended up as a theory of reading." De Man found himself "unable to progress beyond local difficulties of interpretation. In trying to cope with this, I had to shift from historical definition to the problematics of reading" and called this shift "typical of my generation" (de Man *Allegories* ix).

recovery of a single definitive meaning" and resists "interpretive closure," demonstrating "the irreducibility of language," an insight shared by deconstruction and psychoanalysis as well. Just like for the narrator of Poe's tale, as well as de Man and Lacan, "What calls for analysis is the insistence of the unreadable in the text" (Felman *Adventure* 149), an imperative that Felman, Johnson, or Caruth pursued in their own subtle ways. However, I believe that when dealing with nineteenth-century texts, this "theoretical," "universal" notion of unreadability uncovered by deconstructive readings needs to be juxtaposed to a historicity evoked by Brand, Hayes, Nord, McClintock, and Seed, which stages the "unreadable" in its relation to the social function of the city sketch, the gendered notion of the flaneur, as well as the inception of detective story. Such a reading would reverse the narrative emerging from de Man's introduction to *Allegories of Reading* by pointing out how these "local difficulties of interpretation" (de Man *Allegories* ix) that are usually generalized under the deconstructive / psychoanalytic notion of unreadability acquire a historical dimension that is often forgotten by critical narratives.

CHAPTER II. DECONSTRUCTION AND FEMINISM

BONDS OF READING: DECONSTRUCTION AND FEMINISM IN SHOSHANA FELMAN'S OEUVRE

> "Resemblance is 'loved' because it can be interpreted as identity as well as difference and is therefore unseizable, forever in flight." (Paul de Man, *Allegories of Reading*)

To begin this chapter about the uneasy relationship between deconstruction and feminism, let me briefly return to one of the epigraphs of Shoshana Felman's *Literature and Psychoanalysis* (1985). As I have written in the previous chapter, Felman has taken that epigraph from Paul de Man's *Allegories of Reading*, yet she decided to leave out a little detail of that quote. The original passage reads like this: "reading is dramatized, *in the relationship between Marcel and Albertine*, not as an emotive reaction to what language does, but as an emotive reaction to the impossibility of knowing what it might be up to." (de Man *Allegories* 19, emphasis added) De Man's observations about reading thus come from a very specific reading of Proust and stage the stakes of reading in an interpersonal relationship, which happens to be a man-woman relationship as well, thus inevitably gendered. It is as if only through the omission of such an interpersonal, gendered relationship that the general theory of a deconstructive psychoanalytic reading can invent itself, which seems a bit odd, as its pretext and model was supposed to be the reinventing of love, *à la Rimbaud*. Exploring such "bonds of love" and "bonds of reading" became crucial for Felman later, in her *The Scandal of the Speaking Body* (first published as *The Literary Speech Act* in 1983) and *What Does a Woman Want?* (1993), which "borrows for the title the frustrated and bewildered question Freud formulated in a letter to Marie Bonaparte, »What does a woman want?«" (May 631), and which espouses an openly feminist standpoint towards literature and literary theory. This feminist stance embraced here was all the more symbolic as many critics, including Barbara Johnson, in her "Gender Theory and the Yale School," have identified the Yale School as a "Male School" (Johnson *World* 32). As Felman reflected later, in her new preface to *Writing and Madness*, "the Yale School was perceived as the creation of five men. The women were its unofficial members, not its official ones. […] [our gender] did not prevent our personal, *privative* inclusion, but it did not promote our *public* one." But all this, as Felman admits, only became apparent "when feminist critique became part of our baggage." (Felman "Story" 8-9)

She also realized later that *Writing and Madness* laid the foundations for her later texts, and "in many ways anticipates, *prefigures* all my later books" (Felman "Story" 5). For example while *Writing and Madness* aimed "to seek the specificity of literature by exploring literature's constitutive relation to what culture has excluded under the label »madness«" (2), *What Does a Woman Want?* explores a similar exclusion, "the exclusion of women in patriarchal society" (Felman "The Story" 6). The most obvious link connecting these two volumes is "Women and Madness: The Critical Phallacy," which essay was written in 1974 and it already appeared in the French original of *La folie et la chose littéraire* in 1978. It was first published in English in *Diacritics* in 1975 to appear later in *What Does a Woman Want?* In a similar way, the topics analyzed in *The Scandal of the Speaking Body*, most notably the relationship between J. L. Austin's speech act theory and the body, also prefigure Felman's "feminist turn." Later on, the author's pioneering venture into the theme of the body and sexuality was appropriated by mainstream postmodernist feminism as well.[26]

There are many other examples that could be listed to prove that there is a consistent continuity in her writings. Yet when she is writing about what the navel of the dream means for Freud and de Man, she comes to the conclusion that "Freud is looking for the continuity of the paradoxical figure of discontinuity, for the connection of the disconnection. De Man, in contrast, insist on the discontinuity disrupting the continuity, on the disconnection of the connection" (Felman "Postal" 71). In a similar fashion, Felman's oeuvre can be read in the "Freudian" as well as the "de Manian" way: do we suppose that there is continuity or discontinuity between the different phases of her career, focusing on psychoanalysis, feminism, trauma or legal studies? Do these different texts, these unique acts of reading lead to a synthesis, offering a synecdochical way of interpretation? Or do the individual texts follow each other in a radically contingent way, just like the enumerations we have witnessed in "The Man of the Crowd"? This question is all the more pressing as it also allegorizes the possibility of inflecting deconstruction with different discourse, psychoanalysis, feminism, trauma or legal studies. I believe that Felman's texts are so seductive because they can be read both ways, at the same time offering and denying such interfaces, embracing them, at the same time remaining critical of them. In this chapter of the dissertation, I will address the unique strategies employed by Felman and Johnson in creating one of the most intriguing encounters between deconstruction and feminism. I will try to highlight the strong points as

[26] The 2002 reissue of *The Scandal of the Speaking Body* included an afterword by Judith Butler, where she praises Felman's work as having a profound impact on criticism: her "text prefigured and sometimes prompted the cross-disciplinary travels of the speech act: in legal and literary works, performance studies, queer theory, political theory and ethnography." (Felman *Scandal* 114)

well as blind spots of their enterprise, and show how an analysis of Edgar Allan Poe's notion of "the most poetical topic" can help us better understand the problems at hand.

Repetitions

Felman admits that she realized that the trajectory of her earlier essays collected in *What Does a Woman Want?* was pointing at roughly the same (feminist) direction without her being conscious of this (Felman *Woman* 17-18):

> the practical readings that compose this book encompass and unwittingly reveal the implicit story—and the autobiographical itinerary—of how one becomes a feminist. At the outset of the writing process of the book, my current feminist positions were not a given. They were neither altogether conscious nor truly owned by me with their full critical potential: I arrived at them through reading, acquired them in writing. (Felman *Woman* 12-13)

These readings used different deconstructive and psychoanalytical approaches (Felman *Woman* 7) but in the end they analyzed

> three texts by male writers who dramatize, each in his own way, a male encounter with femininity as difference, a male experience, that is, of femininity as precisely the emergence of the (unexpected, baffling, and not always conscious) question: "What does a woman want?" (Felman *Woman* 3)

Strictly speaking only the introductory and the closing chapters of the book are new, yet this new frame rereads these essays and casts them in a different light, bringing about a return of difference instead of sameness.[27] For example "Textuality and the Riddle of Bisexuality" originally appeared with the title "Rereading Femininity" in *Yale French Studies* in 1981.[28] A crucial chunk of "Competing Pregnancies: The Dream from which Psychoanalysis Proceeds" was also included in "Postal Survival, or the Question of the Navel" (1985), Felman's tribute

[27] The frame is also immensely important as Felman's notion of female autobiographies also connects *What Does a Woman Want?* with *Testimony: Crises of Witnessing in Literature Psychoanalysis and History* (1992).
[28] It is interesting to see that the notion of rereading surfaced both in Felman's as well as Johnson's writings in that period, and in both cases, the importance of rereading was emphasized in analyses of texts of Balzac revolving around the question of sexual difference ("The Girl with the Golden Eyes" and *Sarrasine* respectively). Johnson's review about Roland Barthes's *S/Z* "The Critical Difference" was originally presented at the MLA Convention in 1977, published in *Diacritics* in 1978, and it was also included in *The Critical Difference* in 1981, the year when Felman's "Rereading Femininity" appeared.

to de Man, which imagines the relationship between psychoanalysis and deconstruction through a significant "bond of reading," and introduces the question of gender into rhetorical study.

The performance of the book is thus partly dependent upon repetition, which figure also proves to be a strategy of (re)reading for Felman. Repetition is thus both a performative aspect and a thematic concern of the book. I argue that Felman's repetitions of texts being analyzed as well as the notion of female desire as a deconstructive force is similar to Luce Irigaray's concept of *mimicry* [*mimétisme*] delineated in *This Sex Which Is Not One* (1977), where the French feminist thinker is also trying the find answers to the question of sexual difference. And to argue that there is an intrinsic link between Felman's and Irigaray's mode of reading also implies that there might be a blind spot in Felman's feminist approach. To substantiate this claim, I will first briefly delineate Irigaray's critical endeavor, then proceed to read Felman's critique of it, to conclude with the return of mimicry in Felman's "Textuality and the Riddle of Bisexuality."

The Mimic Women

In one of her essays on the psychoanalytic theory of female sexuality Irigaray cites Freud's (in)famous metaphor of female sexuality as the 'dark continent' in excess of psychoanalytic knowledge (Irigaray *This* 48), and sets out to trace its vicissitudes in psychoanalytic theory:

> In the process of elaborating a theory of sexuality, Freud brought to light something that had been operative all along though it remained implicit, hidden, unknown: *the sexual indifference that underlies the truth of any science, the logic of every discourse*. This is readily apparent in the way Freud defines female sexuality. In fact, this sexuality is never defined with respect to any sex but the masculine. (Irigaray *This* 69)

Irigaray suggests here that Freud's formulations on sexuality are governed by certain presuppositions, the effects of which he is not fully aware. These underlying assumptions are most apparent in his theory of female sexuality, which he defines with a constant reference to male sexuality as a norm, as opposed to which female sexuality can be understood. The result of this structure is what Irigaray calls 'sexual *in*difference', which, by subordinating its object (female sexuality) to the principle of sameness, is not able to see it in its own right. Thus, although psychoanalysis is revolutionary in transforming Western philosophy, when it comes

to the question of sexual difference, psychoanalysis "remains submissive to that [patriarchal] order" (Irigaray *This* 70, Moi *Sexual* 129).

In Irigaray's view, the phallocentric nature of Freud's discourse on female sexuality is by no means exceptional, as a similar standpoint can be traced to be prompting "the truth of any science, the logic of every discourse." That is the reason why she decided to shift her attention to key philosophical texts in which she pursues the underlying assumptions that account for the psychoanalytic theory of female sexuality. For Irigaray, turning to philosophy provides a chance for a "critique of the foundations" of the narrative that governs the traditionally hierarchical relation between the sexes. She reads philosophy as the systematic "master discourse" that provides all other kinds of discourses with authority: "this discourse sets forth the law for all others, inasmuch as it constitutes a discourse on discourse." (Irigaray *This* 74) That is why, if she wants to call our attention to the arbitrary nature of the discourse of sexual difference, "it is indeed precisely philosophical discourse that we have to challenge, and *disrupt*" (Irigaray *This* 74). Irigaray claims that philosophical discourse has the "power to *reduce all others to the economy of the Same* […] to *eradicate the difference between the sexes* in systems that are self-representative of the 'masculine subject'." (Irigaray *This* 74) In the name of this sameness, all kinds of differences have to be reduced to enable the system to be articulated in a process that erases the Other. This logic of philosophy is far from being gender-neutral as it implicitly gives primacy to the masculine as a subject of discourse: it is only by a reference to masculinity that 'the other sex' can be posited.

In her texts, Irigaray challenges this 'logic of the Same' by submitting it to critical analysis, by reopening philosophical discourse through what has been excluded from it, through articulating the system with its Other that it tries to forget. It is through this kind of reading that the points where these key metaphysical texts are exposed to be in contradiction with themselves. Irigaray's readings thus set out "to interrogate *the conditions under which systematicity itself is possible*" (Irigaray *This* 74) showing what had to be excluded from discourse in order to make it seem systematic. There is a problem, however, of "how can we introduce ourselves into such a tightly-woven systematicity?" (Irigaray *This* 76) Thus, there is the question of introducing and recovering the feminine in(to) discourse that emerges precisely upon her silence. Judith Fetterley in *The Resisting Reader* seems to argue that "Such a closed system cannot be opened up from within but only from without." (Fetterley xx, quoted by Felman *Woman* 5) Irigaray is quite sure too that "a direct feminine challenge" leveled against philosophical discourse "means demanding to speak as a (masculine) 'subject,' that is, it means to postulate a relation to the intelligible that would maintain sexual

difference."[29] (Irigaray *This* 76) In other words, a direct challenge against philosophy cannot be satisfactory because it would repeat on the level of *utterance* the error that it wanted to expose.

That is the reason why she chooses to trace "the unconscious of philosophy," to analyze their unsaid presuppositions. These unvoiced assumptions that govern the psychoanalytical constructions of sexual difference "ensure its coherence so long as they remain uninterpreted." (Irigaray *This* 75) Thus, only through the exclusion of the feminine can philosophical discourse be systematic and coherent. As long as this position is not interpreted, it functions to provide discourse with coherence. Which is to say that the foundations of this system of patriarchal representations have to remain unaddressed in order that the system function properly. It seems that in this respect, *interpretation itself* is disruptive, pinpointing the silent grounds on which metaphysical discourse is predicated. What is at stake here is the re-reading of *interpretation* itself: Irigaray here offers a new way of interpretation which would be on the one hand, proper to its subject (feminine difference), on the other hand which would not re-inscribe itself to the framework it wanted to criticize (Irigaray *This* 78-80). This method of interpretation, which should be called a "strategy" or a "style," is *mimicry*.[30]

> There is, in an initial phase, perhaps only one "path," the one historically assigned to the feminine: that of *mimicry* [*mimétisme*]. One must assume the feminine role deliberately. Which means already to convert a form of subordination into an affirmation, and thus to begin to thwart it. […] To play with mimesis is thus, for a woman, to try to locate the place of her exploitation by discourse, without allowing herself to be simply reduced to it. It means to resubmit herself – inasmuch as she is on the side of the "perceptible," of "matter" – to "ideas," in particular to ideas about herself, that are elaborated in/by a masculine logic, but so as to make "visible," by an effect of playful repetition, what was supposed to remain invisible: recovering a possible operation of the feminine in language. It also means "to unveil" the fact that,

[29] According to Bart Moore-Gilbert, a similar doubt of direct challenge is found in the texts of Julia Kristeva and Gayatri Spivak: "those who oppose the dominant power on its own terms or in its own language are necessarily caught up in its logic and thus perpetuate it" (Moore-Gilbert 139). Homi K. Bhabha also puts a "similar emphasis on contiguity rather than direct opposition as the most effective political position to inhabit, and his stress on infiltration of the dominant symbolic orders and systems, rather than more traditional forms of rejection or reversal of the dominant." (Moore-Gilbert 139-140)

[30] "Mimicry (*mimétisme*) – An interim strategy for dealing with the realm of discourse (where the speaking subject is posited as masculine), in which the woman deliberately assumes the feminine style and posture assigned to her within this discourse in order to uncover mechanisms by which it exploits her." (Irigaray *This* 220) Irigaray's strategy seems to be similar to how Bhabha conceptualizes mimicry as a form of colonial policy, yet the way their notions ignore each other is quite symptomatic. In my view, "feminine" and "colonial mimicry" contain each other as their condition of possibility and as a self-subversive blind spot that threatens to disrupt their authority. I have written extensively about these issues in "Két mimikri között: A mimikri Luce Irigaray és Homi Bhabha szövegeiben."

> if women are such good mimics, it is because they are not simply resorbed in this function. *They also remain elsewhere* (Irigaray *This* 76)[31]

Though it always brings with itself the question of how to move beyond it, mimicry is a *conscious* assuming of the feminine role historically invented by the patriarchal system of representations to impose fixity on her, thus to subordinate her.[32] This deliberate assuming of the representations of the feminine ('ideas' about herself) in a process of repetition lays bare the mechanisms of oppression by which the feminine is defined as lack in metaphysics making them liable to critical interrogation. Mimicry doubles the feminine in discourse, which results in its displacement, since this repetition is "tactical and it aims at *producing* difference" (Braidotti 99, quoted by Whitford 71). The "critical difference" that this doubling/interpretation of the feminine produces questions the authority of the mechanisms of representation that provide metaphysical discourse with its power. Thus, to read through mimicry is to repeat/interpret "the way in which, within discourse, the feminine finds itself defined as lack, deficiency, or as imitation and negative image of the subject," and to reveal in this process that "with respect to this logic a *disruptive excess* is possible on the feminine side." (Irigaray *This* 78)

However, what seems perplexing for readers of Irigaray is the status of mimicry as a strategy of reinscribing *or* displacing texts of philosophy.[33] This ambivalence concerning mimicry can be compared to the psychoanalytic notion of repetition, which is itself double: as the repetition of identity, as a way of gaining symbolic mastery over loss *and* repetition as difference, as compulsion, closely allied to the notion of the uncanny.[34] However, what distinguishes Irigarayan mimicry from "mere repetition" (the ambivalence of which it shares) is its inevitable gendered aspect: she appropriates mimicry as a specifically feminine strategy. Due to "the citational, often ironic status of the repetition" (Suleiman 165), mimicry inevitably constructs a reading that always solicits another interpretation, leading to an endless chain of repetitions. Much like irony, which, instead of "closing off the tropological system, […] enforces the repetition of its aberration." (de Man *Allegories* 301)

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[31] Translation slightly modified, following Margaret Whitford's translation of this passage. (Whitford 71)

[32] "As Irigaray suggests, mimicry may be only an 'initial phase,' a first strategy adopted traditionally by the oppressed. This raises the question of how one might go beyond mimicry, to other possible strategies not based on an ironic relation to a preexisting situation." (Suleiman 165, footnote 25)

[33] For example, Susan Stanford Friedman argues that "Irigarayan parody, however disruptive, does not displace the hegemonies it cracks open because the text's mimicry requires the (re)activation of the cultural narratives it would expose" (Friedman 30-31)

[34] For an extended account of 'the primal scene' of the repetition compulsion, see the *fort/da* game in chapter 2 of Freud's "Beyond the Pleasure Principle" (and its various re-readings that are too many to name). Irigaray's reading of that scene ("The Gesture in Psychoanalysis") seems fully aware of its gendered nature (Brennan, ed. 16).

Felman in "Madness and Philosophy, or, Literature's Reason" argues that the discourse of Reason and philosophy was predicated on the exclusion of madness (Felman *Madness* 39), while literature constitutes an imaginary space where this missing voice can be recovered (Felman *Madness* 51). If "Madness and Philosophy" approached this exclusion from a general philosophical perspective, "Women and Madness: The Critical Phallacy" can be regarded as its feminist supplement, focusing on how women, as "irrational," "emotional" beings, were associated with the notion of madness too in patriarchal discourse and society. The parallel history of these essays is quite revealing in itself: both essays are from 1975; "Madness and Philosophy" originally appeared in *Yale French Studies*, and was later included in *Writing and Madness* as "Foucault/Derrida: The Madness of the Thinking/Speaking Subject"; "Women and Madness" was published in *Diacritics* and it was included in French in *La folie et la chose littéraire* but it was missing from the book's English translation of *Writing and Madness*. While the general philosophical perspective on madness was preserved, the feminist approach disappeared, repeating an exclusion that Felman herself talks about in the essays. "Women and Madness" appeared again only later, in *What does a Woman Want?*

Pursuing this connection between women and madness, Felman reviews Irigaray's *Speculum de l'autre femme* (1974) together with Phyllis Chesler's *Women and Madness* (1973), two feminist texts approaching this topic in an incompatible, yet complementary way (Felman *Woman* 24). While Chesler relies on the "subjective testimony of women"[35] (Felman *Woman* 21), inspired by Derrida's deconstructive critique, Irigaray interrogates "the key theoretical writings of men – fundamental texts in philosophy and in psychoanalysis—which, in one way or another, involve the concept of femininity." (Felman *Woman* 22) Felman argues that there are certain pressing ambivalences in Irigaray's approach which involves the position her texts are written from:

> A question could be raised: if "the woman" is precisely the other of any conceivable Western theoretical locus of speech, how can the woman as such be speaking in this book? Who is speaking here, and who is asserting the otherness of the woman? If, as Luce Irigaray suggests, the woman's silence, or the repression of her capacity to speak, are constitutive of philosophy and of theoretical discourse as such, from what

[35] "Supported by extensive documentation, Phyllis Chesler proposes a confrontation between objective data and the subjective testimony of women: laced with the voices of women speaking in the first person-literary excerpts from the novels and autobiographies of woman writers, and word-for-word interviews with female psychiatric patients-the book derives and disputes a »female psychology« conditioned by an oppressive and patriarchal male culture." (Felman *Woman* 21)

> theoretical locus is Luce Irigaray herself speaking in order to develop her own theoretical discourse about the woman's exclusion? (Felman *Woman* 24)

In Felman's view, Irigaray's venture runs the risk of repeating "the oppressive gesture of *representation*, by means of which, throughout the history of logos, man has reduced the woman to the status of a silent and subordinate object, to something inherently *spoken for*" (Felman *Woman* 24), and from this perspective she can show the blind spots of her critical undertaking. Chesler's book "*gives voice* to the woman" directly (Felman *Woman* 25), but in Irigaray's case, it is not clear whether

> statement and utterance […] coincide so as to establish actual feminine difference, not only on the thematic, but also on the rhetorical level: although the otherness of the woman is here fully assumed as the subject of the statement, it is not certain whether that otherness can be taken for granted as positively occupying the unthought-out, problematical locus *from which* the statement is being *uttered*. (Felman *Woman* 25)

Just like she showed how Freud's statement and utterance about femininity failed to coincide, Felman demonstrates that similar ambivalences are at work in Irigaray's text as well, implying that such aporias might surface even when the author-philosopher is not male.

Anticipating similar critiques, in the introduction to *What Does a Woman Want?* Felman addresses in detail her theoretical position of speech: "I am not proposing to speak in the name of women: the »we« is a rhetorical structure of address, not a claim for epistemological authority. I am speaking not *for* women, but *to* women" (Felman *Woman* 14) assuming a personal bond, an apostrophical structure of address in which reading may take place. Felman is here implicitly also talking about the political investment in two rhetorical figures, *prosopopeia* and *apostrophe*. While prosopopeia, the "fiction of an apostrophe to an absent, deceased, or voiceless entity, which posits the possibility of the latter's reply, and confers upon it the power of speech" (de Man *Rhetoric* 75-76) is posited as inevitably bound to the structures of representation condemned above, apostrophe, a trope giving (figural) life, animation and presence to something dead, inanimate, or not present (Johnson *World* 185), seems like the only politically correct method for Felman to pursue "the enigmatic truth of sexual difference" (Felman *Woman* 2). Just like how Cathy Caruth regards Jill Robbins's texts, in Felman's book "the other is not spoken about […] but addressed" (Caruth "Insistence" 7).

In Felman's view, as for Irigaray, the driving question of *What Does a Woman Want?* "can be truly opened up and radically displaced […] by being repossessed, reclaimed by women" (Felman *Woman* 3), and this process is carried out partly through repetition. This repetition becomes immediately apparent in the introductory part of Felman's "Textuality and the Riddle of Bisexuality," where she analyzes some crucial lines from Sigmund Freud's infamous lecture on "Femininity":

> Throughout history people have knocked their heads against the riddle of the nature of femininity— […] Nor will *you* have escaped worrying over this problem—those of you who are men; to those of you who are women this will not apply—you are yourselves the problem. (Freud "Femininity" 146, quoted by Felman *Woman* 41)

By simply reading out Freud's lines as a woman, the text provoked laughter in the lecture room where Felman's paper was first delivered. Yet this displacing repetition and the ensuing laughter had deeper implications as it uncovered an "inherent textual discrepancy between Freud's *statement*, opening up the question *of* the Woman, and his *utterance*, closing it for women, excluding women from the question" (Felman *Woman* 43). Through the interposition of a female reader the inherent rhetorical discrepancies of Freud's text could be highlighted.

Felman insists that similar ambiguities can always be found in literary and philosophical texts inasmuch as they are all made up of language and rhetoric, which gives the specificity of what she calls "*la chose littéraire*". She argues that such aporias

> can be amplified, made patent, by the desire—and by the rhetorical interposition—of a woman reader. It is this double practical process of amplification and rhetorical interposition—and its incalculable theoretical and emotional effects—which I would like here to propose. (Felman *Woman* 6)

Felman thus visualizes the female reader and female desire as a deconstructive force which helps revealing the internal ambiguities and incongruities that reside within a (male) text, be it a literary or philosophical one. "Women and Madness: The Critical Phallacy" thus aims to highlight the incongruities that reside within Irigaray's approach (the incompatibility between what her text says and what her text does). Yet immediately after this critique, "Textuality and the Riddle of Bisexuality" goes on to employ the same strategy that Irigaray was using when Felman is citing, repeating and displacing Freud's words about femininity. She points out the blind spots involved in Irigaray's method, yet rhetorically acts out the same kind of *mimicry*

(she calls it "amplification and rhetorical interposition") that the French feminist critic argued for in her search for female difference in the founding texts of patriarchy. What Felman's text says and what it does seem to be at odds with each other in this respect. It seems that even though "To Open the Question" argued that there is "one crucial feature which is constitutive of literature but is essentially lacking in […] theory as such: irony" (Felman *Question* 8), irony (as repetition, mimicry and "rhetorical interposition") might become a very powerful rhetorical tool for theory and critique, suggesting a significant link between de Man's rhetorically oriented deconstructive criticism and Felman's feminist practice. But this link can never be stable, making the conversation between feminism and deconstruction potentially unstable and endless. Read through Felman's *What Does a Woman Want?* repetition, irony and apostrophe over prosopopeia become the master tropes of a reading practice employing such a double perspective.

The Navel of Theory

It must be noted, though, that such a claim that Felman is proposing in her introduction to *What Does a Woman Want?* runs the risk of appropriating the radically contingent effects of rhetoric in any given text in the name of "female desire," which resembles her "feminine appropriation of the figure of the navel" (Felman "Postal" 70), a theoretical move that de Man has deconstructed in his answer to her text.[36] In "Postal Survival, or the Question of the Navel," Felman reads Freud's inaugural "Irma-dream" in *The Interpretation of Dreams* as "a dream about a knot of female pain recalcitrant to, and in excess of, Freud's discourse (Freud's interpretation); a dream about a knot of irreducibly resistant women; a dream about a knot of feminine complaints." (Felman "Postal" 66) This dream is also important for Felman because it is here in a footnote that Freud introduces the figure of the navel into the theory of dreams:

> I had a feeling that the interpretation of this part of the dream was not carried far enough to make it possible to follow the whole of its concealed meaning. If I had pursued my comparison between the three women, it would have taken me far afield.—There is at least one spot in every dream at which it is unplumbable

[36] Felman's appropriation of the ambivalences and aporias of rhetoric appears very resonant with Jacques Derrida's representation of the "woman" as a deconstructive force in *Éperons*. Derrida has often been criticized by feminist critics for appropriating the concept of "woman" for his own deconstructive project (Kalmár „A női test" 233). From a deconstructive point of view, Felman's gesture appears as problematic as Derrida's from a feminist perspective.

> [*unergründlich*]—a navel, as it were, that is its point of contact with the unknown.[37] (Freud *Interpretation* 186, footnote 2)

Dreams thus have a point where they are linked with the unknown, the unreadable, where interpretation falters: "The »navel« is, in other words, Freud's discovery-through the Irma dream-that in every theory, interpretation or conscious meaning there is a disconnection" (Felman "Postal" 67). In this account, the "blind metaphor" of the navel refers to a point of fissure, a gap in interpretation; still, by introducing such a point, Freud can propose a coherent reading of the dream.[38] While pursuing the "comparison between the three women" that would have taken Freud "far afield," Felman asks

> Why, indeed, does Freud choose to call "navel" the dream's relationship to the unknown? The navel marks the place where the umbilical cord which connects the infant to the mother has been cut (during delivery); it marks, in other words, at once the disconnection and the connection between a maternal body giving birth and a newborn child. The navel of the dream embodies thus, the way in which the dream is, all at once, tied up with the unknown and disconnected from its knowledge, disconnected from the knowledge of its own begetting. (Felman "Postal" 63)

Elizabeth Bronfen interprets the figure in similar maternal terms: the metaphor of the navel "sounds reassuring because it refers to the most primordial mark on the body, one that carries a sense of continuity, generation and origin and recalls the site of connection to one's maternal origins" (Bronfen *Knotted* 81). But the navel, as she puts it, is also an "analeptic index of a bodily wound" (Bronfen *Knotted* 4) signifying vulnerability and mortality (Botting 8, Bronfen *Knotted* 20, Földényi 96, 97). In a broader philosophical perspective, the navel can

[37] What was translated as 'unplumbable' by Strachey (or 'unfathomable' elsewhere) is in the German original '*unergründlich*,' meaning in English 'unfathomable,' 'bottomless,' 'inscrutable' and 'impenetrable' (*Cassell's German–English, English–German Dictionary*. London: Cassell Ltd, 1986. 640), and, taking into account the meaning of the word '*gründen*,' 'without a proper foundation.'

[38] Freud later also argues that "There is often a passage [*Stelle*, that is, 'place'] in even the most thoroughly interpreted dream which has to be left obscure [*im Dunkel*, that is, 'in the dark']; this is because we become aware during the work of interpretation that at this point there is a tangle of dream-thoughts which cannot be unravelled and which moreover adds nothing to our knowledge of the content of the dream. This is the dream's navel, the spot where it reaches down [*aufsitzt*, that is, 'straddles'] into the unknown. The dream-thoughts to which we are led by interpretation cannot, from the nature of things, have any definite endings; they are bound to branch out in every direction into the intricate network of our world of thought. It is at some point where this meshwork is particularly close that the dream-wish grows up, like a mushroom out of its mycelium." (Freud *Interpretation* 671-672) For According to Lacan, "Freud uses the term navel to designate the point at which the sense of a dream appears to culminate in a hole, a knot, beyond which it is to the core of being that the dream appears to be attached." (Lacan *Seminar III* 259-260) Freud's description of the dream-wish growing up from the meshwork resonates with Lacan's formulation of metaphor: "metaphor occurs at the precise point at which sense emerges from non-sense" (Lacan *Ecrits* 175), making the navel a metaphor of metaphor.

also be read as the symbol of the centre, proportion and harmony (Bronfen *Knotted* 3, Földényi 87), but the figure does not only connote a central point, but a wound, a site of loss, separation as well: the Sanskrit *nabhi* from which the Greek *omphalos* or the English *navel* is derived from means at once a central point, origin, home and rupture, disruption, fissure. (Földényi 94, 106, 114). Following associations evoked by the Greek word *omphalos*, László Földényi links the navel with a symbolic matrix which includes the center of the earth which is referred to as a cave, a *stoma*: this Greek word is used interchangeably to mean a mouth, or a navel, or vagina, even. (Földényi 105) The reassuring nature of the navel can thus soon turn uncanny: removed from its logocentric self-sameness and centrality, "the navel," as Fred Botting argues, "opens, literally and figurally, on to questions of difference." (Botting 3)

The navel is a central point, which is at once a point of resistance to understanding: it both provokes and defies interpretation, and "the entire dream interpretation revolves around this moment of failure" (Bronfen *Knotted* 77). For Freud, the navel is what stops the potentially endless chain of interpretations, yet for Felman, it is precisely what opens up possibilities for a critique: in her reading, the navel of the specimen dream is intimately linked to feminine difference, it "points not to the identifiability of any given feminine identity, but to the inexhaustibility, the unaccountability of female difference" (Felman "Postal" 64) within the discourse of psychoanalysis. De Man's analysis of such a theoretical position (which takes place in a special bond of reading) is very much to the point:

> My only question arises, if I dare say, at the level of the navel. What should we do with the manifest bisexuality of that mark, which separates as much as it unites, and which escapes the difference between the genders? The navel is a knot that's cut, and as such, more philosophical than analytical. (quoted by Felman "Postal" 68)

Such a deconstruction of her critical project brings Felman to an exemplary moment of self-reflection:

> My reading of Freud, in equating the figure of the navel with the female knot and through it, with the feminine stance in Freud's text, used that figure to introduce, rhetorically, a self-subversive (sexual) difference into Freud's own discourse. In displacing my rhetorical equation *navel = female (knot),* in pointing out-imaginatively, creatively-as the blind spot of my vision of the navel, the bisexuality of that same figure, de Man, at the sweep of a surprise, deconstructs the thrust of my whole discourse, in repeating my rhetorical procedure with respect to Freud but in turning

> that twist back upon myself-in introducing, thus, rhetorically, a self-subversive (sexual) difference into my own text, into my own reading of Freud's difference and self-difference. (Felman “Postal” 69-70)

De Man thus reads Felman’s feminine appropriation of the “androgynous” (Migiel 31) navel “by pointing out some residue to meaning” in her text “which subverts and undercuts our illusion of coherence, of appropriation” (Felman “Postal” 70). I believe that appropriating for the feminine the ambivalences and aporias found in all texts by rhetorical readings might open up a possibility of subverting Felman’s text in a similar way that was demonstrated in “Postal Survival.” As Marilyn Migiel puts it in her reading of “Postal Survival,” “the operations of language (and by extension, of the text) can always reveal themselves indifferent to desire” (Migiel 38), or in de Man’s words, “independently of any intent or any drive or any way or any desire we might have” (de Man *Resistance* 96). Thus it happens regardless of “the desire of […] a woman reader” (Felman *Woman* 6) constructed by Felman’s *What Does a Woman Want?* Though nor the navel, nor the contingencies of language can unproblematically be appropriated solely for the feminine, we find a similar insistence of connecting the aporias of rhetoric to the operation of the feminine within language in Johnson’s texts, which I will analyze at length in the next part of this chapter.

"THE SPACE IN BETWEEN": BARBARA JOHNSON'S DISLOCATIONS OF FEMINISM AND DECONSTRUCTION

> "A thinking of politics can thus only address its reality when it begins not with the smooth transition from knowing to doing, but with an attempt to understand the notion of responsibility as emerging precisely in the ineradicable conflict between them." (Cathy Caruth, *Critical Encounters*)

With the publication of *Défigurations du langage poétique* (1979), *The Critical Difference* (1980) and her translation of Jacques Derrida's *Dissemination* (1981), Barbara Johnson emerged as one of the most eminent deconstructive critics. Most readers remember this volume by the closing article in which Johnson analyzes the debate between Jacques Lacan and Jacques Derrida about Edgar Allan Poe's "The Purloined Letter." To claim that the volume was an example of "purely" deconstructive criticism would not however do justice to the amazing complexity of the book. The essay, for example, that lent its title to the volume, "The Critical Difference: BartheS/BalZac" reads Honore de Balzac's *Sarrasine* as "a subversive and unsettling formulation of the question of sexual difference" (Johnson *Critical* 5). "Allegory's Trip-Tease: *The White Waterlily*" also sets out "to analyze and question the very nature of the relations between literature and sexuality" (Johnson *Critical* 14). In "Melville's Fist: The Execution of *Billy Budd*," we see a superb example of a deconstructive reading which deals with questions of ethics, law, and judgment. All these examples suggest that from the very start, Johnson's critical approach contained different discourses which were explored later on too in various essays and books, including her most recent, and, sadly, last volumes *Persons and Things* (2008) and *Moses and Multiculturalism* (2010). Singling out only one problem from Johnson's complex and nuanced approach to literary, philosophical or critical texts might be as dangerous as it is revealing: in this chapter of the dissertation I will analyze the relationship between feminism and deconstruction in Johnson's oeuvre.

Such an analysis should start with examining the explicitly stated aim of Johnson's second volume of essays, *A World of Difference* (1987) was "to transfer the analysis of difference […] out of the realm of linguistic universality or deconstructive allegory and into contexts in which difference is very much at issue in the 'real world'" (Johnson *World* 2). One of the most important contexts in which Johnson scrutinized this kind of difference was feminism and gender studies, to which she later devoted a whole volume, *The Feminist Difference* (1998). However, Jane Marie Todd concludes her sensitive review of *A World of*

Difference by pointing out a crucial problem inherent in Johnson's book: "there is a drive to bring feminism around to deconstruction, or to tinker with deconstruction in order to make it more politically acceptable, without a real recognition of the very different stakes of the two critical traditions and the enormous difficulties involved in any confrontation between them." (Todd 284) These concerns are prompted by Todd's doubts whether fetishistic notions of deconstruction, like unreadability, undecidability or "self-difference" can provide a solid ground for the advent of an "authentic voice" presupposed by feminist politics and intervention.[39] Agreeing with Todd, Chris Weedon also claims that

> much deconstructive analysis, especially in American literary criticism, fails to attend to questions of social context, particular interest and power. […] Deconstructionist approaches to textual analysis which share a disregard for the wider historically specific discursive context of reading and writing and the power relations which structure the literary field itself do not meet feminist needs. (Weedon 165)

For both critics the most important difference between feminism and deconstruction is their irreconcilable approach to the question of politics. To rephrase Todd's doubts about *A World of Difference* and formulate it as a question: can deconstruction with its focus on language, textuality and rhetoric be transformed to adopt a political standpoint necessary for feminist critique? Can *A World of Difference* live up to its promises, given Johnson's deconstructive affiliations?

In her "Gender Theory and The Yale School", even Johnson claims that the Yale school "has always been a Male School" (Johnson *World* 32), and ponders upon the relationship between feminist issues and deconstruction. In this sense, Todd's criticism of deconstruction as unresponsive to questions of gender and sexual difference is justified. Instead of accusing "the male Yale School theorists of having avoided the issue of gender entirely," Johnson in her study chooses "to demonstrate that they have had quite a lot to say about the issue, often without knowing it" (Johnson *World* 33), arguing that the issue of gender was a blind spot in their writings. It is enough to think about the infamous Archie Bunker example Paul de Man used to point out the ambiguities involved in (rhetorical) questions (de Man *Allegories* 9-10). But Johnson confesses her own guilt of having elided the question of gender in her earlier writings: "no book produced by the Yale School seems to

[39] Diane Elam, the author of *Feminsm and Deconstruction: Ms. En Abyme*, also notes that "Initially, the two seem to have little in common. Feminism seems to be a political project, whereas deconstruction appears more philosophical or literary. By this account, their mutual interests do not converge." (Elam 1, cf. Elam 67) Nevertheless she argues in her book that "feminism and deconstruction are beside one another in that they share a parallel *divergence* from (or dislocation of) politics and philosophy." (Elam 1)

have excluded women as effectively as *The Critical Difference*. […] In a book that announces itself as a study of difference, the place of the woman is constantly being erased" (Johnson *World* 39). While I do not agree with this view, I think this erasure of woman she is referring to, in her readings of Mallarmé and Apollinaire at least, might be due to the ambiguities caused by the inherently rhetorical nature of language. Deconstructive readings focusing on the rhetorical behavior of texts do have an unconscious tendency to overlook issues of gender.

Politics, Figurality and Reference in Deconstructive Criticism

In "Apostrophe, Animation and Abortion" Johnson notes that "the political dimensions of the scholarly study of rhetoric have gone largely unexplored by literary critics. What, indeed, could seem more dry and apolitical than a rhetorical treatise?" (Johnson *World* 184) In other words, the various kinds of linguistic ambivalences uncovered by rhetorical analyses do not seem to have much to do with political questions and problems, or, in turn, issues of gender or sexual difference (they are "quietistic," "apolitical," "neutral").[40] In spite of these observations, however, Johnson argues that "the study of rhetoric has everything to do with human politics" *(*Johnson *World* 6). In her view, it is precisely the undecidabilities in texts that enable politics to come into existence in the first place: "It is often said, in literary theoretical circles, that to focus on undecidability is to be apolitical. […] [I] suspect that, on the contrary, the undecidable *is* the political. There is politics precisely because there is undecidability" (Johnson *World* 193-194). As opposed to this theoretical stance that we can call deconstructive, feminist critics Biddy Martin, Chandra Talpade Mohanty, Leslie Wahl Rabine, or Mary Poovey all contend that the deconstructive notion of undecidability and indeterminacy in general entail an empoverishment of agency necessitated by feminist intervention (Warhol and Herndl, eds. 295, Rabine 26, Poovey 61, cf. Elam 82-83). Still, for Johnson, the very existence of the political flows from the undecidable itself, which, in this interpretation, does not hinder, but rather allows politics to come into existence. Johnson here seems to agree with Jacques Derrida that "deconstructive practices are also and first of all political and institutional practices." (Derrida "Beyond" 168, cf. Montrose 16) Still, the

[40] I think Johnson is acutely aware of the problems these critics pointed out, and she addresses this crucial dilemma several times in her career. For example in *The Wake of Deconstruction* (1994) she warns of the double-bind in which deconstruction is caught: "Whereas critics in the public media are attacking deconstruction for its subversive politics, politically radical critics of deconstruction within the academy have long attacked it for its quietistic, apolitical neutrality, its privileging of analysis over action. Because deconstruction involves the analysis of texts or situations to the point of 'aporia' or 'undecidability,' the argument goes, it paralyzes, or at least cannot authorize, action." (Johnson *Wake* 28) From this perspective, then, deconstruction is condemned both because of its "subversive politics" and for its "quietistic, apolitical neutrality."

question remains: how can politics be posited on undecidability, which is regularly understood as making it impossible? How can the possibility of politics flow from its impossibility? Can the discrepancy between feminism and deconstruction be reconciled by this claim? I think that such a "paradoxical alliance" between undecidability and politics, deconstruction and feminism does come into existence through Johnson's special way of reading. To see the stakes inherent in these questions, we must briefly return to de Man's theories of rhetoric as it is his model of rhetorical reading that Johnson is using and displacing in her writings; then we must examine closely the most important ethical/legal/literary figure in Johnson's text, *abortion*; and point out the ways this figure might help us to rethink the relationship between feminism and deconstruction.

A passage in *Allegories of Reading* connects to this problem of literature and politics:

> Far from being a repression of the political, […] literature is condemned to being the truly political mode of discourse. The relationship of this discourse to political praxis […] [can be described] in terms of the relationship, within the rhetorical model, between the *referential* and the *figural* semantic fields (de Man *Allegories* 157, emphasis added).

Thus, similarly to what Johnson says, in de Man's view, literature, deconstruction and politics do not simply exclude each other, their relationship is much more complex. I think it is a mistake to say that de Man's texts are only attentive to the figural dimensions of language, and they neglect referentiality as such, as he points out that through their rhetorical structure, texts both promise and deny reference at the same time. As Vincent B. Leitch argues, "language vacillated uncontrollably between the promise of referential meaning and the rhetorical subversion of that promise. […] De Man never renounced referentiality; he problematized it, undermined it, exploded it—yet preserved it, as did other deconstructors." (Leitch 285) De Man also notes that "Political and autobiographical texts have in common that they share a referential reading-moment explicitly built within the spectrum of their significations, no matter how deluded this moment may be in its mode as well as in its thematic content." (de Man *Allegories* 278, cf. Felman and Laub 143) I argue that Johnson explicates such moments within the political, while Felman explores mostly the autobiographical aspects of this insight, struggling with the "horns of the bull" de Man borrowed from Michel Leiris.[41]

[41] Felman in *Testimony* explicates the meaning of this reference in de Man's text as a threefold structure: "1. the inescapable materiality of one's past; 2. the irreducible reality of the confrontation, through the writing, with a

If we would like to follow de Man in determining a possible relationship between deconstruction and politics, we must first clarify the relationship between referentiality and figurativity within his thinking. Language in de Man's view is inherently figurative, rhetorical, which is at odds with the texts' claims to refer to an "outside world" beyond them. Direct political action and intervention requires precisely this kind of reference, whereas deconstruction, with its problematization of reference and figurality (through the question of rhetoric) seems to exclude straightforward politics. As Werner Hamacher claims, "the referential intention of a text can be denied by the indication of the possibility of its merely figurative status." (Hamacher "Lectio" 173) In this sense, if political praxis has to be connected with transparent, referential language, it fails to be "political enough" because of the inescapably figurative language it has to use to formulate its claims. In a rhetorical reading, the language of politics becomes opaque, its authority is subverted by the very means which was used to posit it. In order to be effective, political praxis has to forget about its necessary figural status.

The most important problem here is de Man's arguing that "the convergence of the referential and the figural signification can never be established" (de Man *Allegories* 208), which suggests that politics and rhetorical inquiry, feminism and deconstruction may never simply converge. Yet there seems to be a need for such a convergence, as texts often try to reconcile these two dimensions: de Man says that the "attraction of reconciliation," in this case, of figurality and referentiality, "is the elective breeding-ground of false models and metaphors" (de Man *Allegories* 5), which he elsewhere calls ideologies (de Man *Resistance* 11).

In the introductory chapter ("The Insistence of Reference") to *Critical Encounters: Reference and Responsibility in Deconstructive Writing*, Cathy Caruth also addresses the problems of reference, history, ethics and responsibility. For many readers, deconstructive criticism seemed "to involve a dangerous denial of any link between texts and reality: that reference is indirect seems to mean that we have no reliable access to experience or to history and hence no basis for political action and ethical decision." (Caruth "Insistence" 1) Such denouncing claims are most often found in the texts of whom Robert Eaglestone calls the late heirs to the "modernist paradigm of criticism" (Eaglestone 10), or even "anti-theoretical critics and philosophers" (Eaglestone 20).[42] In Eaglestone's view, these "anti-theorists" seem

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real danger deriving from a real event; 3. the political and ethical effects of writing as itself an act, an act that provokes change and that thus itself has material consequences" (Felman and Laub 143-144)

[42] These critics, who, "unlike the wide range of theorists they amalgamate and oppose," in Eaglestone's opinion, "form a relatively coherent group because they share the same paradigmatic view of the method and function of

to defend “a humanist modernist critical paradigm” (Eaglestone 10) against the alleged moral decay of “theory” understood as “a combination of structuralism, deconstruction, psychoanalysis, philosophy, poetics, and cultural materialism.” (Johnson *Wake* 79, cf. Eaglestone 20) Eaglestone’s analysis of the critical scene in the 1990s seems to evoke what de Man in the 1980s identified as “the resistance to literary theory” (de Man *Resistance* 5). De Man imagined “theory” on the basis of

> the introduction of linguistic terminology in the metalanguage about literature. By linguistic terminology is meant a terminology that designates reference prior to designating the referent and takes into account, in the consideration of the world, the referential function of language or, to be somewhat more specific, that considers reference as a function of language and not necessarily as an intuition. Intuition implies perception, consciousness, experience, and leads at once into the world of logic and of understanding with all its correlatives, among which aesthetics occupies a prominent place. (de Man *Resistance* 8)

Following this quote, “theory” and “anti-theory” could be juxtaposed on the basis of how they conceive of the referential function of language: while theory examines the reference in terms of a linguistic terminology, anti-theory resist such a terminology in favor of an intuitive model. However, as de Man aphoristically warns us a few pages later, “The resistance to theory is a resistance to the use of language about language. It is therefore a resistance to language itself or to the possibility that language contains factors or functions that cannot be reduced to intuition” (de Man *Resistance* 12-13), which he earlier connected with perception, consciousness, experience, logic and understanding. Such a view prompts Caruth to claim that “deconstruction does not deny reference, but denies that reference can be modeled on the laws of perception or of understanding.” (Caruth “Insistence” 2) This latter presupposition seems to be the common denominator between certain critiques of deconstruction, anti-theorist, or feminist alike: “the assumption that experience is constituted in large part by self-awareness and thus by meaningful perception, that history is available primarily as the completed knowledge of a past, that political and ethical decisions can and do arise only from a position of understanding and self-understanding.” (Caruth “Insistence” 1) Instead of surrendering to such presuppositions, Caruth ponders

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criticism” (Eaglestone 20), include Howard Felperin, Eugene Goodheart, Tobin Siebers, Michael Fisher, David Kaufmann, Patrick Parrinder, or Patrick Grant, etc. (Eaglestone 32-33).

> What would it mean, on the contrary, to conceive of an experience that is constituted by the very way it escapes or resists comprehension? How might one have access to a history that is constituted by its continually delayed entrance into experience? In what ways could we define a politics or ethics that derives from a position in which full understanding is not possible? Taking as their starting point the attempt to rethink fundamental questions of reality and of reference, the essays in this volume ask how we might learn to recognize and to respond to the realities of a history, a politics, and an ethics not based on straightforward understanding. (Caruth "Insistence" 1)

In other words, the intuitive model of understanding, reference, experience, history, politics or ethics offered by the modernist paradigm of criticism (Eaglestone's "anti-theorists"), or feminist critics who think that agency disappears with undecidability, can only grasp something as positive knowledge if it is available to consciousness, which precludes, for example, traumatic experience to be recognized as such. By prioritizing moments that "resist or disrupt patterns of totalizable meaning" (Caruth "Insistence" 4), Caruth argues that

> it may indeed be in those moments that are least assimilable to understanding that a referential dimension can be said to emerge. The analyses by which deconstruction comes to distinguish reference from perceptual or cognitive models thus do not eliminate reference, but rather examine how to recognize it where it does not occur *as knowledge*. It is indeed in this surprising realignment of reference with what is *not fully masterable by cognition* that the impact of deconstructive writing can be said precisely to take place. (Caruth "Insistence" 3)

Caruth is convinced that by "breaking the tie between *reading* and *certainty*," deconstructive readings "permit reference to arise where understanding may not." (Caruth "Insistence" 5)

Politics and Rhetoric

In the light of these statements, how are we to judge Johnson's intention of "reconciling" rhetoric and politics, deconstruction and feminism? Does it (falsely) promise

the convergence of figural and referential signification, which according to de Man cannot be established? Is this promise only a metaphor, a "false model," an "aberration" even, or a way through which Johnson can voice certain suggestions left unexplored in de Man's writing? (cf. Sári 64) Johnson states that the essays collected in *A World of Difference* attempt "to transfer the analysis of difference […] out of the realm of linguistic universality or deconstructive allegory and into contexts in which difference is very much at issue in the 'real world'" (Johnson *World* 2). She also warns that "It would be falsely progressivist, however, to see in these essays an itinerary that could be labeled 'From Deconstruction to Feminism' […] The book as a whole moves back and forth among positions that remain skeptical of each other" (Johnson *World* 4). It would thus be a mistake to think about *A World of Difference* as a text where deconstruction is wholly left behind for the sake of feminist inquiry: the author's texts show that the (falsely reductive) opposition between deconstruction and feminism can be realigned in the process of reading literature, which entails not only an inquiry into rhetoric, but an engagement with politics as well. As Johnson argues in *The Feminist Difference*, "literature is important for feminism," as well as for deconstruction, "because literature can best be understood as the place where impasses can be kept and opened for examination, where questions can be guarded and not forced into a premature validation of the available paradigms" (Johnson *Feminist* 13).

In an interview, Johnson explains how this transfer from linguistic structures to the real world might take place:

> certain political problems are based on rhetorical structures or are thoroughly shaped and overdetermined by rhetorical structures. In the case of the essay I wrote, 'Apostrophe, Animation, and Abortion,' it seemed as if apostrophe and the attendant personification were inseparable from the way in which 'person' was discussed in legal texts and the way in which the investment in the unborn was structured like apostrophe. (Johnson *Wake* 81-82)

This "turning to the real world," then, proves not that straightforward: in the essay referred to in the passage above, "Apostrophe, Animation and Abortion," Johnson is trying to illuminate problems in the real world (the political and legal problem of abortion) with rhetorical issues (apostrophe), and vice versa, showing that, as Harold Schweizer claims, "aesthetic and textual concerns are then perhaps in surprising ways applicable to the political situation" (Johnson *Wake* 82). For Johnson, then, politics, examined through the very real question of abortion,

"begins not with the smooth transition from knowing to doing, but with an attempt to understand the notion of responsibility as emerging precisely in the ineradicable conflict between them." (Caruth "Insistence" 6)

There is a certain parallel between what Johnson is trying to do with more practical criticism and what Diane Elam argues in her theoretical treatise about the relationship of feminism and deconstruction. Elam's theoretical inquiry offers an ethical solution to the impasse generated by the debate of the theoreticians of the two fields, after all, both feminism and deconstruction is about uncovering a repressed voice from texts (Elam 87). In Johnson's "Apostrophe, Animation and Abortion," abortion as a subject, or a figure, the meaning of which is negotiated between the discourses of law and literature, appears to promise of establishing what de Man called "the convergence of referential and figural signification," politics and rhetoric, and at the same time, with which she can rethink the reductive view of the relationship between feminism and deconstruction.

Law, Literature and the Aporia of Abortion

Barbara Brook emphatically calls our attention to the fact that "pregnancy is one of the areas where the modern state seems to have very little problem in deciding the personal is political, not in the way feminism required, but by erasing women's pregnant bodies and focusing on the foetus" (Brook 95). In other words, the neat boundaries between the private (to which women were traditionally referred) and the public seem to break down by reference to the figure of the pregnant body. This confusion of boundaries does not however mean for women an advent of voice, quite the opposite: the personal (the experience of pregnancy) becomes political only through erasing the agency of women. The female body is appropriated by power and becomes a public "instrument," no longer fully available to women's choice (either of abortion or of giving birth).

In Elisabeth Porter's view, "One of the most vexing issues in ethics is that of abortion" (Porter *Feminist* 134). She suggests that the "impasse that occurs when we discuss the 'rights' of a woman to choose whether or not to terminate the pregnancy and the 'rights' of the foetus to life appear insurmountable" (Porter *Feminist* 135). It is this ethical aporia that law and literature must address. Between law and literature the meaning of abortion still continues to elude us: "Competing rights are opposed, causing an irresolvable moral-legal dilemma" (Porter *Feminist* 139). Adrienne Rich claims that "The child that I carry for nine months can be defined *neither* as me nor as not-me" (quoted by MacKinnon 363, footnote 15), suggesting

that in the experience of pregnancy, there can be no easy and clear-cut differentiation between mother and child, self and other. It is precisely through a "cut," the cutting of the umbilical cord that the difference between mother and infant is finally stabilized, leaving the navel as a memento to this primordial separation. It is this "umbilically" intertwined relationship between self and other, mother and infant that both "Pro-choice" and "Pro-life" arguments miss. Robert Goldstein's *Mother-Love and Abortion* argues that both these stances "treat the fetus and woman as independent creatures, indeed strangers, and avoid the extraordinary dependence and intertwined interconnectedness of their relationship." (quoted in Davis "Mother" 957)

Jurisprudence is usually the instrument called upon to resolve these kinds of aporias, "to arbitrate between opposing views" (Felman *Juridicial* 4). In *The Juridical Unconscious*, Shoshana Felman claims that a "trial is presumed to be a search for truth, but, technically, it is a search for a decision, and thus, in essence, it seeks not simply truth, but a finality: a force of resolution" (Felman *Juridical* 55). It either chooses to respect women's right to privacy (as in the legal case *Roe v. Wade*), or decides to give primacy to the right of the foetus to life. In either case, it inevitably misses something: as Carol Gilligan claims, pregnancy implies a connection between the mother and the foetus "in which there is no way of acting without consequence to other and self" (cited in Porter *Feminist* 152). Both solutions imply some kind of violence, thus law cannot but partake of the violence it was called upon to adjudicate. As opposed to the language of law, literature is "a dimension of concrete embodiment and a language of infinitude that […] encapsulates not closure but precisely what in a given legal case refuses to be closed and cannot be closed" (Felman *Juridical* 8). Literature is thus about what a legal case must inevitably miss by reducing the undecidability concerning abortion to the "finality" of a decision. It is this supplementary aspect of literature that Johnson's article explores in her analysis of the shifting and often ambivalent structures of address in women's poems about abortion.

In "Apostrophe, Animation and Abortion" Johnson shows how rhetorical and political structures are mutually implicated in each other. She asks whether "the very essence of" a legal or "a political issue" might "hinge on the structure of a figure?" (*World* 184) In her view, the various legal debates surrounding abortion appear to revolve around the central question of "when, precisely, a being assumes a human form" (*World* 189), suggesting that these debates are contingent on the structure of apostrophe, which is precisely about giving (figural) life, animation and presence to something dead, inanimate, or not present through a structure of address. Similarly to Felman, for whom apostrophe, speaking *to* someone, creates

a structure of address which might escape the representational logic of speaking *for* someone that implicitly mutes the subjects it claims to represent (the error she criticizes in Irigaray), Johnson also focuses her attention to this rhetorical figure as it seems to be an allegory of the relationship between rhetoric and politics, deconstruction and feminism.

Apostrophe and "the Male Canon"

Before turning to the main problem of "Apostrophe, Animation, and Abortion" (the figure of abortion), Johnson sets up the rhetorical background against which she will read the dilemma of abortion and its literary inscriptions. She analyzes two poems—one from Charles Baudelaire and one from Percy Bysshe Shelley—in which apostrophe has a crucial structuring role. In Johnson's view,

> Apostrophe […] involves the direct address of an absent, dead, or inanimate being by a first-person speaker. […] Apostrophe is thus both direct and indirect: based etymologically on the notion of turning aside, of digressing from straight speech, it manipulates the I/Thou structure of *direct* address in an indirect, fictionalized way. The absent, dead, or inanimate entity addressed is thereby made present, animate, and anthropomorphic. Apostrophe is a form of ventriloquism through which the speaker throws voice, life, and human form into the addressee, turning its silence into mute responsiveness. (Johnson *World* 185)

Baudelaire's "Moesta et Errabunda" narrates a sense of loss, "the loss of childhood aliveness brought about by the passage of time." (Johnson *World* 186) It is this loss of animation, the self-difference uncovered in the poetic persona itself, which the poem is trying to overcome by means of a sequence of apostrophes culminating in a rhetorical question. In these last lines, apostrophe "becomes not just the poem's mode but also the poem's theme": the rhetorical question ponders "whether its own rhetorical strategies can be effective. The final question becomes: can this gap be bridged; can this loss be healed, through language alone?" (Johnson *World* 187) Shelley's "Ode to the West Wind" "makes even more explicit the relation between apostrophe and animation." (Johnson *World* 187) The apostrophes of the poem are born from a recognition of a dissimilarity between the poetic persona and the addressed entity (the West Wind), and this difference is a result of a loss of animation in the poetic self, which

tries to "borrow" life from the addressed entity. The gap between the addresser and the addressee is precisely what the linguistic performance of address tries to reduce to metaphorical sameness, which would enable the poetic self to overcome its loss of animation. Like in the case of Baudelaire, the poem ends with a rhetorical question asking about whether the apostrophes can enact this metaphorical totalization between self and other.

These lines, expressed by way of rhetorical questions, reveal that the effect, and, most importantly, the *readability* of the poems depend upon their main rhetorical figure, apostrophe.[43] Reading in these poems is contingent upon an apostrophic conferring of animation. Both poems "end with a rhetorical question that both raises and begs the question of rhetoric." (Johnson *World* 188) As de Man warns us in his reading of the rhetorical question as uniquely exemplifying the conflict between grammar and rhetoric, "grammar allows us to ask the question, but the sentence by means of which we ask it may deny the very possibility of asking." (de Man *Allegories* 10) In the case of a rhetorical question asking about the performance of apostrophe, we are dealing with (at least) two, mutually exclusive meanings, which implies that, in Johnson's words, a rhetorical question "has no stable one-to-one correspondence with a meaning." (Johnson *World* 188) One poses the question as a real question, and opens it up for the other to answer; the other reveals the question *as* an answer, denying the possibility of recuperation by means of apostrophe. The ambivalence involved in the rhetorical question is thus the rhetorical restatement of being in a state of loss (aporia), which the figure of the apostrophe tries to overcome. Apostrophe, the figure *par excellence* of lyric voice (Johnson *World* 185), faces an impossible task by trying, through linguistic means, to bridge a gap caused by loss (of meaning).

Apostrophe and "the Female Canon"

In the second part of her essay, Johnson analyses how

> these structures of apostrophe, animation, and lost life will take on a very different cast through the foregrounding of the question of motherhood and the premise that the life that is lost may be someone else's. […] For if apostrophe is said to involve language's

[43] Johnson is convinced that apostrophe is "a rhetorical device that has come to seem almost synonymous with the lyric voice" (Johnson *World* 185). Jonathan Culler also argues that "one might be justified in taking apostrophe as the figure of all that is most radical, embarassing, pretentious, and mystificatory in the lyric, even seeking to identify apostrophe with lyric itself." (Culler "Apostrophe" 151, cf. Culler "Reading Lyric" 100)

> capacity to give life and human form to something dead or inanimate, what happens when those questions are literalized? (Johnson *World* 188-189)

This is the point where "apolitical" deconstructive reading strategies seem to take on a more overtly political stance. As opposed to the seemingly straightforward structures of address encountered in Baudelaire's and Shelley's poems (which nevertheless have their own ambivalences), the poems of Gwendolyn Brooks, Anne Sexton, Lucille Clifton and Adrienne Rich reveal the structures of address to be much more "shifting and complex" (Johnson *World* 188), when the lives lost are taken literally, and not in a poetical-figurative sense.[44] The pattern Johnson is following here has its model in de Man's "Anthropomorphism and Trope in the Lyric," where he offers a unique way of reading two poems by Baudelaire, showing how the devices used by "Obsession" defamiliarize and dismantle the rhetorical inventory of "Correspondances." In a much similar fashion, by reading the asymmetries of address inherent in the poems about abortion written by women, Johnson shows the way these poems retroactively "disrupt and displace" the male canon's "lyric illusion of dialogic reciprocity and symmetry" (Johnson *Critical* 30).[45] In the following few paragraphs, I will try further to illuminate the problems and ambivalences involved in the rhetoric of the poems Johnson reads in her essay.

The most striking feature of Gwendolyn Brooks's "The Mother" is the way the rhetoric of the poem presents us the relationship between guilt and excuse, which can be analyzed with the help of de Man's "Excuses (*Confessions*)." The poem narrates an attempt at what might be termed an excuse ("Believe that in my deliberateness I was not deliberate"), but goes on to say: "Though why should I whine / Whine that the crime was other than mine? / Since anyhow you are dead." It seems that the irrevocable death of the children no longer enables the mother to make an excuse: the guilt is beyond question and beyond exoneration. Yet the poem goes on to supplement that last word, "dead": "Or rather, or instead / You were never made. / But that too, I am afraid, / Is faulty: oh, what shall I say, how is the truth to be said?" Neither "dead" nor "never made" seems to be a proper term for the aborted children,

[44] What Johnson does not reflect on in her essay is that in many feminist thinker's view, the female lyrical "I" is itself (herself) a problematic notion. For example Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar used the term of the *anxiety of authorship* to describe the ambivalent feelings of women writers to their art and poetical representation. These anxieties, in Jonathan Crewe's view allow "no integral poetic subjectivity to be constituted" (Crewe 1), leaving the female poetic persona fragmented.

[45] Although this quotation is taken from *The Critical Difference* and it refers to the two versions (one lyric, one prose) of *Invitations au voyage* by Baudelaire, the model Johnson uses in "Apostrophe, Animation and Abortion" remains similar, but in this case, permeated through and through by the questions of gender.

which mirrors the undecidability between the recognition of guilt and its lack: if the children were indeed thought of as "living," the persona is guilty of killing them, but if they are represented as "never made," there is no guilt. Because of the inability of language to refer properly to the aborted children, guilt cannot be grounded *cognitively*, it remains undecidable in the poem. Thus, because of the suspension of cognitive grounding, the poem has to shift to a *performative* mode of diction to carry out an attempt at persuasion: "Believe me, I loved you all. / Believe me, I knew you, though faintly, and I loved, I loved you / All." This need to persuade ("Believe me") arises from the obvious discrepancy between having an abortion and the confession of feeling a profound affection ("I loved you all") even for these aborted children. Although, these last lines are clearly not excuses, their purpose make them seem very much like excuses: their "purpose is not to state but to convince, itself and 'inner' process to which only words can bear witness." (de Man *Allegories* 281) Both excuses and these lines try to exonerate guilt, but while excuses try to "explain it away," these lines operate precisely through embracing guilt. This persuasion can only be carried out through language—only "words can bear witness" to it—, and it assumes that there is *someone* to be convinced. The attempt at persuasion, as it is directed towards the aborted children—who are neither "dead" nor "never made"—thus presupposes an apostrophic structure of address, which necessarily presents the children as animate beings. In this way, the rhetoric of the poem (through its use of apostrophe) retroactively stabilizes the undecidability of guilt which "rested" on the impasse whether the children were "alive" or "never made." The animating address of *apostrophe*, which constitutes poetic voice itself, is "making a relation between persons out of [what] was in fact a relation between persons and non-persons" (Johnson *Persons* 9), once the poem is written, the persona becomes guilty. Functioning very much like an excuse, the performative mode in the poem "generate[s] the very guilt [it] exonerate[s]" (de Man *Allegories* 299). It is only through its performative rhetoric that the poem can produce guilt as a *stable* essence. Language's incapability of naming and referring is "redeemed" by apostrophic address, but which retroactively reinstates guilt.

Anne Sexton's poem also seems to reinforce this claim as it depicts a vague and elliptical story which has the title "The Abortion." The last stanza of the poem spitefully glosses this evasive "logic" as one which "will lead / to loss without death." Language not only partakes of the violence against the fetus (as we have seen in the case of the Brooks poem), but tries to disguise it as well. In the second speaker's view, the use of the linguistic devices of figurality and euphemism (substituting "gone" for the act of abortion itself) fails to register what actually happened, and is, in this sense, cowardice. It is from the discrepancy between death (which discloses an actual violence done to the fetus) and loss (which only

affects the mother), and the reduction of semantic tension between the two terms through euphemism that the fury of the second persona originates. But the last words of the second speaker ("this baby that I *bleed*") reveal that using these linguistic procedures (using figures) that erase pain and suffering does not totally depend on intention. Paradoxically, there is something in the irreducible materiality of the event of abortion that resists being addressed in literal terms. "The Lost Baby Poem" by Lucille Clifton deals with this problem as well. The word "dropped" in the first line of the poem ("the time i dropped your almost body down"), and the word "lost" in the title of the poem hints at two different interpretations of what might have happened: the child is either "lost through abortion or through miscarriage" (Johnson *World* 195). Thus, the reader cannot decide between two possibilities, one is intentional (abortion), the other is not intentional (miscarriage). These two words rhetorically erase the difference between the event being deliberate and not deliberate.

The rhetoric of women's poems about abortion does not offer us easy solutions to the problem: the differences between self and other, victim and perpetrator, animate and inanimate, life and death, literal and figural, guilt and innocence, intentional and unintentional act are blurred to such an extent that we can no longer tell them clearly apart: it is "impossible to distinguish violence from victim, subject from object, or self from other." (Schweizer 9) That is why both lyric poetry and the discourse of law—which in Johnson's view, "two very different ways of instating what a 'person' is" (Johnson *Persons* 188)— tries to reduce this ambivalence to sense by stabilizing the boundaries between them, reminding us that the lyric is "not a genre, but one name among several to designate the defensive motion of understanding." (de Man *Rhetoric* 261) This stability, as the "female canon" demonstrates, is contingent upon the clear distinction between speaker and addressee within the apostrophic structure. Only in this way can poetry grant "the possibility of undoing loss or death" (Schweizer 8) through apostrophic address. However, this separation is precisely what is not available to female personas writing about pregnancy and abortion.

The last part of Johnson's essay is concerned with the relationship of poet-parents of different sex to their deceased children. I think that this is the most problematic part of the essay as Johnson seems to suggest that the rhetorical ambivalences pointed out in women's poems about abortion cannot be found in male poets' works. Johnson's essay is best read in conjunction with Jonathan Crewe's essay, "Baby Killers," which was written as "a late response" to Johnson's text. The article forcefully argues, that "historical difference is fully subsumed under gender difference in the contrast Johnson draws between poems by nineteenth-century men and by twentieth-century women." (Crewe 3) It might as well be that

the (rhetorical) ambivalences uncovered in women's poems are not unique to female personas, male poets' texts can also show such ambiguities.

In "Gender Theory and the Yale School" Johnson writes that "It may be impossible to know whether it is the gender question that is determined by rhetoric or rhetoric by gender difference." (Johnson *World* 39) This rather enigmatic claim is left in "suspended animation" in this quote, but I think in "Apostrophe, Animation and Abortion," this question receives an implicit answer: gender difference seems to determine the shifting and unstable structures of address. Thus, Johnson's account fails to remain properly in the space "in between" deconstruction and feminism as she implicitly gives primacy to gender differences from which rhetorical differences are derived. In other words, just like Felman, Johnson seems to appropriate the contingencies of rhetoric for the feminine.

Conclusions

While deconstruction's insistence on the ambivalences and undecidabilities uncovered in texts through rhetorical readings runs the risk of effacing questions of gender and sexual difference, feminism, through its demand of political intervention and strong subject positions, forecloses self-difference and ambivalence. This is, doubtless, a very reductive reading of both feminism and deconstruction, erasing the considerable differences that exist within both of these theoretical approaches. We can think of the differences between Derridean deconstruction or American deconstructive criticism; or a feminism that argues for essentialism and the need for strong subject positions, or a "more postmodern" feminism that emphasizes the social construction and performance of gender and the strategic belief in "contingent foundations." I think that the texts of Felman and Johnson point out that the interaction of these various styles within critical discourse may lead to fascinating new insights.

Felman argues that female desire can be seen as a deconstructive force which reveals the internal ambiguities and incongruities residing within a literary or philosophical text, the praxis of which can be likened to Irigaray's notion of mimicry. However, from a deconstructive point of view, her theoretical stance risks appropriating for the feminine the ambivalences and aporias uncovered in all texts by rhetorical readings. Through the figure of abortion—the meaning of which is negotiated between law and literature—, Johnson is also able to create a dialogue between deconstruction and feminism, in spite of their considerable

differences. On the one hand, abortion can be shown to have its unique kind of undecidabilities and ambivalences, which make it resistant to univocal feminist appropriation. On the other hand, the familiarity of "linguistic universality or deconstructive allegory" (Johnson *World* 2) found in de Man's view of language and rhetoric is inflected with and, at the same time, displaced by the focus on the politics of gender and sexual difference.

In both Felman's and Johnson's critical praxis, feminism and deconstruction are "intertwined" (Johnson *Wake* 96): they exist in a relationship of mutual implication, as Felman put it elsewhere, "each one finding itself enlightened, informed, but also affected, displaced by the other" (Felman *Question* 9), or, in Johnson's words, "haunted by the ghost of the other" (Johnson *World* 44). Feminism and deconstruction seems to be each other's condition of possibility and, at the same time, each functions as the element which threatens to disrupt the other's authority. Johnson's texts suggest that we should "recognize these ghosts not as external enemies but as the uncannily familiar strangers that make their own knowledge both possible and problematic" (Johnson *World* 46).

If Johnson allegorizes feminism and deconstruction as "ghosts," the next part of the dissertation will also focus on ghosts, but in a more literal sense, it reads Edgar Allan Poe's concept of the poetic as it is negotiated between theory, poetry and fiction. The concept links, on the one hand, a purely mechanical, material view of language familiar from deconstructive criticism, and, on the other hand, the death of a beautiful woman being sublimated into the advent of poetry as the elegiac, a notion very dubious from a feminist perspective. I will read this topic from a double perspective of feminism and deconstruction inasmuch as these critical positions are haunted by each other, just like Poe's aesthetics is haunted by the uncanny exchanges between life and death, beauty and terror, poetry and prose.

GIVING LIFE, GIVING DEATH:

POE AND THE APORIAS OF "THE MOST POETICAL TOPIC"

> "Perhaps the loss of unconsciousness about the lack of humanness is what de Man was calling "true 'mourning'." (Barbara Johnson, *Persons and Things*)

Edgar Allan Poe has always had an ambiguous place in American literary history. As Shoshana Felman claims, "Perhaps no poet has been so highly acclaimed and, at the same time, so violently disclaimed as Edgar Allan Poe" (Felman *Adventure* 27). Shawn Rosenheim and Stephen Rachman also note that in many countries "Poe has served as a crucial and much celebrated literary model for generations of writers and readers. In the country of his birth, however, Poe can hardly be said to be at home" (Rosenheim and Rachman ix).[46] While being denied a place in the grand synthesizing literary histories of American literature, Poe was "purloined" by French writers and theorists (Rosenheim and Rachman ix, xi): the central place of Poe's "The Purloined Letter" in deconstructive criticism goes without saying nowadays. In spite of this fact, it seems that the author's poetry proved much harder to grasp in deconstructive terms than some of the short stories. Richard De Prospo writes in a review that

> Nowhere among the writings of […] major deconstructionist critics of Poe is there anything that even approaches the bravura performance of the high deconstructionist critics of the works of the several difficult nineteenth- and twentieth-century poets who admire Poe, such as Baudelaire, Mallarmé, Rimbaud, and Rilke. (De Prospo 50)

That is why he thinks that "The one definitely original task that remains for deconstructionist critics of Poe to accomplish is the 'fresh' rereading of Poe's poetry, and if deconstruction can rejuvenate even Poe's old bird, then the rejuvenation of all the other, for the most part less stigmatized, poems may be at hand" (De Prospo 50). Ever since this review, many fascinating deconstructive readings of Poe's poetry have been published. For example we can think of Johnson's brilliant reading of "The Raven," Tom Cohen's reading of "The Bells," Kevin J.

[46] Kevin J. Hayes also notes this asymmetry in Poe's reception: "While Poe had achieved a status in France equal to that of a great national author and, through his French reputation, was gaining much acceptance in other parts of Europe, his reputation among the literati in English-speaking nations was ambiguous." (Hayes, ed. 1)

Hayes's interpretation of "Ulalume," or Felman's reading of Poe as well, which is mostly concerned with the vicissitudes of Poe's reception in literary history.

As opposed to the celebration Poe has received in deconstructive approaches, for feminist critics, he usually performs the role of the villain, a character to be "exorcised" from the canon, for example in Beth Ann Bassein's view (Roderick 15). For feminist readers, the most disquieting claim of Poe occurs in "The Philosophy of Composition": "the death […] of a beautiful woman is, unquestionably, the most poetical topic in the world—and equally is it beyond doubt that the lips best suited for such topic are those of a bereaved lover" (Poe "Philosophy" 19). Elizabeth Bronfen in *Over Her Dead Body: Death, Femininity and the Aesthetic* notes that by examining such views on aesthetics, "[s]ome critics, who assume a compatibility between lived reality and aesthetic depiction, have accused Poe of misogyny" (Bronfen *Over* 59). In this book, Bronfen contextualizes these symptomatic aesthetic notions in a tradition of Western thinking which tends to connect death and femininity on the basis that "both femininity and death serve as western culture's privileged topoi and tropes for what is superlatively enigmatic" (Bronfen *Over* xiii). One reason for this association might be that

> because the feminine body is culturally constructed as the superlative site of alterity, culture uses art to dream the deaths of beautiful women. Over representations of the dead feminine body, culture can repress and articulate its unconscious knowledge of death which it fails to foreclose even as it cannot express it directly (Bronfen *Over* xi).

Aesthetic representation thus has a tendency to suppress the materiality of the dead female body through the guise of art. By denying the literality of the corpse, it sublimates it into the purely figurative, in this way foreclosing the anxiety hidden behind the cultural constructions of death and femininity.[47]

There is no doubt that the analogy between femininity and death in many cases had a profoundly negative impact on historical women's lives. Yet, failing to take into account the intricate relationship between lived reality and artistic representation might lead to oversimplifying interpretations, although it might be argued that canceling out such "literal" readings in the name of high-brow literary theory constitutes another attempt to marginalize

[47] As Bronfen claims, "[f]emininity and death cause a disorder to stability, mark moments of ambivalence, disruption or duplicity and their eradication produces a recuperation of order, a return to stability. The threat that death and femininity pose is recuperated by representation." However, as Bronfen shows, this "recuperation is imperfect, the regained stability not safe, the urge for order inhabited by a fascination with disruption and split, and certainty emerging over and out of uncertainty" (Bronfen *Over* xii).

the effects that misogynist representations have on female experience. The system of representation that links femininity, death and aesthetics shows certain symptoms of instability, ambivalence, and in order to portray Poe as a misogynist thinker, these referential readings need to forget about these puzzling indeterminacies and identify "imagined violence" in one to one correspondence with "real violence." As Bronfen herself concedes: "it seems as necessary to stress the fundamental difference between real violence done to a physical body and any 'imagined' one […], as it is necessary to explore the way in which these two registers come to be conflated and confused" (Bronfen *Over* 59).

These female figures in Poe's texts do not seem to "rest peacefully": the dying women, who should have stabilized the author's aesthetics (which is "unquestionably" symptomatic from a feminist perspective), on the contrary, return to subvert his theory from within. This "return"—be it literal or figurative—is the problem that this part of the dissertation will address: this theme creates certain symptomatic ambivalences in Poe's texts which are best analyzed through a double perspective of feminist and deconstructive reading strategies. Bronfen's book is a brilliant example of such a reading that is attentive to deconstructive, psychoanalytic as well as feminist reading strategies; in my reading I would like to supplement her analysis of the figure of the dying woman in Poe's oeuvre by noting that, as a result of these ambivalences involving death, *life* itself becomes no less problematic. I will point this out by offering a rhetorical reading of some of Poe's texts, in a way making up for this aspect which I feel is lacking in Bronfen's book: she sketches the possible outlines of such a reading, but does not wish to pursue them to their logical conclusions. In such a reading, it can be shown that the death of the other (the "beautiful woman") does not stabilize the discourse of the self in such a reassuring way as critics like Bassein or Bram Dijkstra would have it, which counters somewhat the charge of misogyny; of course, by claiming this, I am not suggesting that Poe was a feminist either. Another reason I find this double perspective more viable is that a "purely" deconstructive reading would run the risk of reinforcing the traditional separation between aesthetics and politics—even though this is one of the explicit intention of Poe's aesthetics—, which feminist criticism has shown to be illusory and deluded.

In the first part of this chapter, I will attempt to (re)read one of Poe's less celebrated poems, "The Sleeper," which poem seems to have been forgotten, rarely given the critical attention that would reflect its complexity. The sole exception may be David Halliburton's monograph on Poe which devotes a short, but nonetheless very illuminating chapter to this poem and also conceptualizes the category of the "sleeper-poems." In my interpretation I will focus primarily on the rhetorical figures that blur the borderlines between the living and the dead, using the insights gained from this analysis in a contrastive reading of the poetry and the short stories. I think that there are certain unsettling points inherent in poetry, which threaten with the collapse of the most important categories figured in Poe's aesthetics, and these disquieting insights are allegorized in the tales of terror.

Here is the opening section of the poem:

At midnight, in the month of June,
I stand beneath the mystic moon.
An opiate vapour, dewy, dim,
Exhales from out her golden rim,
And, softly dripping, drop by drop,
Upon the quiet mountain top,
Steals drowsily and musically
Into the universal valley.
The rosemary nods upon the grave;
The lily lolls upon the wave;
Wrapping the fog about its breast,
The ruin moulders into rest;
Looking like Lethë, see! the lake
A conscious slumber seems to take,
And would not, for the world, awake.
All Beauty sleeps!—and lo! where lies
(Her casement open to the skies)
Irenë, with her Destinies! (Poe "Sleeper" 64)

These opening lines introduce some of the most important images and rhetorical figures of the poem, portraying an anthropomorphic natural scenery in which the landscape is filled with life through the metaphor of slumber. From the very beginning, delicate figures of permeation (like the "opiate vapour" which is itself personified later on, or the fog covering the landscape) reign in the poem, blurring the borderlines of the animate and inanimate, human and non-human, showing one as always traversed by the other, even within the same sentence: "Wrapping the fog about its breast / The ruin moulders into rest." Whereas the first line constitutes an anthropomorphic exchange between a building and the human body, the next line revokes this figural substitution by the reifying verb "to moulder." Similarly to this figural oscillation, the animating rhetoric is itself somewhat paradoxical as well: Western culture usually regards sleeping, on the one hand, as a transitory state between life and death, and, on the other hand, as a euphemism that suggests death as its signified. In Poe's poem, the landscape is "alive" inasmuch as it is "slumbering" in a state suspended between life and death: the "conscious slumber" of the lake (from which it *consciously* does not want to awake) is perhaps the most apt oxymoron to describe this state. Irene, the lady addressed by the speaker is also "sleeping" in a similarly ambiguous condition. In this figure of the slumbering beloved, we can recognize the image dying woman from "The Philosophy of Composition": neither dead, nor alive, she is the very emblem of the poetic for Poe. (Perhaps it is precisely this undecidability which constitutes "the poetic" as such in his thinking?)

When examined from a feminist perspective, the poem rests on imbalanced gender roles familiar from patriarchal texts: an active, male persona is addressing a sleeping, silent, distant female figure, which classifies "The Sleeper"—together with, for example, John Keats's "Ode on a Grecian Urn"—as belonging to a male lyrical tradition (Gilbert and Gubar 68) where "women are often idealized, objectified and silent." (Johnson *Feminist* 132) Because of her silence, she can become a screen for male projections and fantasy (Kalmár "A női test" 20, 31, 34, Gilbert and Gubar 53-55), which involves „a male appropriation of female muteness as aesthetic trophy accompanied by an elision of sexual violence." (Johnson *Feminist* 136) This is not to suggest that the persona of the poem is directly responsible for the lady's "solemn silentness" (Poe "Sleeper" 65), nevertheless it offers a way of pointing out how this patriarchal image of female passivity and silence often evoked close associations with death (Gilbert and Gubar 24-25), which metaphorical link also happens to structure "The Sleeper." In a reading sensitive to gender issues, then, "the most poetical topic" seems predicated on the silence of the woman, who, in turn, can be mourned by the male elegist, which process often operates through the rhetorical figures of apostrophe and prosopopeia. I think, however, that the rhetorical feats underlying this scenario are worth exploring in a

further detail, because it can be shown that the voice of the male persona is undercut by the same mechanisms of address that constitute the poem.

From a deconstructive stance, then, what is problematic in such an alignment of the anthropomorphic landscape and the "sleeping" loved one, is that there is a fundamental difference between them, yet the rhetorical devices of the poem blur this difference, as they are both conceptualized through the metaphors of sleeping. The distinction that I feel here is probably best exemplified by the difference between two rhetorical figures, that of anthropomorphism and prosopopeia, although the uncanny performance of the poem lies in the act of annulling this disctinction. In Paul de Man's late writings, anthropomorphism, prosopopeia and apostrophe become the most important rhetorical figures of lyric poetry. In his view, prosopopeia is a "fiction of an apostrophe to an absent, deceased, or voiceless entity, which posits the possibility of the latter's reply, and confers upon it the power of speech" (de Man *Rhetoric* 75-76). As opposed to prosopopeia, anthropomorphism is

> not just a trope but an identification at the level of substance. It takes one entity for another and thus implies the constitution of specific entities prior to their confusion, the *taking* of something for something else that can then be assumed to be *given*. Anthropomorphism freezes the infinite chain of tropological transformations and propositions into a single assertion or essence which, as such, excludes all others. It is no longer a proposition but a proper name (de Man *Rhetoric* 241).

In Johnson's interpretation, the most important difference between the two figures is that while anthropomorphism posits the essence of being "human" as a quality which precedes language, prosopopeia demystifies this act by calling attention to this essence as contingent on linguistic acts.[48] For anthropomorphism, it is already given what "human" means thus it can safely invest human traits in inanimate objects, deceased persons or abstract concepts, prosopopeia is a much more disquieting figure as it interrogates what it means to be "human."

The implications of this distinction for the poem are manifold. In the beginning of the poem, the anthropomorphic structures seem fairly unproblematic, the animate and the inanimate, human and non-human enter into a chiasmic chain of substitutions. The complications arise once these personifications are juxtaposed with the rhetoric that the speaking persona uses to refer to the sleeper (Irene): this switch brings a new opposition into

[48] Johnson claims that "[t]o use anthropomorphism is to treat as *known* what the properties of the human." (Johnson *Persons* 190) and that "anthropomorphism depend[s] on the givenness of the essence of the human and personification does not" (Johnson *Persons* 206-207).

play (alive and dead) which cannot symmetrically be projected onto the sets of oppositions introduced in the beginning (animate-inanimate, human-nonhuman). Introduced by the prosopopeia of the dead beloved, this new pair of oppositions intersects and transgresses the anthropomorphic structure constituted in the beginning, inviting the reader to retroactively notice that what seemed to be the "triumph of poetry"—the synthesis of animate with the inanimate, the human with the nonhuman—also leaves a residue of anxiety which questions the possibility of differentiating between these categories. In such a system of figuration it is hard to tell what the essence of the human is: once this structure can be shown to be at work in the poem, anthropomorphism ceases to function "properly."

This ambiguous animating rhetoric is later intensified by an apostrophe to the loved one as well, giving her (figural) life, animation and presence: "Oh, lady bright! can it be right—/This window open to the night?" (Poe "Sleeper" 65) If we compare "The Sleeper" to one of the first drafts of the poem (dating from 1831 and then entitled "Irene"), we notice that in the early version the moon is "humming," and the speaker stays in the background nearly to the very end of the poem, while in the later version analysed in detail here, the persona is himself addressing the lady. The apostrophe animates the loved one and the fictive dialogue represents her as being able to respond to the query of the speaker:[49]

> Oh, lady bright! can it be right—
> This window open to the night?
> The wanton airs, from the tree-top,
> Laughingly through the lattice drop—
> The bodiless airs, a wizard rout,
> Flit through thy chamber in and out,
> And wave the curtain canopy
>
> So fitfully—so fearfully—
> Above the closed and fringed lid
> 'Neath which thy slumb'ring soul lies hid,
> That o'er the floor and down the wall,
> Like ghosts the shadows rise and fall! (Poe "Sleeper" 65)

[49] "Apostrophe […] involves the direct address of an absent, dead, or inanimate being by a first-person speaker. […] Apostrophe is thus both direct and indirect: based etymologically on the notion of turning aside, of digressing from straight speech, it manipulates the I/Thou structure of *direct* address in an indirect, fictionalized way. The absent, dead, or inanimate entity addressed is thereby made present, animate, and anthropomorphic. Apostrophe is a form of ventriloquism through which the speaker throws voice, life, and human form into the addressee, turning its silence into mute responsiveness." (Johnson *World* 185)

If we take a closer look at what this apostrophe (which happens to be a rhetorical question) is inquiring about, we can see that the persona is pondering here whether the "wanton airs" do not disturb the rest of the lady. The speaker has disclosed earlier, if only in parentheses, that "(Her casement [is] open to the skies)," but now he is quite anxious to perceive that these *airs* "flit" freely through the realms of the living and the dead. Clearly, the function of the word "air" is crucial in these lines. According to *Webster's Dictionary*, it includes among its various meanings, "the breath of life" (meaning the air we breathe in and out), a "tune or melody," an "aria," or even an "Elizabethan art song." In this sense, these "bodiless *airs*" which "flit through [her] chamber in and out" and the "opiate vapour" which is "exhaled" from the moon's "golden rim" in the beginning of the poem can be read as *figures for the poem itself*. The "air" is traversing and transgressing the boundaries between the living and the dead, through its promise of animation given by that "breath of life," apostrophe. Taking this possibility into account, these lines of the poem can be shown to be implicitly interrogating the uncanny effect *brought about by their own rhetoric*: the blurring of the boundaries between the living and the dead, which is inherent in the figures of apostrophe, prosopopeia and anthropomorphism. A bit later the speaker risks another apostrophe:

> Oh, lady dear, hast thou no fear?
> Why and what art thou dreaming here?
> Sure thou art come o'er far-off seas,
> A wonder to these garden trees!
> Strange is thy pallor! strange thy dress!
> Strange, above all, thy length of tress,
> And this all solemn silentness! (Poe "Sleeper" 65)

From this point on, the second person address transforms into the third person singular, the interrogative gives way to the imperative, which clearly indicates a rhetorical shift in the poem resulting in yet another erasure of the woman. It is as if the persona realized something about that "solemn silentness" of the addressee, her "mute responsiveness" (Johnson *World* 185) is no longer desired. We can interpret this shift with regard to the titles of the earlier ("Irene") and the later versions ("The Sleeper") of the poem as well: the rewriting of the text also entails the *effacement of the name*, which is a logical consequence of the structure that I have been tracing in the poem. After a point the speaker has to abandon apostrophe, as this figure creates such rhetorical complications which the persona is no longer able to control. At

this point, it is useful to refer to another of Poe's poems, "Ulalume," which, as opposed to the "The Sleeper," dramatizes the *return of the name*: it is through reading the epitaph of his dead beloved (the name of the lady, which happens to be the title of the poem as well, enabling us to read the whole poem as an epitaph) that the "I" of the poem is able to recognize itself. While in "The Sleeper" the speaker slowly loses power over his rhetorical vocabulary and becomes unable to tell whether the loved one is still alive or already dead, the inscription-like unchangeability of the other's death in "Ulalume" is able to unify the persona again. Paradoxically enough, this self-recognition is carried out in "Ulalume" through the metaphors of the dead scenery depicted at the beginning of the poem: it seems that here the reclaiming of the self is only possible through its figurative death.

In "The Sleeper," this recognition (if it does occur at all) of the performance of "aberrant" figures that leads to this shift in the rhetoric takes place in the silence of the blank space between the two stanzas of the poem. As if acting upon this recognition, the rhetorical shift in the following part of the poem reflects the speaker's anxious attempts to re-establish the boundaries between the living and the dead (and, in turn, anthropomorphism and prosopopeia) that the rhetoric of the poem has blurred to an uncanny sameness:

> The lady sleeps! Oh, may her sleep,
> Which is enduring, so be deep!
> Heaven have her in its sacred keep!
> This chamber changed for one more holy,
> This bed for one more melancholy,
> I pray to God that she may lie
> Forever with unopened eye,
> While the dim sheeted ghosts go by!
> My love, she sleeps! Oh, may her sleep,
> As it is lasting, so be deep!
> Soft may the worms about her creep! (Poe "Sleeper" 65)

At this point, again, there is a considerable difference between the early and the later version of the poem. Whereas in "Irene," the Moon is desperately pleading the lady to wake up, the persona (who appears only at the end of the poem), like the speaker of "The Sleeper," is praying "may her sleep,/Which is enduring, so be deep!" It seems that the two distinct voices we can find in "Irene" become an internal division in "The Sleeper." While part of the self

wants to preserve the lady in this “sleeping” state, suspended between being alive and being dead (which state, according to the early version, is upheld precisely by remembering the loved one), another part wants to “kill her off” (at least rhetorically speaking). This state, however, brings with itself a certain anxiety: as the distance between life and death is eroded, this threatens to undo the oppositions structuring the poem. That is why the speaker has to modify the rhetoric of the poem as best he can, to redraw the borderlines between the living and the dead again by, this time reassuringly, defining the state of the sleeper. A perfect metaphor for this re-established boundary might be the “black/And winged” gates of the “tall vault” referred to in the last section of the poem. The lady’s “proper” place is not in the imaginary space of the here and now created by the temporality of apostrophe and prosopopeia, but

> Far in the forest, dim and old,
> For her may some tall vault unfold—
> Some vault that oft hath flung its black
> And winged pannels fluttering back,
> Triumphant, o’er the crested palls,
> Of her grand family funerals—
> Some sepulchre, remote, alone,
> Against whose portal she hath thrown,
> In childhood, many an idle stone—
> Some tomb from out whose sounding door
> She ne’er shall force an echo more,
> Thrilling to think, poor child of sin!
> It was the dead who groaned within. (Poe “Sleeper” 65-66)

The final lines of the poem thus thematize this sealing off of the living from the dead, condemning the blurring of these boundaries through a little anecdote. The speaker calls Irene “poor child of sin,” recalling her childhood delusion of mistaking an echo that a rock made on a door, for the voice of the dead within. In other words, because she has mistaken the purely

material sound of the echo for phenomenal voice and meaning, for the voice of the dead.[50] (But then, is this not the error inherent in all apostrophical address? An error already inscribed *within* language?)

Through this little allegory, then, the persona denounces speaking of the dead in terms of the living. But as he himself has committed precisely this (rhetorical) error earlier (through his use of apostrophe and prosopopeia, through his address to the lady), this allegorical venture can also be interpreted as a move by which the text is trying to efface its own (unconscious or unadmitted) "mistake." By calling this a "sin," these lines hope to rectify the "error" the rhetoric of the poem has already acted out by having recourse to "aberrant figures." Yet it seems that the aberrant use of language condemned in these lines finds its way back to the text at the very same spot where it is being denounced. If we examine these lines from a rhetorical point of view, we notice—paradoxically enough—that it is through the use of prosopopeia that this claim is formulated. The text can only grant its "wisdom" in erroneous form: even the vault that seals off the realms of the living and the dead is represented through the use of personification ("Some vault that oft hath *flung* its black/And winged pannels fluttering back"), and it is only by portraying Irene as living and acting that the speaker can condemn the "delusion" of referring to the dead in terms of the living. Thus, the re-establishing of the boundaries between the living and the dead is carried out by virtue of yet another aberrant figure, which inescapably obfuscates these borderlines again. The text once again destabilizes the boundaries between the living and the dead, the present and the past by the very gesture through which it was supposed to seal it once and for all.

By apostrophizing and later personifying the lady, the speaker entangles himself in a structure which, in the end, seems to threaten his own sameness, his own claims to poetic voice, and his pure existence even, as he is no longer able to symmetrically align and control the sets of binary oppositions that structure the poem (animate-inanimate, human-nonhuman, alive-dead, being awake-being asleep, etc.). This process is all the more intimidating as it might disrupt the movement of sublimation of Death into Beauty, which has a crucial place in Poe's aesthetic. The speaker in the poem tries to counter this threat, on the one hand, by a rhetorical shift (from the second person to the third person), and, on the other hand, by

[50] I think this is a process similar to the one which Johnson points out in her reading of "The Raven," in which the speaker of the text interprets the word "nevermore" first as a name, and as his imagined dialogue with the raven goes on, the word is filled up with different *meanings* (Johnson *World* 99). The persona seems unable to resist making some sense or meaning out of the purely material sounds that make up the word. The little girl in "The Sleeper" makes a similar mistake: she cannot but think that the sound that the stone elicited from the door comes from the inside (as the answer of the dead). The rhetoric of the poem, however, is unsure about whether this was only an effect of language, or was it *really* the "dead" that "groaned within"? These lines seem to allow both interpretations.

resorting to allegory. However, as this latter denunciation of the error is itself "aberrant," the "negative imprint" of the delusion that the allegory tries to erase is inscribed into and retained within the fabric of the poem as an anxiety which must be disavowed, perhaps, only through yet another aberrant figure.

The Testimony of the Short Stories

Poe's tales of terror often seem to be structured by similar anxieties that we uncovered in a rhetorical reading of "The Sleeper." While the poem makes an effort to reduce and contain its haunting rhetorical performance, the short stories demystify this poetic disavowal by letting this anxiety surface in a much more "tangible" form, through *terror*. We might say that Poe's tales of terror witness the literalization of what remained only a threat in "The Sleeper": the dead woman returning from death to haunt the narrator, condemning him to numb silence. An analysis of such a return, from a feminist perspective, would help us answer the question asked by Barbara Johnson's *The Feminist Difference*: "What happens when women attempt to break that silence" (Johnson *Feminist* 137) on which the male elegist's voice was predicated upon? What happens when women recover agency after being subordinated by male systems of representation? The Poe's gothic tales seem to suggest that this return marks a disruptive moment in the texts, which often proves fatal for male personas. I will try to substantiate these claims, on the one hand, by reading the relationship between personification and reification implied by the chiasmic structure of prosopopeia in "The Fall of the House of Usher"; on the other hand, by exploring the function and the effect of the vocative in the apostrophical addresses we find in "Ligeia." In other words, I am proposing to read both of these tales as allegories of rhetorical figures that threaten to disrupt the emergence of the aesthetic or the poetical. Through this rhetorical reading it can also be shown how close Poe's ambiguous representation of dying and returning women is to Felman's theory of female desire: these subversive female figures seem to become an uncanny allegorical counterpart to Felman's theoretical representation of female desire as a deconstructive force in the process of reading.

At the beginning of "The Fall of the House of Usher," there is a moment when the unnamed narrator of the tale first catches a glimpse of "the melancholy House of Usher" and tries to record as accurately as possible the feelings of dread that he experienced then:

> I know not how it was—but, with the first glimpse of the building a sense of insufferable gloom pervaded my spirit. I say insufferable; for the feeling was unrelieved by any of that half-pleasurable, because poetic, sentiment, with which the mind receives even the sternest natural images of the desolate and the terrible. […] There was an iciness, a sinking, a sickening of the heart—an unredeemed dreariness of thought which no goading of the imagination could torture into aught of the sublime (Poe "Fall" 317).

There is something terrifying in the atmosphere of the house that resists being translated into aesthetic categories: the imagination fails to regain control over terror by inscribing it as a sublime experience.[51] As a result of this failure, the narrator is overcome by "an iciness, a sinking, a sickening of the heart," he feels gradually deprived of life in a figurative sense. Both the narrator of the tale and his "cadaverous" (Poe "Fall" 321) host, Roderick Usher are haunted by this possibility: becoming de-animated. In his strange theory about "the sentience of all vegetable things" (Poe "Fall" 327), Usher attributes this process of de-animation to the "silent, yet importunate and terrible influence" (Poe "Fall" 328) of the atmosphere of his ancestral home. It can be traced in the short story how the house (much like the haunted palace in the poem inset) gradually acquires the attributes of a person, while the inhabitants are slowly losing their animation. Although the narrator dismisses this theory as one needing "no comment," I think Usher's point is worth exploring here: besides many of its thematic preoccupations pointed out by critics, this tale also seems to be dramatizing a rhetorical figure, *prosopopeia*. "The Sleeper" already hinted at the more sinister side of this trope: how, as a result of inanimate things becoming animated (using de Man's words here), "the living are struck dumb, frozen in their own death" (de Man *Rhetoric* 78). Because of the chiasmic reversals between the animate and the inanimate, the living and the dead involved in prosopopeia, it is really hard to say exactly where the boundaries of these concepts are located. The fact that, much like the characters in the tale, the reader is unable to distinguish whether she is still alive or already dead makes of Lady Madeline's death and burial a hauntingly memorable scene in the tale. As in the poem, the key to the ambiguities is a female figure, one of Poe's half-dead, half-asleep female figures, who also happens to be the par excellence figure of "the poetical." This aporia that the dying woman embodies so tragically plagues Usher's mind, and when his twin sister makes her final appearance at the end of the

[51] This blockage might even be similar to what Neil Hertz writes about in "The Notion of Blockage in the Literature of the Sublime," although he interprets this blockage as a necessary moment in the dialectical movement of the sublime. For Poe's narrator this blockage is insurmountable, but perhaps this is what makes it "sublime" in the end.

story, he ends up becoming, as the narrator puts it, “a victim to the terrors he had anticipated” (Poe “Fall” 335). Usher’s “terror” is very much like the “error” denounced in the last lines of “The Sleeper”: thinking about the dead in terms of the living, if only in a figurative sense, blurs the borderlines between them, and enables the dead to return to haunt the texts.

While the narrator’s feelings about this dreadful last “family reunion” are omitted from the text, the narrator of “Ligeia” is eloquent about his feelings when the corpse of Rowena, his second wife, after a long and painful process of dying, starts to show faint signs of life again: “Through a species of unutterable horror and awe, for which the language of mortality has no sufficiently energetic expression, I felt my heart cease to beat, my limbs grow rigid where I sat” (Poe “Ligeia” 275). This sentence hints at a similar bodily sensation to that which the narrator of the previous tale encountered at the first glimpse of the mansion. This sensation is clearly in excess of language, yet I think it is also uncannily connected to it. In a way very similar to that in which “The Fall of the House of Usher” dramatizes prosopopeia, “Ligeia” revolves around the trope of *apostrophe*. To justify this claim, let me recall the narrator’s fitful repetition of Ligeia’s name in the first paragraph of the tale: “Ligeia! Ligeia! […] it is by that sweet word alone—by Ligeia—that I bring before mine eyes in fancy the image of her who is no more” (Poe “Ligeia” 262). The figurative structure of apostrophe (the vocative manifestation of the “will”) can, if only to the imagination, make Ligeia present once more. Yet the victory of the “will” over death (that the tale might offer itself an allegory of) has a residue of terror, which radically defamiliarizes the ideal it wanted to regain. What makes apostrophe so sinister in this tale is that its fictional structure which confers life upon the dead is uncannily literalized: the narrator’s fitful apostrophes are answered from beyond the shrouds that cover Lady Rowena’s body, by “a sob, low, gentle, but very distinct” (Poe “Ligeia” 274).

This address, instead of reclaiming animation and hope for the melancholic narrator, figuratively deprives him of life: “I trembled not—I stirred not—for a crowd of unutterable fancies connected with the air, the stature, the demeanor of the figure, rushing hurriedly through my brain, had paralyzed—had chilled me into stone” (Poe “Ligeia” 276-277). This paralyzing terror cannot even be redeemed by recognizing a familiar face in “the thing that was enshrouded” (276). This recognition of—or, rather, this *conferring of a face* (this is how de Man etymologizes the Greek prosopopeia, *prosopon poiein*) to—Ligeia at the end of the story resembles the ambivalent ending of “The Sleeper.” Here, as in the poem, the uncontrollable effects of the “will” (or apostrophe) cannot be “conquered,” only reformulated, by another “aberrant” figure, prosopopeia. While the poem tries everything to evade this

insight, the tales, as mementoes to terror, compulsively re-inscribe this knowledge, insistently reminding us of its uncanny nature.

It is as if there was something irredeemably material about the death of these beautiful women in the tales, which refuses to be translated fully into the figurative, and which blocks the dialectical movement of aestheticization which seemed at first glimpse quite complete in the poems. Only at first sight, though, for, as I have tried to show, "The Sleeper" encapsulates similar moments of blockage which disturb the sublimation of Death into Beauty, leaving the poem without any reassuring resolution. (It might even be suggested, after all, that the moment "the most poetical topic" appears in a literary text, it deconstructs the aesthetical categories it was supposed to uphold.) It becomes, then, the task of "The Philosophy of Composition" to subdue the anxiety left behind as a residue of this lack of resolution. Poe's careful differentiation between "the sole legitimate province" (Poe "Philosophy" 16) of poetry and prose could be such a method: to say that Beauty and Terror have nothing to do with each other offers a possible way of resolving the pressing ambivalences I have identified in this section of the dissertation. Yet the difficulties that emerge when both "provinces" thematize "the most poetical topic," seem to destabilize such a neat opposition between poetry and prose, revealing their relationship as being one of mystification and demystification. Indeed, through a rhetorical reading of "the most poetical topic," we can demonstrate that the relationship between life and death, animate and inanimate, Beauty and Terror, success and failure, poetry and prose is much more complex and intimate in Poe's writings than that of being mutually exclusive terms, revealing a structure familiar from the constellation between deconstruction and feminism hinted at in the texts of Felman and Johnson.

Conclusions

There is at least one question left to ask after this reading, and this question also bears on the broader context in which I have chosen to read Poe in the first place. Is there an essential link between the return of the muted female figure in Poe's texts and the complications that appear in the rhetoric of his texts? The attempt to answer this question will return us briefly to "The Philosophy of Composition" again. If we take a look at what this essay is doing, we find that "the most poetical topic" signifies on several levels: being "poetical" connects language as pure signifier (as pure sound) with a thematic preoccupation (we might say obsession: a dying woman), and the rhetorical feat of Poe's essay is the performance of the superlative ("unquestionably") which links contingent values to each other

and (re)presents them as necessity.[52] In other words, this might be the performative moment that gives birth to the allegorical system that connects an aspect of femininity and rhetoric that we have already seen in Felman's account of female desire as a deconstructive force. Like the raven's "nevermore" or the echo of the stone in "The Sleeper," this founding contingency can no longer remain in its "primary meaningless" form as it becomes a vortex that attracts all sorts of meanings. Poe's rhetorical feat, on the one hand, demonstrates that the relationship between gender difference and the rhetorical complications is a "non-relation," on the other hand, to cover up this non-relation, his aesthetics is all about creating essential ("unquestionable") links between gender and poeticity. Interestingly enough, it is precisely because of the ambivalences of the rhetoric in his texts that this link remains unstable.

To rephrase the question on a more abstract level: what can we learn from Felman, Johnson and Poe when we are dealing with the complex relationship between gender difference and rhetoric? While de Man's texts clearly gave primacy to "universal" rhetorical structures which neglected gender as a category of analysis (Johnson *World* 45), both Felman and Johnson explore these possibilities never explicitly embraced in de Man's oeuvre. Their argumentation, in the end, suggests that an essential link exists between rhetoric and gender—they even seem to appropriate the ambivalences inherent in rhetoric for the feminine, which seems problematic from a deconstructive perspective—, while Poe's texts reveal the internal contingencies at the heart of this problem. Read through these examples, the relationship between deconstruction and feminism is structured by the endless sliding between these two extremes (either there is an essential or a contingent connection) when it comes to answering this aporia. I see the most important contribution of these theorists (Poe included) to the ongoing debates about feminism and deconstruction in pointing this problem out as a key question to be seriously considered.

[52] Bronfen claims that "What emerges from Poe's repeated insistence on the superlative *most* (as a moment of supreme suggestiveness) in conjunction with expressions of determination – 'universal', 'obvious', 'unquestionable', and 'equally beyond doubt' – is precisely a poetics of such a death-induced doubt." (Bronfen *Over* 61) Note however that this passage also reveals that according to Bronfen, the obvious origin of the complications in Poe's texts can be found in our culture's ambiguous relationship to death, and the dying woman is used as a symptomatic facade that might help to cover this anxiety. This problem in Poe seems heavily overdetermined, and I think that "death" is only one of the many possible sources of the ambivalences found in Poe's texts and each reading can only reduce this intriguing complexity. Being suspicious of the notion of "origins," a rhetorical reading is mostly interested in analyzing how these readings work as allegories of the question they are trying to solve.

CHAPTER III. DECONSTRUCTION AND TRAUMA THEORY

BETWEEN DECONSTRUCTION AND ETHICS:

THE CONCEPT OF THE LITERARY IN TRAUMA THEORY

> "We might think of deconstructive writing, indeed, as struggling with the difficulty of listening to a certain address and of writing in a mode that is not a statement but itself a paradoxical address, governed by the ethical question of how to speak without reducing the text to a form of comprehension." (Cathy Caruth, *Critical Encounters*)

Simon Critchley asks in his book *The Ethics of Deconstruction*, "what could deconstruction possibly have to do with ethics, apart from radically putting into question the possibility of the latter?" (Critchley *Ethics* 2) Just like the link between deconstruction and politics in the previous chapter, connecting deconstruction and ethics may seem odd at first glance, given the primacy that deconstructive criticism gives to linguistic structures and rhetoric in general in contrast to the notions of ethics, reference, politics or history. The "and" between deconstruction and ethics, just like between deconstruction and psychoanalysis, or deconstruction and feminism, needs further elaboration. In this chapter of the dissertation, I will try to illuminate how the oeuvres of Shoshana Felman, Barbara Johnson and Cathy Caruth can be regarded as substantially contributing to an "ethical turn" of deconstructive criticism, which, through trauma theory, emphatically foregrounded questions of reference, history, politics and responsibility.[53] After contextualizing trauma theory within the framework opened up by the ethical turn in contemporary literary theory, I would like to examine three problems: the role of literature and the literary in trauma theory; the reconceptualization of history as trauma; and trauma theory's implicit doubleness; then supplement these theoretical issues with the reading of literary and philosophical texts. I argue that literature, or the "literary thing," has a crucial place in trauma theory: as a testimony it counteracts forgetting, through prosopopeia, it gives a face to the other disfigured by history,

[53] If we consider Critchley's claim that "the textual practice of deconstructive reading"—and he is talking specifically about Jacques Derrida here, and not deconstructive criticism—"can and, moreover, *should* be understood as an ethical demand" (Critchley *Ethics* 1), the "ethical turn" of deconstruction does not mean a literal turning to questions of ethics, but rather a recognition that, from the very start, Derrida's solicitation of philosophy "takes place (*a lieu*) ethically, or there is duty in deconstruction" (Critchley *Ethics* 2). Derridean deconstruction has been ethical from the start, the waves of American reception simply tended to "overlook or relegate the importance of the relation of ethics to deconstructive reading." (Critchley *Ethics* 2)

and through apostrophe it lets the other address and remind us about the ethical obligations of reading. Trauma theory also brought about deconstruction's "return to history": it reconceptualized history through the psychoanalytic notion of trauma which theoretical move radically changed the traditional relationship between history and consciousness. In the texts of Felman, Johnson and Caruth, "history" becomes a traumatic return of the real that inevitably shapes texts and oeuvres. To conclude the theoretical part of the chapter, I am opening up trauma theory to recent critiques, namely I will return briefly to the relationship between feminism and trauma theory in Felman's two books, to point out how they write two parallel narratives about trauma, which can be regarded as its "monumental history" and its "critical history." Nowadays many critics call attention to the fact that trauma theory with all its ethical potential might itself be blind to traumas pertaining to gender, class, or race. In the last section of the chapter, I am tracing the relationship between recognition and foreclosure in the face of trauma through reading Ralph Waldo Emerson's mourning for his son, Waldo; and I end the chapter by reading the parable of Tancred and Clorinda in Torquato Tasso's *Jerusalem Delivered* in order to reveal how the blind spots of trauma theory can be pointed out from a postcolonial perspective.

Trauma Theory and the Ethical Turn in Contemporary Literary Theory

Probably Robert Eaglestone's *Ethical Criticism: Reading After Levinas* gives the most convincing narrative about the reemergence of the ethical claims of literary criticism that took place in the 1990s. His narrative goes back to the beginning of the 20th century and argues that, as opposed to the literary criticism of the 19th century, "An explicit concern for ethics has been at the heart of literary criticism since its inception in a modern and modernist form at around the time of the First World War." (Eaglestone 1) Emphasizing a newfound need for modernist art and interpretation in the face of rapid technological development and the horrors of the World War, this paradigm of literary criticism created seemingly essential links between questions of ethics, literature and criticism (Eaglestone 17, 14) Since then, this "universal" claim of literature to ethical significance became insecure. During the history of literary criticism "both the humanist ethics and the way in which those ethics can underlie a critical practice, have come into question." (Eaglestone 10) For example Gauri Viswanathan pointed out that "English literature" and "literary studies" as a subject has a colonial history of being "a vital, active instrument of western hegemony" in the early nineteenth century (Viswanathan 199, quoted by Eaglestone 14), by relying ideologically on its "civilizing values" (Eaglestone 15). It seems, then, that modernist criticism is determined through and

through by this colonial legacy, hinting that from such a historical perspective its ethical grounding can be radically questioned. The other challenge to this critical tradition came from "theory"—that is, mostly deconstructive criticism—as it laid bare the theoretical and methodological assumptions and inconsistencies of the late heirs of the modernist critical paradigm, which related "literature back to humanistic concerns, since their understanding of literature is a reflection of their own humanism." (Eaglestone 21) Eaglestone identifies one of the underlying critical assumptions of this paradigm in "its straightforward understanding of language and the problem of reference" (Eaglestone 27). Language for them, unlike deconstruction, is a clear medium through which literature can engage with the outside world. They assumed that "the realm of ethics is separate from the realm of the aesthetic, or from works of literature" and the transition from the textual to the ethical is unproblematic and self-evident (Eaglestone 30).

Eaglestone regards the ethical criticism of Martha Nussbaum as a neo-Aristotelian way of renegotiating "the modernist, humanist critical paradigm" (Eaglestone 30-31). Her oeuvre shares the modernist assumptions about language in that it ignores "the very textuality of text" and assumes "a clear referentiality." (Eaglestone 93) Following Denis Donoghue, Eaglestone calls this type of reading peculiar to modernist critics as 'epi-reading': "For an epi-reader, language is transparent, a window through which the world of people, actions and events can be seen." (Eaglestone 3) Epi-reading, just like prosopopeia, "is predicated on the desire to hear … the absent person" and it "moves swiftly from print and language to speech and voice and the present person" (quoted by Eaglestone 3). As opposed to Nussbaum, whose critical practice presupposed a continuity between ethics and literary criticism, "deconstructive criticism appeared to exclude this ethical base of literary criticism," and sought to show that oversimplifying "assumptions based on referential structures," like history, ethics and politics "were deeply problematic." (Eaglestone 66) For example J. Hillis Miller offered a different perspective of the relationship between literature, criticism and ethics, which, however, "explored only the textuality of the text," "denying the validity or even the possibility of reference outside the text" (Eaglestone 93).[54] The critical method

[54] It is important to note, however, that "Miller is not denying the importance of political engagement, but he is insisting that before this engagement can take place, there is the ethical obligation to read." (Eaglestone 67) And to read is to face the contingencies of rhetoric that seem to shatter any historical scheme, which led some scholars to claim that deconstructive criticism "paralyses political or other forms of action" (Eaglestone 74), and ultimately to accuse deconstructive critics of "nihilism" (Kulcsár-Szabó 201, cf. Eaglestone 67), even though, as a letter to Wlad Godzich shows, de Man regarded for example history his "main and ever-recurrent concern" (Waters lxxiii, cf. Godzich xvii and Kulcsár-Szabó 201) that kept disappearing and reappearing throughout his oeuvre. One of the most memorable example of reading as opposed to history occurs in the preface to *Allegories of Reading*, which "started out as a historical study and ended up as a theory of reading." De Man found himself "unable to progress beyond local difficulties of interpretation. In trying to cope with this, I had to shift from historical definition to the problematics of reading." (de Man *Allegories* ix)

exemplified by Miller is referred to by Eaglestone as graphi-reading, as it "prioritises language, text and reading over a nostalgia for the human and seeks to engage with texts 'in their virtuality' […] it represents, in Geoffrey Hartman's words, 'the eclipse of voice by text'." (Eaglestone 4) If we connected epi-reading with prosopopeia, we might think of graphi-reading as "defacement," Paul de Man's concept that narrates the impossibility of moving from text directly to anthropomorphic substance.

In Eaglestone's view, for an ethically driven contemporary literary criticism, neither 'epi-reading,' which appears to exclude language, nor 'graphi-reading,' which seems to exclude reference, is sufficient. He offers the complex ethical philosophy of Emmanuel Levinas as a counterpoint to this impasse exemplified by the modernist paradigm and deconstructive criticism, claiming that "Levinas's work shows how the ethical signifies in language" (Eaglestone 94) and literature.[55] In Eaglestone's reading, Levinas's philosophy responds to the imperative of language as well as of reference, offering fascinating ways of renewing our critical practice. However, I think that the synecdochical logic that Eaglestone employs (Miller is the only example from deconstructive criticism) fails to account for how the generation after de Man changed deconstruction. From the end of the 1980s on, deconstructive criticism also tried to rethink its relationship to ethics, reference, politics or history, resulting in volumes like *Critical Encounters: Reference and Responsibility in Deconstructive Writing* (1995) edited by Caruth and Deborah Esch.[56] In the light of recent discussions of de Man's texts (for example Zoltán Kulcsár-Szabó's monograph), these issues have always been in the center of his attention and it is in terms of his rhetorical theory that Caruth and Felman grasped the experience of trauma and the Holocaust, demonstrating a continuity in the history of deconstructive criticism, and resulting in the field that we now call

[55] However, Eaglestone warns us that "ethical criticism" seems "meaningless" (Eaglestone 124) if we regard Levinas's "deep-seated antipathy to art" Eaglestone 98) and his distrust of representation in general (Eaglestone 110), making his theories not directly applicable "to the interpretations of works of art" (Eaglestone 99). In "Reality and its Shadow" and *Totality and Infinity: An Essay on Exteriority*, "ethics stem from the face-to-face relationship, guaranteed by an assumption of presence." (Eaglestone 99) It is this presence that seems to be lacking in art: "as an objectless image," art "pertains not to truth and objects, but to a strange non-truth" (Eaglestone 107), it "opens to the inhuman," and is therefore "secondary and parasitic" (Eaglestone 110). In *Otherwise than Being*, art still cannot partake of the ethical saying, as Levinas regards "the non-saying of art as an example of the 'pure said', with no reference to the saying" (Eaglestone 155), so at the level of statements, his philosophy would still "resist any attempt to relate criticism to ethics." (Eaglestone 156) In Eaglestone's view, the way Levinas treats art and aesthetics has its certain blind spots, which could open up his theory to give way to an ethical criticism. This blind spot occurs when in *Otherwise than Being* Levinas is criticizing Martin Heidegger for writing like a poet, which critique is interrupted by a voice: "Only the meaning of the other is irrecusable, and forbids the reclusion and reentry into the shell of the self. A voice comes from the other shore. A voice interrupts the saying of the already said." (quoted by Eaglestone, 157) This moment is crucial for at least two reasons: the voice can be recognized as a literary allusion to Hamlet; and the very fact that the self is addressed by the voice of the other. This literary allusion occurs when Levinas's text has just condemned Heidegger for writing in a literary style, which gesture reveals a blind spot about literature in his philosophy, enabling literature to partake of the ethical saying.

[56] It must be added that this rethinking took place partly through the first serious encounters with Levinas: Jill Robbins's contribution to *Critical Encounters* happens to be a treatise on Levinasian ethical philosophy.

"trauma theory."[57] As Ortwin de Graef observes, "Caruth's trauma theory embraces the ethical register never quite assumed—nor, importantly, denied—in de Man's work" (de Graef "Instance" 251), which observation, I believe, applies equally to Felman.[58] De Graef writes that

> trauma theory redeems the liminal promise of ethical substance left gratuitously suspended in hardcore textualist deconstruction by using the resistance to understanding documented with such perverse perseverance in the rhetorical readings of canonical texts as a matrix for the non-understanding of trauma. (de Graef "Instance" 252)

It is through the double perspective of psychoanalytical inquiry and rhetorical theory that trauma theory invented itself in the beginning of the 1990s and took both deconstructive criticism and psychoanalysis "beyond" themselves to be able respond properly to questions of ethics, reference, politics or history and to formulate a powerful alternative to Levinasian philosophy within the framework of the "ethical turn."

[57] Both Felman and Laub's *Testimony* as well as Caruth's *Unclaimed Experience – Trauma, Narrative, and History* (1996) include an important chapter on de Man. Felman even connects de Man's notion of the "impossibility of reading" to the effect of the Holocaust on his theories (Felman and Laub 140): "de Man keeps reiterating, and demands that we keep facing, the historical impossibility of reading (or the Holocaust) as an unredeemable scandal of injustice and of injury." (Felman and Laub 152) Looking back on his wartime journalism, de Man must also have discovered "the inescapable, pervasive way in which ideological coercion is surreptitiously built into language, into the very discourse one is inadvertently employing and the very writing of which one believes oneself to be the author." (Felman and Laub 139)

[58] Dominick LaCapra is on the same opinion too: "her version of trauma theory, as well as Shoshana Felman's, may itself be interpreted as an intricate displacement and disguise of the de Manian variant of deconstruction. […] In this view (close to Lacan's), the real or the literal is traumatic, inaccessible, and inherently incomprehensible or unrepresentable; it can only be represented or addressed indirectly in figurative or allegorical terms that necessarily distort and betray it." (LaCapra *Writing* 107, footnote 20) He also thinks that "The key notion of »unreadability« is now construed in terms of trauma." (LaCapra *Writing* 184, footnote 3), which quotes are to be read more of a critique than a compliment. LaCapra suggests that "One may question the extent to which Caruth's version of trauma theory, as an ambitious rewriting of de Manian deconstruction, is able to get beyond the repetition compulsion other than through allegories of excess, incomprehensibility, and empty utopian hope." (LaCapra *Memory* 208, footnote 22) Susannah Radstone also thinks that "Within the Humanities […] deconstruction was one of the theories which, along with these clinical developments, most shaped the emergence of trauma theory. Its influence can be traced through repeated references to the work of Paul de Man (Caruth's erstwhile teacher) throughout Caruth's *Unclaimed Experience* as well as through a chapter devoted to him in Felman and Laub's *Testimony: Crises of Witnessing in Literature, Psychoanalysis and History*. To put things at their simplest, trauma theory appears to help the Humanities move beyond the impasses and crises in knowledge posed by these theories, without abandoning their insights. Trauma theory promises, that is, not a way round the difficulties presented by these theories, but a way through and beyond them." (Radstone 11)

Co-authored with Dori Laub,[59] Felman's *Testimony: Crises of Witnessing in Literature, Psychoanalysis, and History* elaborates on questions of reference, representation, history, trauma and the Holocaust. *Testimony* was an immensely influential book in the 1990s, creating, together with Caruth's *Unclaimed Experience*, a whole new discourse for literary and cultural criticism (cf. Goodhart 203, Radstone 9). In Petar Ramadanovic's view, "While Felman is not the first to use this term in the context of literary and cultural studies," in this book, "trauma is formulated into one of the fundamental concepts of this field." (Ramadanovic "Introduction" footnote 1) The inception of this new theoretical field was all the more important as it created a new discourse in which the complex relationship between literature, history, witnessing and testimony could be reformulated with the help of psychoanalysis as well as deconstruction.

Many theorists think about the Holocaust as a unique event in history (Braun 40), the "unrepresentable" par excellence, and associate it with the (negative) sublime (LaCapra *Writing* 190, LaCapra *Memory* 2, footnote 3, LaCapra *Representing* xi, Berger 573). It constituted an event that ultimately defies understanding and can only be inscribed into historical narratives in the form of disruption, silence; nevertheless it insists to be represented if we are to integrate it into our history and learn its possible lessons (van Alphen 12) to be able to keep on living. Similarly, for trauma survivors, it is of great importance to represent their stories in a coherent narrative that resituates them within the symbolic order that the overwhelming experience seemed to shatter altogether. It is precisely from this perspective that (legal or artistic) testimonies, autobiographies or diaries receive a crucial role in the process of recuperation. These modes of writing, in Ernst van Alphen's view, seem to provide a "directness" of experience that was precluded by the traumatic situation (van Alphen 11), the most sinister characteristic of which was that it resulted in a "collapse of witnessing" (Felman and Laub 80), robbing its victims of a language (Felman *Juridical* 125) or a voice that would have been able to integrate the event's impact. Felman reclaims this lost voice of the witness and the survivor through art and literature. These modes of discourse contribute to the reestablishment of subjectivity, which is no longer captured by the traumatic repetition of the past (van Alphen 14).

[59] Michael Berenbaum argues that "The book is neither a work of collaboration nor a joint effort. Instead, each of the seven essays is written by one of the authors." (Berenbaum 93) I would agree here with Sara R. Horowitz's interpretive stance, who considers primarily Felman "as the author of the book": "Although nominally co-authored, *Testimony* is essentially Felman's, who penned five of its seven chapters; Laub's two more narrowly focused essays are interpolated within her larger oeuvre. Both authors sign the »Forward, « but its tone and scope more closely resemble the style and content of Felman's chapters." (Horowitz 66, footnote 9)

Various artists, philosophers and critics pointed out the paradoxes involved in transforming the Holocaust into art, suffering into aesthetics (van Alphen 3, 16). For example Elie Wiesel claims that "There is no such things as a literature of the Holocaust, nor can there be. The very expression is a contradiction in terms. Auschwitz negates any form of literature, as it defies all systems, all doctrines" (Wiesel 314). Or we might think of Theodor W. Adorno's famous dictum that "To write poetry after Auschwitz is barbaric. And this corrodes even the knowledge of why it has become impossible to write poetry today." (Adorno "Cultural" 23) In Adorno's view, "The aesthetic principle of stylization" makes "an unthinkable fate appear to have had some meaning; it is transfigured, something of its horror is removed. This alone does an injustice to the victims" (Adorno "Commitment" 61).[60] Despite what Wiesel and Adorno write, I think Felman's concept of literature, or as she calls it, *la chose littéraire*, the "literary thing" might provide a useful critical tool in understanding what is at stake in the dialogue the author creates between deconstruction and trauma theory. For both Felman and Caruth, literature is very important, because, as Dominick LaCapra argues, "literature in its very excess can somehow get at trauma in a manner unavailable to theory" (LaCapra *Writing* 183).

Testimony is a unique contribution to trauma theory as it offers "an alternation of a literary and a clinical perspective," using literature and psychoanalysis as two "separate, yet complementary fields of endeavor" (Felman and Laub xiii), which "have come to contaminate and to enrich" (Felman and Laub 15), as well as mutually illuminate and displace each other during their intertwined history (Felman *Question* 9). Even though the new preface to *Writing and Madness* claims that "the quest for literature is replaced by, or rather is subordinated to, the question for history (the quest for legal facts and for historical events)" (Felman *Madness* 5), literature and art still has a special place in this critical endeavor, since they are conceptualized by Felman and Laub "as a precocious mode of witnessing—of accessing reality—when all other modes of knowledge are precluded" and the book tries to demonstrate "the uniqueness of experience in the face of its theorization, and of the shock of the unintelligible in the face of the attempt at its interpretation" (Felman and Laub xx). This insight into the role of art and literature in the face of trauma and the Holocaust echoes Adorno again, who later refined his famous statements and admitted that "it is now virtually in art alone that suffering can still find its voice, consolation, without immediately being betrayed by it." (Adorno "Commitment" 61) Through the literary imagination we may relate

[60] LaCapra thinks that "Adorno's famous and often misunderstood comment about the barbarity of writing poetry after Auschwitz is itself best seen not as a *Verbot* (prohibition) but as a statement concerning the difficulty of legitimate creation and renewal in a posttraumatic condition, and it is also better applied to the role of the imagination as well as its interactions with memory than to poetry in any generic or delimited sense." (LaCapra *Memory* 181)

to another's suffering, but literature can also contain in itself something of the resistance to understanding that is frequently referred to in theories about the Holocaust: writing about Albert Camus's *The Plague*, Felman claims that "Literature bears testimony not just to duplicate or to record events, but to make history available to the imaginative act whose historical unavailability has prompted, and made possible, a holocaust." (Felman and Laub 108)

Felman clearly associates the literary thing with the inherent rhetorical nature of language, arguing that the *rhetorical act* par excellence is what "generates the specificity of the thing called literature" (Felman *Madness* 27). In her introductory essay to the collection of texts trying to reinvent the relationship between psychoanalysis and literature, Felman also argues that "There is one crucial feature which is constitutive of literature but is essentially lacking […] in theory as such: irony." (Felman *Question* 8) Irony becomes a distinctive feature of the literary as opposed to theory, and this rhetorical residue attributed to irony demands much critical attention.[61] I believe that Felman's concept of irony being a characteristic of *la chose littéraire* draws upon de Man's texts on the topic. In contrast to New Criticism, which saw irony as a stabilizing factor contributing to the understanding of texts (Brooks "Irony" 732-733), de Man regards irony as a paradigmatic example of the complications involved in rhetoric. Probably his two most memorable texts about irony are "The Rhetoric of Temporality" and "The Concept of Irony," which reveal their central rhetorical figure in different theoretical constellations, both of which seem to have proved important for the inception of trauma theory. "The Rhetoric of Temporality" discusses irony in connection with allegory (Antal 104), and focuses on a crucial moment within Charles Baudelaire's "On the Essence of Laughter": "the spectacle of a man tripping and falling into the street" (de Man *Blindness* 211) resulting in a duplication within consciousness. Writing about this notion of "*dédoublement*," de Man observes that "The ironic language splits the subject into an empirical self that exists in a state of inauthenticity and a self that exists only in the form of a language that asserts the knowledge of this inauthenticity." (de Man

[61] Both contemporary literary theory and literature reserves a crucial role for *irony* in our "understanding" of trauma and the experience of the Holocaust. For example Martin Amis's *Time's Arrow* employs a temporal reversal of a Holocaust narrative, while Tadeusz Borowksi's *This Way to the Gas Ladies and Gentlemen* and Imre Kertész's *Sorstalanság* uses the grotesque and the ironic to show these events in their very "meaninglessness." These texts not only consciously draw upon and refer to the traditional anti-fascist approach authors used to talk about the Holocaust, and in doing so, they radically estrange that discourse, which also contributes to the cultural construction of national identity as well. (Szirák 54, 73-74, Morse 215, van Alphen 2) The novels' narrative techniques lead to the narrators' failure to fully understand the events, which results in the text's bracketing of direct historical reference. Yet, it is through these failed acts of understandings, or misfires that these novels and stories speak about "the nature of the offence" (the phrase comes from Primo Levi's *The Drowned and the Saved* and acts as an "alternative title" to *Time's Arrow*), which, in van Alphen's view, was in excess of the anti-fascist narrative provided by Levi, Jorge Semprun, or Steven Spielberg's *Schindler's List* (van Alphen 3).

Blindness 214) The fall thus becomes a historical event, the impact of which divides the self into a "fallen" empirical self and its self-reflexive linguistic counterpart. Kevin Newmark's "Traumatic Poetry: Charles Baudelaire and the Shock of Laughter" suggests that it is possible to see this self-reflexivity as a "key that allows the conscious subject to move away from the experience of shock by reintegrating it into a stable understanding of it" (Newmark "Traumatic" 248), providing an essentially modernist reading of the scene (Antal 107). Yet, in a more pessimistic reading, this fall that results in a "perpetual shock" of laughter (Newmark "Traumatic" 242) can be seen more of a paradigm of trauma, which "signals the breakdown of our ability to maintain the perspectival distinctions we ordinarily make between the inside of an empirical experience and the outside of an analytic cognition of it" (Newmark "Traumatic" 248). The experience of trauma as conceptualized by contemporary trauma theory simply does not allow such a stable differentiation to emerge. Similarly to Newmark, Caruth's *Unclaimed Experience* also interprets the figure of falling within de Man's texts as an allegory of the impact of reference (Caruth *Unclaimed* 74), which her texts reconceptualize on the theoretical model of trauma (Caruth "Insistence" 3, cf. LaCapra *Writing* 76 and LaCapra *Memory* 111).

In "The Concept of Irony" de Man moves beyond seeing irony "solely as a principle of consciousness and self-reflexivity" (Newmark "Traumatic" 249, cf. Antal 114) and regards it as a rhetorical allegory narrating the (im)possibility of understanding (Antal 117). De Man ponders "what if irony is always of understanding, […] if what is at stake in irony is always the question of whether it is possible to understand or not to understand?" (de Man *Aesthetic* 166) to later arrive to a Schlegelian definition of irony as "the permanent parabasis of the allegory of tropes" (de Man *Aesthetic* 179), which seems like a restatement of the final lines of *Allegories of Reading* claiming that "Irony is no longer a trope but the undoing of the deconstructive allegory of all tropological cognitions, the systematic undoing, in other words, of understanding. As such, far from closing off the tropological system irony enforces the repetition of its aberration." (de Man *Allegories* 301) In these texts, irony thus becomes a paradigmatic example of the aberrations rhetoric, resulting in aporias of understanding.

A similar notion of irony and rhetoric also echoes in how Caruth conceptualizes literature as "a language that defies, even as it claims, our understanding" (Caruth *Unclaimed* 5):

> literature, like psychoanalysis, is interested in the complex relation between knowing and not knowing. And it is, indeed at the specific point at which knowing and not

> knowing intersect that the language of literature and the psychoanalytic theory of traumatic experience precisely meet (Caruth *Unclaimed* 3).

Ramadanovic would seem to agree with Caruth as he thinks that

> What makes literature into the privileged, but not the only, site of trauma is the fact that literature as an art form can contain and present an aspect of experience which was not experienced or processed fully. Literature, in other words, because of its sensible and representational character, because of its figurative language, is a channel and a medium for a transmission of trauma which does not need to be apprehended in order to be present in a text or, to use Felman's and Dori Laub's term, in order to be witnessed. What is thus also presented through a text is a certain truth about history that is not otherwise available. (Ramadanovic "Introduction" 2)

This not knowing that Felman, Caruth and Ramadanovic refer to always resides in the literary text as a linguistic excess: it is this residue to meaning which is linked to the non-understanding encountered in traumatic experience (de Graef "Instance" 252). There is surprising common choice of words between how theory talks about trauma and rhetoric: Nadine Fresco has termed the experience of trauma as "the gaping, *vertiginous* black hole" (quoted by Felman and Laub 64, emphasis added), while de Man argues that "Rhetoric radically suspends logic and opens up *vertiginous* possibilities of referential aberration" (de Man *Allegories* 10, emphasis added). This vertigo where stable structures of meanings are undone is a point where trauma theory and rhetorical deconstruction meet: rhetoric is structured as trauma, while trauma is structured rhetorically. Trauma theory thus marks a point around which deconstructive and psychoanalytic notions of literature, rhetoric, understanding and history converge, which might even suggest—given how de Man observed at the end of "The Concept of Irony" that "Irony and history seem to be curiously linked to each other" (de Man *Aesthetic* 184)—that trauma theory is a version of the exploration into the relationship between rhetoric and history that de Man could never fully complete himself.

The Recuperation of the Other

Trauma theory thus demonstrates that our understanding of the Holocaust is inevitably filtered through questions of rhetoric. However, according Péter Szirák and Anna Menyhért, the historical occurrence of the event was always already bound up with various rhetorical

procedures of deception (Szirák 41, 54, Menyhért 73-74). Felman claims that the aim of this Nazi scheme of deception was to make the Jews

> essentially invisible. To make the Jews invisible not merely by killing them, not merely by confining them to "camouflaged," invisible death camps, but by reducing even the materiality of the dead bodies to smoke and ashes, and by reducing, furthermore, the radical opacity of the *sight* of the dead bodies, as well as the linguistic referentiality and literality of the *word* "corpse," to the transparency of a pure form and to the pure rhetorical metaphoricity of a mere *figure*: a disembodied verbal substitute which signified abstractly the linguistic law of infinite exchangeability and substitutability. The dead bodies are thus verbally rendered invisible, and voided both of substance and of specificity, by being treated, in the Nazi jargon, as *Figuren*: that which, all at once, *cannot be seen* and can be *seen through*. (Felman and Laub 209-210)

Instead of a name, inmates of death camps were given numbers. Devoid of literality, even their corpses became figures, exposing this kind of language as a site of violence, defacement and foreclosure. A dismantling of this deceptive Nazi rhetoric in the form of testimony, thus, is also a way of recovering these bodies from the void of invisibility, offering recuperation, a regaining of subjectivity within the symbolic order.[62] This movement also takes the shape of a rhetorical figure, that of prosopopeia, where the *face* of the *Figuren* is restored by language. This view of prosopopeia, then, is different from the one that she conceptualizes in *What Does a Woman Want?*, where the rhetorical figure is condemned for being bound up with the political structures of representation: speaking in the name of someone mutes and erases those subjects from discourse (Felman *Woman* 14). In the context of trauma theory, prosopopeia gains an ethical dimension perhaps partly deriving from Levinas's conceptualization of the face as "the relation with the other" constituting "the essential moment of ethics" (Eaglestone 117, 121, cf. Critchley *Ethics* 5, Robbins 139). Prosopopeia becomes a strategy of recuperation, the recovery of the face of the other from forgetting. It is this forgetting that art and literature as testimony is trying to overcome:

[62] Such bodies often seem to haunt the texts of de Man as well as Felman: with reference to "Shelley Disfigured"—"The final test of reading, in the Triumph of Life, depends on how one reads the textuality of this event, how one disposes of Shelley's body." (de Man *Rhetoric* 121)—, and de Man's reading of Walter Benjamin's "The Task of the Translator," Felman argues that "The task of the translator […] is to read the textuality of the original event *without disposing of the body*, without reducing the original event to a false transparency of sense." (Felman and Laub 158)

> The literature of testimony, therefore, is not simply a statement (any statement can but lag behind events), but a performative *engagement* between consciousness and history, a struggling act of readjustment between the integrative scope of words and the unintegrated impact of events. (Felman and Laub 114)

Literature is thus always performative in the sense that it tries to incorporate into language that which resists it. Felman defines traumatic experience as caused by "occurrences that have not settled into understanding or remembrance, acts that cannot be constructed as knowledge nor assimilated into full cognition, events in excess of our frames of reference." (Felman and Laub 5, cf. van Alphen 44, LaCapra *Memory* 2, footnote 3) As trauma is not available "self-transparently" to cognition, she argues that testimony as a "performative speech act" can reveal "the bits and pieces of a memory overwhelmed" by such occurrences, but can never offer "a completed statement, a totalizable account of those events."[63] (Felman and Laub 5)

"Education and Crisis, or the Vicissitudes of Teaching" also demonstrates that because of this excess in language, the outcomes of reading (or witnessing) texts of trauma can never be fully planned ahead: just like trauma testimonies, they often transmit their message to their readers in the form of an ungraspable experience or knowledge that is governed yet again by the structure of trauma (cf. Forter 262). Laub explains that this characteristic of witnessing trauma narratives is already known to psychoanalysts: "the listener to trauma comes to be a participant and co-owner of the traumatic event: through his very listening, he comes to partially experience the trauma in himself." (Felman and Laub 57) LaCapra also warns about this implication of the listener, or historian in the stories they listen to and ascribes it to the psychoanalytic notion of transference (LaCapra *Writing* 87, 192, LaCapra *Memory* 11-12, 41, LaCapra *Representing* xii, Braun 25) that Felman's early texts conceptualize as the general frame of reference in which any reading takes place.

We might interpret the story of Felman's students—which is also a story of transference—as the "primal scene" of the book, and as an allegory of essays and books written in response to the Holocaust. Having watched a videotape of testimonies of survivors, the students of her class about witnessing and testimony "looked subdued and kept their silence even as they left. That in itself is not unusual either. What was unusual was that the experience did not end in silence, but instead, fermented into endless and relentless talking in the days and weeks to come" (Felman and Laub 47). The class was going through a crisis and

[63] Felman later translates this individual notion of trauma into a historical framework: "The event (the Plague—, the Holocaust) occurs […] as what is not provided for by the conceptual framework we call »History,« and as what, in general has no place in, and therefore cannot be assimilated by or integrated into, any existing cultural frame of reference." (Felman and Laub 104)

Felman had to seek the counsel of Laub, who advised that Felman should "reassume authority as the teacher of the class and bring the students back into significance." (Felman and Laub 48) She explained to them that

> The significance of the event of your viewing of the first Holocaust videotape was, not unlike Celan's own Holocaust experience, something akin to a loss of language; and even though you came out of it with a deep need to talk about it and to talk it out, you also felt that language was somehow incommensurate with it. (Felman and Laub 50)

Basically literary as well as the philosophical works written about the Holocaust emerge from this problem of language being radically incommensurate with the event. "*Language was »all that remained«*" (Felman and Laub 50), but it failed to give means to authentically communicate the horrors that the event brought about.[64]

This loss of language did not leave post-Holocaust literature or poetry unaffected either: in Felman's view, "one has to conceive of the world of the Holocaust as a world in which the very imagination of the Other was no longer possible" (Felman and Laub 81).[65] One of the most shattering examples of a poem trying to grasp the meaning of the Holocaust was Paul Celan's "Todesfuge," which in Felman's reading is shown to be "contingent upon various forms of apostrophe and of address," (Felman and Laub 32) and which locates "the very essence of the violence, and the very essence of the Holocaust" in the inability of the persona to address the other (Felman and Laub 33), the "*executioner*, *commandant* and *maestro*" (Felman and Laub 38). Very much like how Johnson reads the political and legal dilemmas about abortion as being contingent upon apostrophe, Felman realizes the ethical stakes of this rhetorical figure in the face of the Holocaust too: the "I" can no longer apostrophize the Other, initiating the breakdown of aesthetics as well as the deconstruction of the fabric of the self:

> There was no longer an other to which once could say "Thou" in the hope of being heard, of being recognized as a subject, of being answered. The historical reality of the

[64] Laub also found that "The survivors did not only need to survive so that they could tell their story; they also needed to tell their story in order to survive. […] This imperative to tell and to be heard can become itself an all-consuming life task. Yet no amount of telling seems ever to do justice to this inner compulsion. There are never enough words or the right words, there is never enough time or the right time, and never enough listening or the right listening to articulate the story that cannot be fully captured in thought, memory and speech. The pressure thus continues unremittingly, and if words are not trustworthy or adequate, the life that is chosen can become the vehicle by which the struggle to tell continues." (Felman and Laub 78)

[65] In a psychoanalytical context, Laub also talks about the problems stemming from "The absence of an empathic listener, or more radically, the absence of an *addressable other*, an other who can hear the anguish of one's memories and thus affirm and recognize their realness" (Felman and Laub 68).

> Holocaust became, thus, a reality which extinguished philosophically the very possibility of address, the possibility of appealing, or of turning to, another. But when one cannot turn to a "you" once cannot say "thou" even to oneself. […] one's identity ceases to exist as well. (Felman and Laub 82)

Celan faced this breakdown of poetry and the persona in its own ways: "As an event directed toward the recreation of »thou,« poetry becomes, precisely, the event of *creating an address* for the specificity of a historical experience which annihilated any possibility of address." (Felman and Laub 38) The "literature of testimony" (be it poetry, prose, or even philosophy or theory) tries to counteract the silence brought about by the decomposition of the aesthetic by restoring the face of the victimized through prosopopeia, and the linguistic creation of an addressable other through apostrophe, so that they can address us, and tell us about our ethical obligations. Giving a face—that which exceeds the idea of the other in the self (Critchley *Ethics* 5)—and a voice by art, that is, through prosopopeia and apostrophe, that it might address us in return, seems the ultimate ethical imperative that Felman extracts from the experience of trauma and the Holocaust.

The notion of prosopopeia as the recuperation of the other from the realm of forgetting and apostrophe as an address to the self also becomes crucial for Caruth as well. In "The Wound and the Voice," the introductory chapter to *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative, and History* (1996), Caruth cites Freud's example of the repetition compulsion from *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, which stages a similar interpretation of these rhetorical figures:

> The most moving poetic picture of a fate such as this can be found in the story told by Tasso in his romantic epic *Gerusalemme Liberata*. Its hero, Tancred, unwittingly kills his beloved Clorinda in a duel while she is disguised in the armour of an enemy knight. After her burial he makes his way into a strange magic forest which strikes the Crusaders' army with terror. He slashes with his sword at a tall tree; but blood streams from the cut and the voice of Clorinda, whose soul is imprisoned in the tree, is heard complaining that he has wounded his beloved once again. (Freud "Beyond" 293, quoted by Caruth *Unclaimed* 2)

After "unwittingly" killing her in a duel, Tancred reencounters his beloved Clorinda in the form of a living tree brought to life by personification to force the knight recognize the meaning of the violence he has committed earlier. Caruth's reading foregrounds her voice,

"the moving and sorrowful voice that cries out, a voice that is paradoxically released *through the wound*" (Caruth *Unclaimed* 2) that addresses Tancred and "bears witness to the past he has unwittingly repeated." (Caruth *Unclaimed* 3) It becomes Tancred's burden, then, to listen carefully to the plea of the victimized other, who talks about the offense he has committed. The parable of Tancred and Clorinda, however, can also be interpreted as a parable of deconstruction and "the return of history" that took place after the discovery of de Man's wartime journalism, which made deconstructive criticism face a history of violence it was not consciously aware of. Trauma theory exemplifies in my reading that deconstruction could reinvent itself by carefully listening to the "wound" talking about the "guilt of deconstruction" that will be dealt with in greater detail on the following pages.

THE RETURN OF HISTORY IN FELMAN, JOHNSON AND CARUTH

The interest in history and reference in Shoshana Felman and Dori Laub's *Testimony: Crises of Witnessing in Literature, Psychoanalysis, and History* can best be described through the rhetorical figure of a chiasmus: it strives to "contextualize the text" as well as "textualize the context" (Felman and Laub xv). The authors argue that

> If our readings […] thus extend, indeed, not merely to the texts themselves but to the intellectual, political, historical and biographical context of their actual production, it is not, however, so as to return, once again, to the purely academic "mirror-games" between "novel" and "life" and to the traditional, all-too-familiar critical accounts of the mutual "reflection" (or "representation") between "history" and "text." It is rather, and more challengingly, so as to attempt to see—in an altogether different and exploratory light—how issues of biography and history are neither simply represented nor simply reflected, but are reinscribed, translated, radically rethought and fundamentally worked over by the text. In order to gain insight into the significance and impact of the context on the text, the empirical context needs not just to be *known*, but to be *read*; to be read in conjunction with, and as part of, the reading of the text. We thus propose to show how the basic and legitimate critical demand for *contextualization of the text* itself needs to be complemented, simultaneously, by the less familiar and yet necessary work of *textualization of the context*; and how this shuttle movement or this shuttle reading in the critic's work—the very *tension between textualization and contextualization*—might yield new avenues of insight, both into the texts at stake and into their context—the political, historical, and biographical realities with which the texts are dynamically involved and within which their particular creative possibilities are themselves inscribed. (Felman and Laub xiv-xv)

Similarly to J. Hillis Miller, Felman and Laub examine "the relation of literature to history" as "a problem, not a solution" (Miller *Pygmalion* 33, cf. Eaglestone 83), and emphasize the need to read not only the text itself, separately from the historical context to point out the general functioning of language, but to read the text in conjunction with the context, and, at the same time, to read the context textually. The text evokes the image of the *shuttle* that Felman used as a self-metaphor of her *Writing and Madness* which tried to talk from the double perspective of Lacanian psychoanalysis and Paul de Man's rhetorical deconstruction (Felman *Madness*

20). Just like Barbara Johnson demonstrated how certain "political problems are based on rhetorical structures or are thoroughly shaped and overdetermined by rhetorical structures" (Johnson *Wake* 81-82), *Testimony* weaves together the rhetorical reading of the text with an analysis of the context, "an encounter with the real," "the events and implications of contemporary history" (Felman and Laub xvi).

The chiasm evoked by Felman and Laub seems to echo the task of literary criticism conceptualized in New Historicism, which came into existence as a counterpoint to "the formalism of the deconstructive approach and the positivism of the old historicism" (Hohendahl 87), a reaction to "poststructuralism and deconstruction, whose formal strategies appeared arid and predictable" (Kaes 148).[66] In "Professing the Renaissance: The Poetics and Politics of Culture," Louis A. Montrose also formulates in a chiasm the most important interpretive strategy used by this new trend in reading: they pay attention to both "The Historicity of Texts and the Textuality of History" (Montrose 23, cf. Szélpál 138, Kaes 148, Greenblatt 20). In Stephen Greenblatt's view, New Historicists'

> concern with literary texts has been to recover as far as possible the historical circumstances of their original production and consumption and to analyze the relationship between these circumstances and our own. New-historicist critics have tried to understand the intersecting circumstances not as a stable, prefabricated background against which the literary texts can be placed but as a dense network of evolving and often contradictory social forces. The idea is not to find outside the work of art some rock onto which literary interpretation can be securely chained but rather to situate the work in relation to other representational practices operative in the culture at a given moment in both its history and our own. (Greenblatt 20)

As opposed to "old historicism,"[67] this new way of seeing the dynamics between textuality and historicity does not view history as a "stable, prefabricated background," or a "some rock," which could explain the text, as there exists "a dynamic, unstable, and reciprocal

[66] While New Historicism might be a counterpoint to deconstructive criticism, as Peter Uwe Hohendahl reminds us, it was also conceptualized partly with the help of New Marxist and poststructuralist practices, including Foucauldian historiography and Derridean deconstruction (Hohendahl 90-91). In fact, Carolyn Porter argues that deconstructive criticism, "the American brand of »deconstruction« centered at Yale defanged the monster of Derridean theory, anesthetizing its political threat and appropriating its fertile analytic power for a reproduction of the formalist program" (Porter 256) inherited from New Criticism that New Historicism challenged (Kaes 150).

[67] Hohendahl sees this classical historicist stance as involving a belief that "history can be presented as the acts of individual subjects who are related to and dominated by an absolute subject. This assumption allows the historian to reconstruct past events as *meaningful* since they come together in a unified narrative called *history*." (Hohendahl 90)

relationship between the discursive and material domains." (Montrose 23) This is a two-way process of representation and displacement, the interplay of which might yield surprisingly new ways of seeing certain textual or historical occurrences.

While Miller in his 1986 MLA Presidential address polarized the "linguistic and the social," Montrose emphasizes "their reciprocity and mutual constitution" (Montrose 15, cf. Hohendahl 98). I believe that the change from Miller's stance that separated the textual and the historical, to Felman's recognition of their reciprocity in the preface to *Testimony* was brought about by the infamous de Man case, which made deconstructive criticism face a history that it was not aware of.[68] This "return of history" as trauma, the discovery of de Man's wartime journalism, started a feverish rush to reconceptualize deconstruction's relationship to history, on the one hand, through tracing the notion of history offered by de Man's texts, on the other hand, through appropriating the dynamics between textuality and historicity offered by New Historicism, and it resulted in the inception of the new field of inquiry, trauma studies, which visualized history on the model of trauma.

Apart from the appropriating of New Historicist concept of the relationship between textuality and historicity, this interpretative mode in *Testimony* is also heir to the example offered by de Man's "Shelley Disfigured," which argues that reference is always already inscribed onto the text as a traumatic "non-event," yet which inevitably shapes both the text and its reception:

> The decisive textual articulation: its reduction to the status of a fragment brought about by the actual death and subsequent disfigurement of Shelley's body, burned after his boat capsized and he drowned off the coast of Lerici. This defaced body is present in the margin of the last manuscript page and has become an inseparable part of the poem. At this point, figuration and cognition are actually interrupted by an event which shapes the text but which is not present in its represented or articulated meaning. It may seem a freak of chance to have a text thus molded by an actual occurrence, yet the reading of *The Triumph of Life* establishes that this mutilated textual model exposes the wound of a fracture that lies hidden in all text.[69] (de Man *Rhetoric* 120)

[68] Anton Kaes also argues a similar point when he writes "To many the much-publicized case of Paul de Man's troubling disavowal of his own past seemed like living proof for the fundamental suppression of history in deconstruction in general." (Kaes 150)

[69] Felman also quotes these lines and reads them in conjunction with de Man's essay on Benjamin's "the Task of the Translator" (Felman and Laub 157-158)

De Man thus implies here that Shelley's *The Triumph of Life* is "molded by an actual occurrence," the poet's tragic death, but such a rupture, or "wound," is to be found in all texts, literary or theoretical. However this perspective could never be wholly explicated in his oeuvre, because of his death in 1983, leaving his work unfinished, just like Shelley's poem. It was Felman, Johnson and Cathy Caruth who forced these arguments to their logical conclusions by offering models of textual analysis like the one we find in *Testimony*, *Mother Tongues*, or *Unclaimed Experience*. In the next pages, I will focus on three examples which are prefigured in de Man's reading of Shelley: Johnson's and Felman's reading of Walter Benjamin's suicide; Caruth's reading of Sigmund Freud's "Moses and Monotheism"; and Felman's reading of de Man's "afterlife." These examples, Benjamin, Freud, de Man, all testify to the ungraspable impact of the historical occurrence of World War II. They demonstrate the "return of history" as an interruption of the text, which can be compared to the psychoanalytic notion of trauma.

Walter Benjamin's Signature

Johnson observes in the first chapter of her *Mother Tongues: Sexuality, Trials, Motherhood, Translation* (2003) how

> it is precisely in the case of an author who has committed suicide that readers who normally restrict their interest to features internal to a text develop a terrible taste for biography as a tool for understanding poetry. Readers are unable to resist asking the poems to tell us why the poet killed herself. (Johnson *Mother* 27)

We bear witness to an uncanny return of the "referential aberration" as the "only way" of making sense of texts when their authors decided to end their lives. The act of suicide thus imposes itself on the texts, somehow becoming their final referent. Such is the case with the poetry of Anne Sexton or Sylvia Plath that Johnson analyzes in detail in her book. Her reading of Benjamin's oeuvre also shows that the same is true if the author is male and if the writings are theoretical or philosophical. Similarly to how Shelley's *The Triumph of Life* was left unfinished because of "a freak of chance" (de Man *Rhetoric* 120), Shelley's death, Benjamin's *The Arcades Project* is also left in fragments due to "an uncommon stroke of bad luck" (quoted by Felman *Juridical* 50, 191, footnote 83) as Hannah Arendt has called it, leading to his suicide on the French-Spanish border in 1940 (Felman *Testimony* 155, Felman *Juridical* 48). Johnson argues that

> *The Arcades Project* develops the way all scholarship develops: through notetaking, quotation, and commentary. But it seems to stop there, and thus is always considered "unfinished." And indeed, Benjamin's death did bring the work to a halt. (Johnson *Mother* 116)

We find one of the most moving examples of such a reading from the point of view of the author's suicide in Felman's "The Storyteller's Silence: Walter Benjamin's Dilemma of Justice" in her *The Juridical Unconscious: Trials and Traumas in the Twentieth Century* (2002). Felman reads Benjamin as the theoretician of the "expressionless" (Felman *Juridical* 13): "His life becomes a parable of the relation between history and silence." (Felman *Juridical* 22) This silence is best illustrated in his theoretical texts struggling with the experience of to the World Wars: "The Storyteller" (1936) attributes this silence and the incommunicability of experience to the First World War (Felman *Juridical* 28), while "Theses on the Philosophy of History" (1940), "his second theory of silence" (Felman *Juridical* 28) attributes this to the "history of the oppressed" (Felman *Juridical* 31), who were deprived of their language during the Second World War. Felman reads Benjamin's autobiographical *Berlin Chronicle* as an "allegory of the ungrasped impact of the First World War" (Felman *Juridical* 36), "an autobiography of trauma" (Felman *Juridical* 42), even though this text seems to be completely oblivious to history and the war. The impact of the war for Benjamin was inevitably linked with the personal tragedy of losing of one of his friends, Fritz Heinle, who committed suicide. In Felman's reading Benjamin's own suicide in 1940 repeats and mirrors "the suicide of his younger friend, his alter ego, at the outbreak of the First World War." (Felman *Juridical* 48) Her reading ascribes a quite specific meaning to this suicide:

> Beyond the irony of fate, beyond misfortune, the suicide (as I have suggested earlier) makes of death a sign. In desperation, dying becomes language. It makes a point. It is not only a decision to stop suffering and to lapse into protective and forgetful sleep. It is—across the gap of two world wars—a knocking at the doors of history. It is the punctuation of a life of writing which, by a final, willful act of silence, leaves behind *its signature*: a signature of desperate but absolutely *unconditional refusal of complicity and of collaboration* with the coercive tyranny of world wars. (Felman *Juridical* 50)

Far from being a wound or a rupture that leaves the oeuvre in fragments, in Felman's critical narrative, suicide paradoxically becomes an event, a "signature," that completes it. However morbid it sounds, suicide seems thus a logical step away from theory to practice, from knowledge to act. Felman always already reads the texts of Benjamin from this event that ended his life, which left his oeuvre in fragments and paradoxically completed it at the same time. However, Johnson challenges such notions of suicide: based on Benjamin's suspicion of Marxism as a meta-narrative (which necessitated his break with Theodor Adorno as well), and his belief in the impossibility of "overriding thesis and synthesis," we can no longer know for sure "what 'finished' means any more" (Johnson *Mother* 116). This claim amounts to no less then a refusal to interpret Benjamin's work from the point of view of his tragic fate and deconstructs critical narratives, like Felman's, in which the act of suicide—as a "signature"—comes to restructure retrospectively the whole oeuvre.

Sigmund Freud's Traumatic Departure

In a move that can be read as the restatement of what she has written in "The Insistence of Reference," her introduction to *Critical Encounters: Reference and Responsibility in Deconstructive Writing* (1990), Caruth claims that

> Recent literary criticism has shown an increasing concern that the epistemological problems raised by poststructuralist criticism, in particular deconstruction, necessarily lead to political and ethical paralysis. The possibility that reference is indirect, and that consequently we may not have direct access to others', or even our own, histories, seems to imply the impossibility of any access to other cultures, and hence of any means of making political or ethical judgments. (Caruth *Unclaimed* 10)

Caruth's introduction to *Critical Encounters* (which proved crucial in the context of the encounter between feminism and deconstruction as well) predates *Unclaimed Experience* (it emerged from a conference, "Deconstruction Reviewed," in April 1989), and only hints at the crucial theoretical concept of trauma in refuting such claims. Such critical notions condemning poststructuralist and deconstructive criticism in general presuppose

> the assumption that experience is constituted in large part by self-awareness and thus by meaningful perception, that history is available primarily as the completed

> knowledge of a past, that political and ethical decisions can and do arise only from a position of understanding and self-understanding. (Caruth "Insistence" 1)

However, in her view, "deconstruction does not deny reference," nor the possibility of history, politics, ethics, or justice, it only denies that they "can be modeled on the laws of perception or of understanding." (Caruth "Insistence" 2) Perception and understanding are precisely what is precluded in the shattering experience of trauma, thus it may provide a theoretical way of reconceptualizing notions of history, politics as well as ethics.

Unclaimed Experience

> propose[s] that it is here, in the equally widespread and bewildering encounter with trauma—both in its occurrence, and in the attempt to understand it—that we can begin to recognize the possibility of a history which is no longer straightforwardly referential (that is, no longer based on simple models of experience and reference). Through the notion of trauma, I will argue, we can understand that a rethinking of reference is not aimed at eliminating history, but at resituating it in our understanding, that is, of precisely permitting *history* to arise where *immediate understanding* may not. (Caruth *Unclaimed* 11)

The ethical turn of deconstruction is thus far from being "aimed at eliminating history," it tries to realign our given notions of history through the experience of trauma, which is caused by violent historical occurrences, yet the registration of which is symbolically denied. History, as trauma, becomes "a mode of interruption of consciousness' awareness, and perception, of reality" (Felman and Laub 148). This is the point in Caruth and Felman that Dominick LaCapra criticizes and warns us that such an inquiry into the dynamics of trauma and history must not lead to "an indiscriminate conflation of all history with trauma" (LaCapra *Writing* 76, cf. LaCapra *Memory* 111). He contends that "What is unclear in Caruth's approach is whether trauma not only is postulated as the condition of possibility of history but tends to be generalized and conflated with history." (LaCapra *Representing* 14, footnote 10) In other words, Caruth thinks that the traditional straightforward view of history, which presupposes an essentially conscious subject and meaningful events, forecloses the recognition of experiences like that of trauma, due to their structure of belated recognition and lack of symbolization. The model she advocates instead of this view is based on what was in excess of it: trauma becomes the structure for all the exchanges between consciousness and

history. Trauma is not one of the possible models for history, then, but "the model" par excellence for Caruth and Felman. In Kevin Newmark's opinion, this understanding of history as trauma derives from Freud's *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, which argues for a disjunction or a "dissociation" between "consciousness" and "memory" (Newmark "Traumatic" 237, 239): "becoming conscious and leaving behind a memory-trace are processes incompatible with each other within one and the same system. […] *consciousness arises instead of a memory-trace*" (Freud "Beyond" 296-297). This amounts to no less than the hypothesis that the impact of history occurs as an inscription whose meaning is not readily available to consciousness.

Similarly to how Felman points out connections between Benjamin's "The Storyteller" and World War I, and "Theses on the Philosophy of History" and World War II, Caruth argues in *Unclaimed Experience* that we might uncover a similar connection between Freud's texts about trauma and the traumatic events of 20th century history:

> The centrality and complexity of trauma in our century was first most profoundly addressed in two important and controversial works by Freud, *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* and *Moses and Monotheism*. These two pieces, written during the event surrounding World War I and World War II, respectively, have been called upon by contemporary critics as showing a direct relation between Freud's theory of trauma and historical violence, a directness presumably reflected in the theory of trauma he produces. (Caruth *Unclaimed* 58)

The World Wars have changed our notions of history, the traumas they witnessed have changed the way we conceptualize consciousness and experience, which no longer allow for transparent notions of historical reference. Caruth thus reads *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* as "the theory of individual trauma" within "the context of the notion of historical trauma in *Moses and Monotheism*" (Caruth *Unclaimed* 58) and shows how these texts do not only theorize trauma from an objective, theoretical metaposition, but are, in fact, talking out of a traumatic situation. Trauma thus appears in these texts not only on the level of statement, but performance as well.

Elizabeth Bronfen locates the traumatic core behind *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* in the death of Freud's daughter, Sophie Freud-Halberstadt on 25 January 1920, which he, in a letter to Max Halberstadt, glossed as "a 'meaningless, brutal act of fate', a 'joke played on helpless, poor humans by higher forces'" (Bronfen *Over* 15). Sophie died of influenzal pneumonia while Freud was working on the theory of the death drive "as an alternative to his

work on narcissism" put forward in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* (Bronfen *Over* 17). Freud vehemently tried to establish "the autonomy of his theory from biographical events," but this denial of reference reinforces all the more an "intersection" or "an interdependence between the theoretical formulation of the death drive and the experience of his daughter's death." (Bronfen *Over* 18). The concept of the death drive that leads beyond the theory of narcissism is thus partly a testimony to a historical dimension within the text that it aims to foreclose. It is as if only through a denial of its painfully referential dimension that the general theory of the death drive could come into existence.

While behind *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* we find a personal tragedy, the "urgent historical context" (Caruth *Unclaimed* 12) of *Moses and Monotheism* was the Nazi persecution of the Jewish people, the genealogy of which Freud also tries to uncover in this text. He argues that there is a discontinuity in the history of the Jewish people, and such a rupture also comes to be inscribed onto his text by the events of his departure from Austria due to the German invasion. At first sight, just like deconstruction, Freud's text can be read as "a tacit denial of history," because he substitutes factual history with "the curious dynamics of trauma." (Caruth *Unclaimed* 15) However, what Freud does here is similar to what deconstructive criticism is trying to do in Caruth's interpretation:

> For history to be a history of trauma means that it is referential precisely to the extent that it is not fully perceived as it occurs; or to put it somewhat differently, that a history can be grasped only in the very inaccessibility of its occurrence." (Caruth *Unclaimed* 18)

Traumatic texts thus no longer simply mirror history as they are about an experience which is not readily available to consciousness. *Moses and Monotheism* is also such a symptomatic text "molded by an actual occurrence" (de Man *Rhetoric* 120), about which it cannot talk, but which is revealed by the interruption of its writing:

> The book itself, Freud seems to be telling us, is the site of a trauma; a trauma which in this case moreover appears to be historically marked by the events which, Freud says, divide the book into two halves: first, the infiltration of Nazism into Austria, causing Freud to withhold or repress the third part, and then the invasion of Austria by Germany, causing Freud to leave, and ultimately to bring the third part to light. The structure and history of the book, in its traumatic form of repression and repetitive

> reappearance, thus mark it as the very bearer of a historical truth that is itself involved in the political entanglement of Jews and their persecutors. (Caruth *Unclaimed* 20)

The events of history have an impact on the text by dividing it into two parts. The structure of the book thus illustrates a similar traumatic rupture that it writes about. It is through these discontinuities that the text stands as a witness to the impact of historical reality.

> The "interval between the prefaces" which Freud explicitly notes, and which is also the literal space between "Before March 1938" and "In June 1938," also marks, implicitly, the space of a trauma, a trauma not simply denoted by the words "German Invasion," but rather borne by the words "verliess Ich," "I left." Freud's writing preserves history precisely within this gap in his text; and within the words of his leaving, words which do not simply refer, but which, through their repetition in the later "Summary and Recapitulation," convey the impact of a history precisely as what cannot be grasped about leaving. (Caruth *Unclaimed* 21)

The ungraspable impact of history takes place in the gaps between the pages, as well as in the gap and "movement" (Caruth *Unclaimed* 23) between languages in the letter that Freud wrote to his son Ernst in 1938, right before his departure from Austria: "Zwei Aussichten erhalten sich in diesen trüben Zeiten, Euch Alle beisammen zu sehen und—to die in freedom."[70] (Freud *Briefe* 459) Curiously enough this gap between languages signifying a "traumatic departure" disappears in the English translation of the letter. The translation thus seems to take away some of the edge of Caruth's argument about the experience of departure, focusing, rather, on the arrival to "freedom" (Ramadanovic "When" 55). There seems to be a discontinuity between the "Viennese" and the "English" phase, or the afterlife, of psychoanalysis, which disjunction is not very much unlike the rupture that Freud locates in *Moses and Monotheism*. Read in the retrospective temporality of translation, the native language of psychoanalysis seems English, and its history seems continuous. It is only if we consider the gap between languages that Caruth is writing about that this traumatic break, figured as a departure, can be located.

[70] The English translation of the letter is the following: "Two prospects keep me going in these grim times: to rejoin you all and—to die in freedom." (quoted by Caruth *Unclaimed* 23)

De Man's fate shows considerable similarities to Benjamin and Freud: the events of World War II had a profound impact on the lives of all these thinkers. Freud's *Moses and Monotheism* testifies to the experience of persecution and the trauma of departure necessitated by Germany's invasion of Austria; Benjamin also needed to flee France due to the German invasion, but he never saw the "freedom" Freud longed for: in his hopelessness he committed suicide at the French-Spanish border. De Man also left Belgium and emigrated to the United States in 1948 (Felman and Laub 134, Waters xi), and in Felman's view

> Benjamin's suicide is referentially inscribed within de Man's survival as well as within "The Task of the Translator" (both de Man's and Benjamin's), in much the same way as Shelley's death is referentially inscribed, in de Man's interpretation within the manuscript of his unfinished poem, paradoxically entitled *The Triumph of Life*, a poem whose writing process was historically and materially interrupted by the author's accidental drowning." (Felman and Laub 157)

The reference to a passage from "Shelley Disfigured" is by no means accidental, as it has become a locus classicus of "the de Man case" as well. What de Man writes of Shelley here is surprisably applicable to his "afterlife" too:

> For what we have done with the dead Shelley […] is simply to bury them, to bury them in their own texts made into epitaphs and monumental graves. They have been made into statues for the benefit of future archeologists "digging in the ground for the new foundations" of their own monuments. They have been transformed into historical and aesthetic objects. (de Man *Rhetoric* 121)

De Man's death in 1983 left his latest project of "»the critical-linguistic« analysis of »aesthetic ideology«" (Warminski 1)—that would ultimately have led to the publication of a new book, *Aesthetics, Rhetoric, Ideology* (Warminski 2)—in fragments, much like how Shelley's *The Triumph of Life*, or Benjamin's *The Arcades Project* was left unfinished. Nevertheless, this incompleteness invites further intellectual effort: Wlad Godzich believes that de Man was "quite aware that the task he had embarked upon would always remain incomplete. The texts he has left behind invite us to pursue his reflexion, challenging us to read them in the radical way he had begun to formulate." (Godzich xi)

As if acting upon the urge that he has shown to be at work in Shelley's poetical heritage—"monumentalization is by no means necessarily a naïve or evasive gesture, and it is certainly not a gesture that anyone can pretend to avoid making" (de Man *Rhetoric* 121)—de Man was indeed first monumentalized like a statue (Waters lxii, LaCapra *Representing* 113-114). The 1985 issue of *Yale French Studies* was entitled "The Lesson of Paul de Man," "to bear witness to the legacy of an extraordinary critic, teacher, and colleague."[71] This periodical also provided "what we hope is a complete bibliography of Paul de Man's published work" ("Foreword" 1). Their hopes were shattered in 1987, when, as a "return of history," de Man's wartime journalism that appeared between 1941 and 1942 in the collaborationist journal, *Le Soir* was discovered (Felman and Laub 120). It was a "freak of chance" that Ortwin de Graef found these writings, yet they provoked some of the most serious ideological and theoretical debates in the 1980s, casting doubt on de Man's pedagogical imperative and illuminating the politics of deconstruction from an entirely different perspective (Kulcsár-Szabó 257, LaCapra *Representing* 135). The discovery led to a hysterical denunciation of his theories, radically and inevitably changing the way de Man's texts can be read today: his "personal history has become part of the debate about the ethics of deconstructive criticism." (Eaglestone 95, footnote 20). The "Lesson of Paul de Man" was suddenly transformed into "the de Man affair," the monument was defaced: "those opposed to deconstruction took this opportunity to make a public denunciation of De Man and everything he represented." (McQuillan 98) Deconstruction as a whole was condemned as a late heir to and perpetrator of Nazi ideology, and was even suspicious of Holocaust denial. De Man's friends and former students, like Jacques Derrida or Cynthia Chase, approached the case through a rhetorical perspective that also offered a way to discuss the questions of ethics and politics in the context of deconstruction. Chase's interpretation of the case focused on "Excuses (*Confessions*)" in *Allegories of Reading*, which could be read as de Man's missing confession (Felman and Laub 141, Kulcsár-Szabó 274, Michaels "Slavery" 10), and which chapter recently became a central text of the "ethical turn" of deconstruction.

Johnson's "Doing Time" in *Mother Tongues*, which was also elicited as a response to the de Man case, asks

> What difference does de Man's own history make now to the things he said about history then? […] In what he says about history in those essays, how has the

[71] Felman consciously alludes to Shelley's death and *The Triumph of Life* when bidding farewell to de Man: "Thank you, Paul, for having taught us, even through the process of your loss of life, how life can triumph. May we live up to your precious memory. May we, through the loss of you, learn how to live *up to your triumph*." (Felman "In Memoriam" 9)

> knowledge that he was concealing/repressing/rethinking *then* become newly readable *now*?" […] what can be said about de Man's statements about history, now that his history has rendered those statements themselves part of history? (Johnson *Mother* 141)

Johnson is alluding here to the pressing questions of how certain events of history, like the discovery of the wartime writings, can retrospectively demystify the critical practice of a famous theoretician like de Man. Like Benjamin's suicide, this discovery seems to alter the very readability of de Man's oeuvre. The texts were suddenly rendered unfamiliar, which prompted the uncovering of their "political unconscious."

Without trying to exonerate the mistakes that the young de Man has committed, Felman's "After the Apocalypse: Paul de Man and the Fall to Silence" insists that the danger in simply abjecting him is that we might "blind ourselves to the historical reality of that past by reducing its obscurity to a paradigm of readability—an easily intelligible and safely remote Manichaean allegory of good and evil" (Felman and Laub 122). Felman undertakes a double task in her essay: on the one hand, she provides a context to the birth of these collaborationist writings influenced by Nazi ideology, and tries to trace when de Man's "traumatic awakening" took place (Felman and Laub 130); on the other hand, shows "how both de Man's silence and his speech articulate, and thus help us understand, the ways in which we are still wounded by the Holocaust, and the ways in which we harbor the unfinished business of this recent history within us." (Felman and Laub 124)

In *Testimony* Felman inserts her answer to the de Man case between the readings of two novels (cf. LaCapra *Memory* 74): Albert Camus, *The Plague* (1947) and *The Fall* (1956), which both revolve around "a scene of witnessing" (Felman and Laub 167), and both can be interpreted as allegories about the Holocaust. In her opinion, *The Fall* is "fundamentally and crucially, a transformation of *The Plague*, a narrative of critical rethinking of the stakes of witnessing in history" (Felman and Laub 168) and calls for a redefinition of the notion of witnessing itself. *The Fall* demystifies directly allegorical narratives of the Holocaust (like *The Plague*) because they fail to capture its essence in its complexity. The "actual occurrence" (de Man *Rhetoric* 120), or the "wound" (Felman and Laub 124) of the Holocaust, or history in general, cannot be directly represented in narrative. *The Fall* stages the very crisis of witnessing that Felman and Laub's book is about: the suicide of the other, as a signifier of the Holocaust, occurs as a non-event, but which, in the end, as a black hole, comes to structure, or rather, disintegrate the whole narrative (Felman and Laub 171, 187). The suicide becomes "a

moment of a missed encounter with reality, an encounter whose elusiveness cannot be owned and yet whose impact can no longer be erased" (Felman and Laub 167).

In her reading of *The Plague*, Felman differentiates between two different modes of testimony, that of the journalist or historian, and that of the writer: "Normally, it is the journalist who, by profession, is considered the historical witness of society and culture, the bearer of historic testimony." (Felman and Laub 105) Such a narrative mode supposes "transparent mediation between seeing and telling, private experience and public testimony" (Felman and Laub 193) and claims to be directly referential, because it models its notion of reference on perception (cf. Caruth "Insistence" 2). Whereas the writer's testimony

> cannot be simply referential but, to be truly historical, must be literary […] Literature bears testimony not just to duplicate or to record events, but to make history available to the imaginative act whose historical unavailability has prompted, and made possible, a holocaust. (Felman and Laub 108)

Journalism in Felman's view is also prone to be blind to the ideologies that inform it (like how de Man was blind to Nazi ideology informing his wartime journalism), but, as she often claims, literary texts are "literary to the precise extent that they are self-transgressive with respect to the conscious ideologies that inform them." (Felman *Woman* 6) Similarly to Felman, Johnson also sees de Man's guilt in the failure of the imaginative act:

> Paul de Man, writing in his early twenties with a precocious sense of entitlement, served as a mouthpiece for a dominant ideology that belittled, demeaned, excluded, and eventually killed millions of Jews. He did not himself commit murder, but he expressed a complete failure to imagine himself in the place of the other whom he was willing to dismiss from Europe. (Johnson *Wake* 47)

Felman retrospectively locates the change in de Man's thinking about language at this moment of recognition:

> Once de Man realized the utter fallacy and aberration of his "war testimonies," the act of bearing witness could no longer be repeated as a simple narrative act but had to turn upon its own possibility of error to indicate—and warn us against—its own susceptibility to blindness. (Felman and Laub 138)

No longer a clear mediator of thought, language was perceived to be a medium deeply submerged in ideology: "de Man discovered the inescapable, pervasive way in which ideological coercion is surreptitiously built into language, into the very discourse one is inadvertently employing and the very writing of which one believes oneself to the author." (Felman and Laub 139) No wonder that after his work as a journalist, de Man renounced direct reference to become involved with the translation of Herman Melville's *Moby Dick*, and in Felman's view he later devoted his whole critical career to the demystification of such ideologies that informed his wartime journalism. Instead of providing a direct confession of his earlier mistakes, de Man's later texts do "nothing other than testify to the complexity and ambiguity of history as Holocaust" (Felman and Laub 137, 139). Felman's reading of de Man's "Excuses (*Confessions*)" in *Allegories of Reading* points out "the incapacity of apologetic discourse to account for history as Holocaust" (Felman and Laub 152). Instead of a "confession," de Man enacted or "translated" his wartime experience into writing, knowing that translation "does not afford, however, a totalizing view of history (or of the original historical occurrence) as a whole but, on the contrary, a constant fragmentation of such a view, a continuous disarticulation of any illusion of historical closure or historical totalization." (Felman and Laub 161)

LaCapra's reading of Felman's approach to the de Man case has highlighted that the problem with "After the Apocalypse" is that Felman seems unaware of the transferential relationship her essay is inscribed into.[72] Indeed, this essay could be read in juxtaposition with her "Postal Survival," which openly acknowledges her emotional and intellectual debt to de Man, while "After the Apocalypse" forgets about this transference and constructs a "theory of silence," claiming that "de Man's later writings said all that could or need be said about his own silence and there was no need for an explicit reckoning with the early articles" (LaCapra *Representing* 116).[73] In other words, her theory of de Man's silence can be interpreted as an excuse which tries to erase guilt itself and "exculpate the confessor" (de Man *Allegories* 280). The problem with such a reading of the case is that its interpretive performance seems to deny that there is a case at all, the empirical existence of which necessitated the interpretive effort in the first place. Such an approach, in LaCapra's opinion, forecloses "the possibility of

[72] LaCapra notes that "Felman's analysis tends to be apologetic with respect to him and his »silence« concerning his early World War II journalism" (LaCapra *Memory* 112) and reminds us of "Felman's intensely transferential relation to de Man," which can be read in juxtaposition with a similar relationship between Hanna Arendt and Martin Heidegger (LaCapra *Memory* 83, footnote 10). See LaCapra's "Paul de Man as an Object of Transference" in his *Representing the Holocaust* for an extended treatment of the case, especially pages 116-125, where he is addressing Felman's response at length.

[73] Walter Benn Michaels puts this problem with Felman's answer to the de Man case the following way: "Felman thus regards what some have thought of as de Man's worst sin, his failure to confess, as his greatest virtue. For confession, diminishing the crime, would excuse the criminal." (Michaels "Slavery" 11)

learning from trauma by acknowledging and mourning the specific losses it involves" (LaCapra *Representing* 136). If we see de Man, like Tancred, only the victim of the traumatic situation, we might never be able to listen to the wound that tells of a historical dimension to deconstruction that was unavailable "before the Fall."

"It is certainly possible to see," writes Johnson in "Doing Time," "de Man's post-1960 work as an attempt to avoid being duped at all costs," like Felman does, "but the earlier de Man, the ghost of the dupe, is all the more haunting." (Johnson *Mother* 141) Seen through the afterlife of de Man's oeuvre, deconstructive criticism is haunted by its other, which threatens to dismantle its very methods of demystification. The next part of this chapter is devoted to a similar critique of trauma theory from the perspective of feminism and postcolonial theory, which can be evinced through a reading the relationship between two books from Felman, as well as in Ralph Waldo Emerson's mourning for his son, but the full force of which will be explored through a reading of Torquato Tasso's *Jerusalem Delivered*.

FEMINISM AND TRAUMA THEORY: SHOSHANA FELMAN'S *WHAT DOES A WOMAN WANT?* AND *TESTIMONY*

It can be argued that the next steps from the psychoanalysis of *Writing and Madness* and the feminism of *What Does a Woman a Want?* led towards questions of trauma, history, and memory in Shoshana Felman's oeuvre. This step is also narrated by the author herself in her new preface to *Writing and Madness*: "the quest for literature is replaced by, or rather is subordinated to, the quest for history (the quest for legal facts and for historical events)," in other words, "reality and reference seem to have become much more important in my work" (Felman "Story" 5). From very early on in her critical career, Felman has been preoccupied with ethical issues, for example she exposed how the discourse of rationality was predicated upon the exclusion of madness; how women were associated with unreason in patriarchal discourse, which condemned them to silence; or the ethical imperative involved in facing question of trauma and the Holocaust in contemporary philosophy and literary history. I believe that *What Does a Woman Want?* forms a bridge in Felman's oeuvre in many ways: two of its chapters date it together with *Writing and Madness*, but these essays only formed a coherent and separate book once the frame offered by her investigations into the psychodynamics of trauma in *Testimony: Crises of Witnessing in Literature, Psychoanalysis, and History* were available. Trauma theory thus became a frame that allowed the completion and subsequent publication of the text, which in turn marks the advent of the feminist voice through the practice of reading (Felman *Woman* 13).

I argue in this part of the chapter about trauma theory that by closely examining the relationship between Felman's *What Does a Woman Want?* and *Testimony*, we can pinpoint how she is conceptualizing two different accounts of trauma. In my opinion *Testimony's* narrative can be regarded as the "monumental history" of trauma, making many crucial psychoanalytical and rhetorical concepts available for the study of traumatic experience; while *What Does a Woman Want?* writes the "critical history" of trauma that implicitly criticizes trauma theory for the disavowal of certain kinds of trauma (trauma experienced especially by women).

Female Autobiography and Trauma

Felman admits that her inquiries into the question of female desire somehow came to hinder the completion of *What Does a Woman Want?* (Felman *Woman* 10), until she realized

the hidden, yet all the more crucial relationship of this question to the notions of autobiography and trauma. Because of being inscribed into a narrative which traditionally "belonged" to male authors, Felman thinks that

> *none of us, as women, has as yet, precisely, an autobiography*. Trained to see ourselves as objects and to be positioned as the Other, estranged to ourselves, we have a story that by definition cannot be self-present to us, a story that, in other words, is not a story, but *must become* a story. And it cannot *become* a story except through the *bond of reading*, that is, through the *story of the Other* (the story read by other women, the story of other women, the story of women told by others) (Felman *Woman* 14).

She further clarifies her point in a footnote attached to this part of her text:

> *our own autobiography is not available to us*, not simply because we have no models and because, inhabiting male plots, we are enjoined not to transgress convention and to leave the realm of accomplishment to men (to live around a male center) but because we cannot simply *substitute ourselves as center* without regard to the *decentering* effects of language and of the unconscious, without acute awareness of the fact that our own relation to a linguistic frame of reference is never self-transparent. (Felman *Woman* 156, footnote 17)

Felman posits an inevitable slippage between "the story told about women" ("what a man might think a woman wants") and "their own story" ("what a woman wants"), which slippage opens up a critical potential that "must become a story." For example, Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson argue in a similar fashion that "in an androcentric tradition, autobiographical authorization was unavailable to most women," and called attention to the fact that "any theory of female textuality must recognize how patriarchal culture has fictionalized »woman« and how, in response, women autobiographers had challenged the gender ideologies surrounding them in order to script their life narratives." (Smith and Watson, eds. 12) Barbara Johnson addresses this problem of an own story, too. In *A World of Difference* she writes,

> The problem for the female autobiographer is, on the one hand, to resist the pressure of masculine autobiography as the only literary genre available for her enterprise, and, on the other, to describe a difficulty in conforming to a female ideal which is largely a fantasy of the masculine, not the feminine, imagination. (Johnson *World* 154)

Indeed, Felman's theory of female autobiography is best understood within the terms offered by Johnson. As a follow-up to her introductory lines, in chapter five of *What Does a Woman Want?* Felman goes on to analyze the interplay of literature, autobiography and theory in the oeuvres of Adrienne Rich, Simone de Beauvoir and Virginia Woolf, and points out how "Literature, autobiography and theory remain […] inextricably tied together in the way in which they mutually resist and yet mutually inhabit one another." (Felman *Woman* 138) Such a profound insight into the dynamics of female autobiography also enables Felman to interpret her own book as a text about how she was missing *her* own implications in the texts she was reading (Felman *Woman* 19), suggesting that theory and the practice of reading offered a way of writing her own "autobiography as missing" (Felman *Woman* 15).[74] Felman insists that missing one's autobiography in such a way, "»the absence of a story« (or its counterpart »the presence of too many stories«)" (Felman *Woman* 126) is "characteristic of the female condition" (Felman *Woman* 15):

> Women have no real memory of their autobiography, or at least that they cannot simply command autobiography by the self-conscious effort of a voluntary recall. Unlike men, who write autobiographies from memory, women's autobiography is what their memory cannot contain—or hold together as a whole—although their writing inadvertently inscribes it. (Felman *Woman* 15)

The "essence" of female autobiography thus seems like an excess in the text ("what their memory cannot contain"), the meaning of which is not readily graspable, evoking the psychoanalytical notion of trauma. While Johnson is convinced that "the monstrousness of selfhood is intimately embedded within the question of female autobiography" (Johnson *World* 154), Felman finds "the critical difference" between masculine and feminine autobiographies in the notion of trauma. She is convinced "that every woman's life contains, explicitly or in implicit ways, the story of a trauma" (Felman *Woman* 16), which claim nevertheless runs the risk of gender-essentialism (cf. Smith and Watson, eds. 11, Séllei

[74] The passages quoted above also suggest that *What Does a Woman a Want?* is not only a critical work pursuing the enigmatic question of sexual difference, but can also be read as a very personal testimony by the author herself. Such a reading of the book would be similar to Felman's reading of Hannah Arendt's *Eichmann in Jerusalem* as a text of unconscious mourning, and could follow the prompts given by Cathy Caruth's response to Felman's oeuvre ("Trauma, Justice, and the Political Unconscious: Arendt and Felman's Journey to Jerusalem", reprinted in *The Claims of Literature*): by drawing parallels between the life stories of Felman and Arendt, Caruth argues in this text that not only Arendt's book contains a "silent subtext" (Sun, et al, eds. 412), but such a "mute testimony" can also be found in Felman's text: "an unconscious existential resonance with Arendt's own unconscious, untold story […] permeates and inadvertently steers Felman's own writing" (Sun, et al, eds. 416).

Tükröm 33). The meaning of trauma is unavailable through conscious recall and it returns in the various rhetorical ruptures of the text, providing a plausible explanation why female autobiographies tend to be more fragmented (Séllei *Tükröm* 32, cf. Jelinek 17, 19). These traumatic narratives, then, necessitate a different approach to writing female autobiography:

> Because trauma cannot be simply remembered, it cannot simply be "confessed": it must be testified to, in a struggle shared between a speaker and a listener to recover something the speaking subject is not—and cannot be—in possession of. Insofar as any feminine existence is in fact traumatized existence, feminine autobiography *cannot be* a confession. It can only be a testimony: to survival. (Felman *Woman* 16)

Felman is contrasting confession and testimony here as two different modes of discourse: on the one hand, confession would presuppose that what the subject wants to confess is readily accessible to consciousness, it exists as a memory, an interpretation which seems to be at odds with what Michel Foucault has written about this topic.[75] On the other hand, testimony for Felman "does not possess itself as a conclusion, as the constatation of a verdict or the self-transparency of knowledge." (Felman and Laub 5) This distinction between confession and testimony seems to rely on de Man's differentiation in "Excuses (*Confessions*)" between "confession stated in the mode of revealed truth" and "confession stated in the mode of excuse" in the sense that "evidence for the former is referential (the ribbon), whereas the evidence for the latter can only be verbal." (de Man *Allegories* 280) While confession supposes referential evidence, testimony, as "a performative speech act," necessitates "a discursive *practice*" (Felman and Laub 5) to establish reference and anchor the unnarratable events once again within language (Felman and Laub 114). She argues in *Testimony* that

> as opposed to confession, the meaning of the testimony is not completely known, even by its author, before and after its production, outside of the very process of its articulation, of its actual writing. (Felman and Laub 163)

She also calls our attention to the judicial context within which testimonies most frequently occur:

[75] Foucault writes that "the agency of domination does not reside in the one who speaks (for it is he who is constrained), but in the one who listens and says nothing; not in the one who knows and answers, but in the one who questions and is not supposed to know. And this discourse of truth finally takes effect, not in the one who receives it, but in the one from whom it is wrestled." (Foucault 62)

> In its most traditional, routine use in the legal context—in the courtroom situation—testimony is provided, and is called for, when the facts upon which justice must pronounce its verdict are not clear, when historical accuracy is in doubt and when both the truth and its supporting elements of evidence are called into question. (Felman and Laub 6)

Being a "hole of memory" (Felman and Laub 65) "outside the range of comprehension, of recounting and of mastery" (Felman and Laub 69), trauma cannot be "confessed" as it lacks a stable referent. Laub explains the paradoxical nature of traumatic experience the following way:

> Massive trauma precludes its registration; the observing and recording mechanisms of the human mind are temporarily knocked out, malfunction. The victim's narrative—the very process of bearing witness to massive trauma—does indeed begin with someone who testifies to an absence, to an event that has not yet come into existence, in spite of the overwhelming and compelling nature of the reality of its occurrence. (Felman and Laub 57)

Trauma, then, is very real, yet the excess contained within the experience precludes its mental inscription (it is "missing") leading to haunting returns of the foreclosed. It is during the testimonies that it can emerge as a (semi-)conscious narrative, even if the events recounted defy historical evidence.[76] In Felman's opinion, women might be able to narrate (and overcome) and reclaim the loss entailed by trauma (their autobiography as missing) through a "bond of reading," through an apostrophical address to other women that performs "an *act of empowerment*" (Felman *Woman* 127), just like "the return of the voice" of the survivor in the narratives of the Holocaust that she writes about in connection with Claude Lanzmann's film *Shoah* in *Testimony*.

Much like how Johnson writes about Shelley and Baudelaire establishing the "normative," "masculine" poetic use of apostrophe, which female poets' poems about abortion deconstruct, Felman reads female autobiographies as testimonies to trauma in a way

[76] "The historians' stance, however, differed from my way of listening, in their firm conviction that the limits of the woman's knowledge in effect called into question the validity of her whole testimony." (Felman and Laub 61) In Felman's view, Claude Lanzmann's *Shoah* can be seen as enacting such a narrativization: "As a solicitor and an assembler of the testimonies, in his function as a questioner but mainly, in his function as a listener (as the bearer of a narrative of listening), Lanzmann's performance is to elicit testimony which exceeds the testifier's own awareness, to bring forth a complexity of truth which, paradoxically, is *not available as such* to the very speaker who pronounces it. (Felman and Laub 263)

that they reveal linguistic contingencies in the heart of the autobiographical enterprise that remain hidden within the texts if the author is male. Felman's notion of autobiography, then, is similar to her conceptualization of female desire as a deconstructive force, or Johnson's rendering of rhetorical difference from gender difference, in that it seems to run counter to her critique of essentialism evident in, for example, *Writing and Madness*, demonstrating another blind spot in her theoretical stance.

The "Monumental" and the "Critical History" of Trauma

Interestingly enough, the feminist issues explicated at length in *What Does a Woman Want?* seem to be pushed very much into the background in *Testimony*, suggesting, in a first reading, that the relationship between trauma theory and feminism is a one-sided connection: the feminist stance could only be truly embraced through an act of looking back (Felman *Woman* 18), or "re-vision" (Felman *Woman* 13) from the point of view of trauma theory. However, in a second reading, we must also keep the risk of gender-essentialism in mind: even though trauma theory allowed the feminist stance to come into existence in the first place (the frame "completed the book"), in the end, the feminist stance paradoxically seems to take control over the notion of trauma, running the risk that the notion of trauma is also appropriated by the feminine, which perspective is missing from *Testimony*. I think we need to recognize that Felman is working with two different notions of trauma in these two books. The notion of trauma we find in *What Does a Woman Want?* seems different from what she espouses in *Testimony* and is similar to how Laura S. Brown conceptualizes this key term through feminist inquiry. In the very book that instates trauma theory—Caruth's *Trauma: Explorations in Memory*—, Brown critiques psychiatry for not being able to recognize instances of "private, secret, insidious trauma" that shapes the lives of certain groups within patriarchal society, like women, people of color, homosexuals, or even people living in poverty, or with disabilities (Brown "Outside" 102-103). She cites DSM-III's definition of a traumatic event as "outside the range of human experience" (qtd. by Brown "Outside" 100), which "human experience" somehow becomes synonymous with "male human experience":

> The range of human experience becomes the range of what is normal and usual in the lives of mean of the dominant class; white, young, able-bodied, educated, middle-class, Christian men. Trauma is thus that which disrupts these particular human lives, but no other. War and genocide, which are the work of mean and male-dominated

> culture, are agreed-upon traumas; so are natural disasters, vehicle crashes, boats sinking in the freezing ocean. (Brown "Outside" 101)

Brown concludes "our images of trauma have been narrow and constructed within the experiences and realities of dominant groups in cultures." (Brown "Outside" 102) Inasmuch as trauma theory shares some of the blind spots of psychiatry, it only seems to recognize the trauma of white Western males, and appears to be blind to "the daily threat of private violence and constant exposure to traumatic situations that women and oppressed peoples face." (Novak 37, cf. Radstone 24-25) Brown's feminist inquiry testifies to "the immanence of trauma in our lives" and argues that "traumatic events do lie within the range of normal human experience" (Brown "Outside" 108, 110), which necessitates a redefinition of the concept of trauma, in a similar fashion as Felman does in *What Does a Woman Want?* In such an interpretation this book becomes a powerful feminist supplement to *Testimony* in the sense that it investigates the implications of trauma for the feminine, which was mostly left unexplored in the book written together with Laub. To borrow two terms from Friedrich Nietzsche, *Testimony* writes the "monumental history" of trauma by critically engaging the shattering experience of the Holocaust; as opposed to this narrative, *What Does a Woman Want?* offers a "critical history" of trauma that is interested in the fragments, bits and pieces that were forgotten or disavowed by "monumental history."[77] In this case, what is foreclosed from the *grand-recit* is women's daily traumas in a patriarchal culture.

In the next chapter of the dissertation, I will focus on a reading of Ralph Waldo Emerson's mourning for his son, Waldo as it is negotiated between various discourses: philosophy, journals, letters and literature. My aim is to focus on the performance of the rhetorical figures I identified as structuring trauma studies itself, apostrophe and prosopopeia and to show that his performance of mourning is haunted by the same problem of recognition and foreclosure that seems to plague trauma theory.

[77] My use of these terms derives from Felman's interpretation of Nietzsche's *The Use and Abuse of History for Life*. "Monumental history" consists in "an aggrandizement, a magnification of the high points of the past as they relate to man's »struggle and action«; in contrast to this history that magnifies the past and seeks in it an inspiration, a »great impulse« for a future action, there is what Nietzsche calls »critical history«—a history "that judges and condemns« and that undercuts illusions and enthusiasms." (Felman *Juridicial* 111)

REPRESENTING THE TRAUMA OF PARTING:

MOURNING EMERSON'S "HYACINTHINE BOY"

> "A father had been watching beside his child's sick-bed for days and nights on end. After the child had died, he went into the next room to lie down, but left the door open so that he could see from his bedroom the room in which his child's body was laid out, with tall candles standing round it. An old man had been engaged to keep watch over it, and sat beside the body murmuring prayers. After a few hours' sleep, the father had a dream that *his child was standing beside his bed, caught him by the arm and whispered to him reproachfully: 'Father, don't you see I'm burning?'*" (Sigmund Freud, *The Interpretation of Dreams*)

Sigmund Freud's dream of the burning child is one of the most moving examples that demonstrate the ethical obligation involved in mourning. Having lost his child, the father sees him returning in a dream, granting him the wish fulfillment of seeing him alive once again; but the child reminds him "reproachfully" that he needs to wake up, only to find his son burning— this time not with fever, but in a very literal sense (cf. Žižek 45, Caruth *Unclaimed* 94-95). The dream as a wish fulfillment animated the child once more, yet the son calls for the discontinuation of the process of personification and dreaming: by waking up, the father recognizes the demand of the child, even if it means letting him "die again."

In the present chapter of the dissertation, I will focus on another father losing a son: the death of Ralph Waldo Emerson's son, Waldo, who died of scarlet fever on 27 January 1842 (Porte, ed. 273, Sánchez-Eppler 74). The five-year-old boy's death is communicated by Emerson in different modes of discourse: journal entries, letters, poetry and philosophy. For Edgar Allan Poe, death of the other constitutes "the most poetical topic in the world" (Poe "Philosophy" 19). It provides a moment of entry to the aesthetic, transforming the meaninglessness, the accidence of death into a meaningful experience—however symptomatic that experience might be (Bronfen *Over* 59): the trauma of death is sublimated into the mourning of art. In contrast to Poe, for Emerson, the experience of Waldo's death resists being fully inserted into the meaningful, marking a point in excess of his Transcendentalist philosophy.

As Emerson's journal entries, letters and his poem "Threnody" testify, he was deeply struck by grief after his son's death. In a journal entry dated 28 January 1842, Emerson laconically records "Yesterday night at 15 minutes after eight my little Waldo ended his life" (Porte, ed. 276), while a letter to Margaret Fuller he wrote on the same day is much more eloquent about the event:

> My little boy must die also. All his wonderful beauty could not save him. He gave up his innocent breath last night and my world this morning is poor enough. He had *Scarlatina* on Monday night. Shall I ever dare to love any thing again. Farewell and Farewell, O my Boy! (Myerson, ed. 263, quoted by Ellison 145)

In a journal entry, dated 30 January 1842, recording a "catalogues of objects and persons, the acquisitions blessed or mediated by the child" (Ellison 145), Emerson writes,

> What he looked upon is better, what he looked not upon is insignificant. […] The sun went up the morning sky with all his light, but the landscape was dishonored by this loss. For this boy in whose remembrance I have both slept & awaked so oft, decorated for me the morning star, & the evening cloud, how much more all the particulars of daily economy; for he had touched with his lively curiosity every trivial fact & circumstance in the household, the hard coal & the soft coal which I put into my stove; the wood of which he brought his little quota for grandmother's fire, the hammer, the pincers, & file, he was so eager to use; the microscope, the magnet, the little globe, & every trinket & instrument in the study; the loads of gravel on the meadow, the nests in the henhouse and many & many a little visit to the doghouse and to the barn.—For every thing he had his own name & way of thinking, his own pronunciation & manner. And every word came mended from that tongue. […] He gave up his little innocent breath like a bird. (Porte, ed. 276, quoted by Ellison 145)

The passage describes a morning with the sun going up "the morning sky with all his light," reminding us of the lines Emerson recorded about the death of his first wife, Ellen: "the air was still sweet, the sun was not taken down from my firmament." (quoted by Cameron "Representing" 19) But here, "the landscape was dishonored by this loss." In Emerson's recollection, the son "decorated" "every trivial fact & circumstance in the household,"

everyday objects became elevated by his "touch." He also became a "mediator" between people, for example Fuller and Emerson (Ellison 147). The entry testifies to a loss of animation, referred to by the text as the landscape being "dishonored." This animation brought about by presence of the son is intimately linked with the performance of poetry itself: it is a result of his "instinctively poetic" renaming[78] of objects operating through catachresis, which implies a "misuse" or a "misapplication of a word" (Cuddon 122), a "deliberate wresting of a term from its proper significance for effect" (Huelhs 353), or in de Man's interpretation, "a trope which coins a name for a still unnamed entity, which gives a face to the faceless" (de Man *Resistance* 44). Objects of everyday life were animated by the performance of catachresis resulting in a giving of a face, prosopopeia. In fact, we might interpret the child as an allegorical figure for prosopopeia. Even more so, the son's presence seems to "mend" language itself by this catachretical process, suggesting an implicit fault that resides within words that need to be "mended." The purely conventional relationship between words and their objects suddenly became motivated again in the act of renaming, generating a romantic symbol. With the loss of the child—"he gave up his little innocent breath"the poetry animating everyday things is gone.[79]

From a biographical perspective, it is possible, following Julie Ellison, to insert Waldo's death into a series of personal calamities in Emerson's life:

> Death also constitutes one of the fundamental serial realities of Emerson's career. His father dies when he was eight; his first wife died after 18 months of marriage in 1831; his adult brothers, Edward and Charles, died in 1834 and 1836, respectively; and then Waldo in 1842. (Ellison 142, cf. Cavitch 153)

His immediate and later response to the death of his first wife is worth exploring in further detail here, especially as it stand in contrast to how he responded to Waldo's death. On 13 February 1831 Emerson records

> Ellen Tucker Emerson died 8th February. Tuesday morning … […] God be merciful to me a sinner & repair this miserable debility in which her death has left my soul. Two

[78] Interestingly enough, in the winter of 1843, one year after Waldo's death, "Fuller dreamed of him. In her dream the boy announced that his name was now Charles, presumably a link to Emerson's brother, who had died in 1836." (Ellison 147) In Fuller's dream Waldo thus renames even himself, reminding of the brother Emerson lost six years earlier than his son. About Emerson's relation to the proper name 'Waldo,' see Cavitch 162-163.
[79] In his letter to Mary Moody Emerson, dated 8 February 1831, Emerson writes about a similar observation in connection with the death of his first wife: "I see it plainly that things & duties will look coarse & vulgar enough to me when I find the romance of her presence (& romance is a beggarly word) withdrawn from them all." (Myerson, ed. 111-112)

> nights since, I have again heard her breathing, seen her dying. O willingly, my wife, I would lie down in your tomb. […] There is that which passes away & never returns. This miserable apathy, I know, may wear off. I almost fear when it will. Old duties will present themselves with no more repulsive face. I shall go again among my friends with a tranquil countenance. Again I shall be amused, I shall stoop again to little hopes & little fears & forget that graveyard. But will the dead be restored to me? (Porte, ed. 74-75)

These lines show that he was quite struck with grief ("miserable apathy") and feared that it might "wear off," lamenting that it was such an event in his life after which nothing will be the same, yet life will go on.[80] Such a concept of grief wants to cling sentimentally to the memory of the loved one and glosses the fading of memories and forgetting as a sort of betrayal. Four years later, on 19 March 1835, Emerson retrospectively records in his journals that

> I loved Ellen, & love her with an affection that would ask nothing but its indulgence to make me blessed. Yet when she was taken from me, the air was still sweet, the sun was not taken down from my firmament, & however sore was that particular loss, I still felt that it was particular, that the Universe remained to us both, that the Universe abode in its light & in its power to replenish the heart with hope. Distress never, trifles never abate my trust. Only this Lethean stream that washes through us, that gives sometime a film or haze of unreality […] only this threatens my Trust. (Porte, ed. 137, partly quoted by Cameron "Representing" 19)

This "Trust" that Emerson writes about was later transformed into a full fleshed philosophical approach: Ellen's death was inscribed into a system of loss and reimbursement in his 1841 essay, "Compensation" (cf. Cavitch 161):

> the compensations of calamity are made apparent to the understanding also, after long intervals of time. A fever, a mutilation, a cruel disappointment, a loss of wealth, a loss of friends, seems at the moment unpaid loss, and unpayable. But the sure years reveal the deep remedial force that underlies all facts. The death of a dear friend, wife,

[80] Max Cavitch claims that he also wrote "plaintive elegies for his first wife, Ellen—elegies that Emerson himself never published. […] In the poems for Ellen he repeatedly bemoans his separation from her and even berates her for her failure to attend him in her disembodied state." (Cavitch 152-153) This "berating" of the mourned one, as a "reproach," is completely missing from the texts written about Waldo.

> brother, lover, which seemed nothing but privation, somewhat later assumes the aspect of a guide or genius (Emerson "Compensation" 302, quoted by Cavitch 160-161).

The essay seems to suggest that the structure of loss and compensation, evoked through an economic metaphor (cf. Sánchez-Eppler 78, Cavitch 154), is always in motion, yet it only becomes available for understanding after "long intervals of time." Consolation for the trauma of loss and privation, then, is sure to come, it is just a matter of time.

However, Waldo's death in 1842 seems to be in excess of the specular structure set up by "Compensation" (cf. Sánchez-Eppler 78, Porte, ed. 274), maybe because, as Philippe Ariès writes, "In middle class circles in the nineteenth century, the death of the child has become the least tolerable of all deaths" (quoted by Cavitch 144). Joel Porte concludes that

> Emerson, to be sure, was no stranger to such grief. But the loss of Waldo was different from that of Ellen or his brothers. He learned that the death of one's child is the most terrible of all personal disasters. […] Emerson tried hard to assimilate this crushing blow to his affirmative philosophy […]. Yet he seemed to "comprehend nothing of this fact but its bitterness." Two years later, in January 1844, he admitted to Margaret Fuller that he had "no experiences nor progress" to reconcile himself to the "calamity" whose second anniversary he was marking. (Porte, ed. 273)

The loss of the boy is thus painfully registered in the "personal" and seems to shatter the reciprocal structure of loss and compensation that the 1841 essay was proposing.

On the one hand, the immediate response of the "personal" testifies to a loss of animation brought about by the loss of the child; on the other hand, it also tells a different narrative: a few days after the event, in a letter to Caroline Sturgis, dated 4 February 1842, Emerson writes:

> Alas! I chiefly grieve that I cannot grieve; that this fact takes no more deep hold than other facts, is as dreamlike as they; a lambent flame that will not burn playing on the surface of my river. Must every experience—those that promised to be dearest & most penetrative,—only kiss my cheek like the wind & pass away? I think of Ixion & Tantalus & Kehama. (Myerson 264, quoted by Cameron "Representing" 20, 29)

In this letter, we find the origins of what would later appear in the philosophical response to Waldo's death: what is grieved is the impossibility of mourning. The death of the son "takes

no more deep hold," it is only one among the series of facts of life, not a privileged one. This way, the "personal" seems irrevocably split between registering the event as a loss of animation, and the impossibility of its recognition. This duplicity is, in turn, allegorized by the "philosophical" and the "literary" responses to the event: the 1844 essay "Experience" and the poem entitled "Threnody" dating the same year.

Philosophy and the Impossibility of Mourning

In a "most dramatic autobiographical moment" of his published prose (Ellison 140), Emerson writes in "Experience" that

> In the death of my son, now more than two years ago, I seem to have lost a beautiful estate,—no more. I cannot get it nearer to me. If tomorrow I should be informed of the bankruptcy of my principal debtors, the loss of my property would be a great inconvenience to me, perhaps, for many years; but it would leave me as it found me,—neither better nor worse. So is it with this calamity: it does not touch me: some thing which I fancied was a part of me, which could not be torn away without tearing me, nor enlarged without enriching me, falls off from me, and leaves no scar. It was caducous. I grieve that grief can teach me nothing, nor carry me one step into real nature. (Emerson "Experience" 473)

What Emerson is writing about here is quite contrary to our received notions of grief and mourning: he tells about his inability to grieve the death of his son. The real pain he should feel only comes in the form of numbness, standing in sharp contrast to how he felt the pain of grief when his first wife Ellen died and wanted to cling sentimentally to it as long as he could so as not to betray her memory (Porte, ed. 74-75). The trauma in this text seems to be that his philosophy is somehow unable consciously to register death as trauma. Grief is only experienced on a theoretical level, which can teach him nothing. The impact of a directly referential moment in the essay fails to be referential enough: it tells about the inability of gaining direct knowledge about nature.[81] Probably the most radical insight of Emerson's essay is precisely this impossibility of directness within the category of experience and intersubjectivity:

[81] Ryan White connects this claim of indirectness with language: "Emerson is principally concerned with what could be called the faultiness of language, a constitutive inability to refer to a real and stable world (»natural facts«) beyond the words themselves. This manifests itself as a preoccupation with the act of naming, or pronouncing a name as an act of representation." (White 286)

> What opium is instilled into all disaster! It shows formidable as we approach it, but there is at last no rough rasping friction, but the most slippery sliding surfaces. We fall soft on a thought. […]
> Was it Boscovich who found out that bodies never come in contact? Well, souls never touch their objects. An innavigable sea washes with silent waves between us and the things we aim at and converse with. […]
> The Indian who was laid under a curse, that the wind should not blow on him, nor water flow to him, nor fire burn him, is a type of us all. The dearest events are summer-rain, and we the Para coats that shed every drop. […]
> I take this evanescence and lubricity of all objects, which lets them slip through our fingers then when we clutch hardest, to be the most unhandsome part of our condition. Nature does not like to be observed, and likes that we should be her fools and playmates. We may have the sphere for our cricket-ball, but not a berry for our philosophy. Direct strokes she never gave us power to make; all our blows glance, all our hits are accidents. Our relations to each other are oblique and casual. (Emerson "Experience" 472-473)

What has only been a looming threat to his hopes of compensation in his 1835 response to his first wife death—"Distress never, trifles never abate my trust. Only this Lethean stream that washes through us, that gives sometime a *film or haze of unreality* […] only this threatens my Trust. (Porte, ed. 137, emphasis added)—becomes in the 1844 essay a paradigmatic model of experience that establishes itself in the disjunction between reality and its representations.[82] We find a certain mistrust of these representations in "Experience," yet the essay also argues that everything is inevitably mediated to us through representation.

[82] In essence, then, Emerson here seems to be speaking against "the assumption that experience is constituted in large part by self-awareness and thus by meaningful perception," instead he conceives of experience as it "is constituted by the very way it escapes or resists comprehension" (Caruth "Insistence" 1), in other words, the very way Cathy Caruth reconceptualized the term in her introduction to *Critical Encounters*. This insight would make him not only the founder of American philosophy, but a "forerunner of deconstruction" as well. Whether this is good news or bad depends on the evaluating critics. For example David Leverenz represents a somewhat ironic stance regarding Emerson being a "proto-deconstructor": "My deflationary reading of »Experience« opposes almost every recent critical assessment. Though Emerson's business constituency shies away from the essay's depressive complexities, intellectuals have found more and more to praise. At the December 1983 MLA convention, in welcoming deconstructionist approaches, Lawrence Buell noted that »Experience« is »the hottest text these days.« It self-destructs its own meanings; it exposes Emerson's resistance to his own will to power; it presents him as bricoleur of his own text, at odds with what the essay calls the »rapaciousness« of a self whose senses have fallen into the world. As an ironic yet yearning exposure of the will to power, the essay may be a deconstructive masterpiece. In its approach to feeling, however, the essay seems to me annoying, petulant, and evasive at almost every turn." (Leverenz 52)

The only example that might penetrate this "film or haze of unreality," these "slippery sliding surfaces" of representation might be grief and suffering. Emerson writes that "Nothing is left us now but death. We look to that with a grim satisfaction, saying, there at least is reality that will not dodge us." (Emerson "Experience" 473) Still, in his view, it does "dodge us":

> People grieve and bemoan themselves, but it is not half so bad with them as they say. There are moods in which we court suffering, in the hope that here, at least, we shall find reality, sharp peaks and edges of truth. But it turns out to be scene-painting and counterfeit. The only thing grief has taught me, is to know how shallow it is. That, like all the rest, plays about the surface, and never introduces me into the reality, for contact with which, we would even pay the costly price of sons and lovers. (Emerson "Experience" 472-473)

For Emerson, death can only be experienced through the deluding systems of representations, which is quite similar to Simon Critchley's view on the topic, claiming that "Death, or, rather, dying, is by definition ungraspable" (Critchley *Very* 73, 26), or, in Emerson's terms, it slips "through our fingers then when we clutch hardest." Because of this, as Critchley suggests, death can only be "experienced" through representation:

> Since direct contact with death would demand the death of the person who entered into contact, the only relation that the living can maintain with death is through a representation, an image, a picture of death, whether visual of verbal. And yet, we immediately confront a paradox: namely, that the representation of death is not the representation of a presence, an object of perception or intuition—we cannot draw a likeness of death, a portrait, a still life, or whatever. Thus, representations of death are *misrepresentations*, or rather they are representations of an absence. (Critchley *Very* 73, 26, cf. Bronfen and Goodwin, eds. 7, 20)

However, there is a very crucial difference between Emerson's and Critchley's approach: while for Critchley, death is the "unrepresentable" par excellence, the death of "sons and lovers" fails to become privileged moments of "direct" experience for Emerson, it is just another example where "reality, sharp peaks and edges of truth" are dissolved into an "evanescence and lubricity of all objects."

The notion that death is only available to us through representation also means that it has a certain historicity that changes over time. The inability to mourn that Emerson complains about in his essay might be linked, following Ryan White's argument, to a Calvinist / Puritan heritage too, which was suspicious of mourning and discouraged "the representation or naming of the dead."[83] (White 288) In David E. Stannard's view, "the Puritans were gripped individually and collectively by an intense and unremitting fear of death, while simultaneously clinging to the traditional Christian rhetoric of viewing death as a release and relief for the earth-bound soul" (Stannard "Dying" 1315), yet there was also a "social taboo on excessive mourning or grief in Puritan culture." (White 294) Nevertheless, from the end of the seventeenth century on, and especially during the nineteenth-century this fading Puritan tradition has been replaced, according to Ann Douglas's *The Feminization of American Culture*, by a host of consolatory practices that clinged sentimentally to the memory of the loved ones and "inflated the importance of dying and the dead by every possible means" (Douglas 6-7, 13, 201). I believe that it is best to situate Emerson's gloss about the impossibility of mourning put forward in "Experience" within the crossroads of the historical trajectory ranging from a Puritan foreclosure to a Victorian overabundance of the representations of death.[84] Emerson's lines admitting that "In the death of my son, now more than two years ago, I seem to have lost a beautiful estate,—no more. I cannot get it nearer to me" (Emerson "Experience" 473) stand in sharp contrast to these sentimental mourning practices described by Douglas. From such a perspective, Emerson's comparison between the loss of a life and the loss of mere property that leaves the self mutilated yet still seemingly whole reads like an outrage and seems closer to the Puritan tradition.[85] Wai-chee Dimock argues that

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[83] To substantiate his claim, White quotes Ronald Bosco's introduction to *The Puritan Sermon in America*, which argues that "Except to acknowledge the passing of New England's most illustrious men . . . the Puritan ministry positively discouraged, and during the 1640s and 1650s civil law forbade, public notice of death in any significant way." He also quotes Gordon E. Geddes's *Welcome Joy: Death in Puritan New England* claiming that there was also a "prohibition against speaking the name of the dead by others outside the family during the period of mourning" (White 295). White is well aware that associating Emerson with Puritanism is at best precarious—"Emerson never became a Calvinist after abandoning Unitarianism" (White 294)—yet I also find this possible link very suggestive.

[84] Karen Sánchez-Eppler for example reads "Experience" "as a critique of the notions of memorialization and preservation characteristic of nineteenth-century sentimental mourning practices" (Sánchez-Eppler 80).

[85] In a letter to Thomas Carlyle, a month after his son's death, he writes: "You can never sympathize with me; you can never know how much of me such a young child can take away. A few weeks ago I accounted myself a very rich man, and now the poorest of all." (quoted by Cavitch 153) In the 19th century, notions that children (likened to "principal debtors") were the property of their parents were common (Ellison 143). Beside this notion of property, Jonathan Crewe also identifies in the "commonplace elegiac accounting system" its opposite, the child as a "loan to the parents, rather than their property." (Crewe 19) While children as property is taken in a figurative sense here, the institution of antebellum slavery hauntingly literalizes this question of children or people as commodity: "The question of what Emerson has lost in his son resonated chillingly with American slaver's collapsing of distinctions between offspring and property." (Cavitch 154). Grossman also believes that "Experience" "demonstrates Emerson's entanglement in antebellum figurations of embodiment through

> what disappoints Emerson is […] not so much the absence of pain as its insufficient magnitude, its failure to exceed the usual limit. He feels some pain when his son dies, sure enough; but that pain turns out to be no more than what he would have felt had he lost a large sum of money. It is this—the fact that the pain is not greater, more acute, more shattering—that embitters Emerson. (Dimock 85)

This "insufficient magnitude" that Dimock identifies makes the loss of the son comparable to the loss of property, rhetorically interchanging the feelings for his son with property, in other words, with the metaphor of interchangeability itself (cf. Dimock 85 and White 293). The uniqueness of an event (the death of a loved one) is thus occluded by a discourse of economic exchange. In such a perspective, the loss of Waldo becomes only one example among others for loss in the argument of the essay, but not *the* example of loss par excellence. It is only part of a series, the elements of which are interchangeable. Just like in Paul de Man's reading of Charles Baudelaire's "Correspondances," here we witness "an enumeration which never moves beyond the confines of a set of particulars" (de Man *Rhetoric* 250), leaving no theoretical space for the death of the other to be uniquely meaningful.[86] Talking about the lords of life, Emerson uses a similar enumerative logic: "I dare not assume to give their order, but I name them as I find them in my way." (Emerson "Experience" 491). Emerson suspects that there might even be no end to the series as he begins experience with the following thoughts: "Where do we find ourselves? In a series of which we do not know the extremes, and believe that is has none." (Emerson "Experience" 471) Near the end of the essay, he also states that "I know better than to claim any completeness for my picture. I am a fragment, and this is a fragment of me." (Emerson "Experience" 491) Enumeration in "Experience," then, becomes an allegory of synecdoche as well, troping the relationship between completeness and incompleteness as they chiastically merge into each other.[87] On the one hand, what was

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slavery's corporealized practices" (Grossman 197) and reads the analogy between children and property "in historical terms as symptoms of the functional equivalences between persons and objects, and between children and objects, that slavery as an institution makes available in antebellum America. Indeed, as Philip Fisher has argued, part of the work of sentimentalism's obsession with the child and slave in antebellum writings is »the extension of full and complete humanity to classes of figures from whom it has been socially withheld«" (Grossman 199). Cavitch also writes about how antebellum culture was stratified by class concerning the image of children too. With very high birth rates, for people of the lower classes, children could become "a new kind of burden and drained parental authority of its legitimacy." (Cavitch 150, cf. 145)

[86] As Critchley would have it, in such a context, "death is meaningless and the work of mourning is infinite" (Critchley *Very* 26, 73) Shoshana Felman also reads Albert Camus's *The Fall* in precisely these terms: "*The Fall* bears witness to the failure of the Other's death to claim significance. And yet, this very insignificance claims the narrative, since it decenters and defocalizes the significance of all the rest." (Felman and Laub 171)

[87] De Man conceptualizes synecdoche as "one of the borderline figures that create an ambivalent zone between metaphor and metonymy and that, by its spatial nature, creates the illusion of a synthesis by totalization." (de Man *Allegories* 63, footnote 8, cf. Bényei *Apokrif* 283)

supposed to be a part of the self "falls off" and "leaves no scar," paradoxically suggesting a loss that leaves the self complete; on the other hand, if we imagine the self as "always in progress" and negotiated between a potentially infinite series—like Emerson's *Essays: First Series*, or *Essays: Second Series*, the word "series" being "powerfully self-referential" here (Grossman 197)—, then the self can never be complete in the first place. The self hovers "ghostlike" between fullness and fragmentation, a recognition of loss and its opposite.

By its title and subject matter, "Experience" is part of a philosophical tradition that wrestles with the heritage of empiricism which ranges from Locke all the way to Kantian transcendental philosophy and Romantic poetry. In Cathy Caruth's view, this discourse of experience is an inquiry into "self-knowledge, or attempts by thought to turn upon itself." (Caruth *Empirical* vii) She argues that in Locke's *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*,

> understanding becomes comprehensible to itself in an experience very much like that of visual perception […] the analogy between physical and mental observation as comparable forms of experience is precisely what establishes the certainty of self-knowledge […] The argument for self-certainty depends first of all on the claim that self-knowledge is structured like perception. (Caruth *Empirical* 6)

The opening paragraph of "Experience," however, testifies not to a Lockean self-knowledge structured by the analogy of the visual, but to a more general confusion of perception:

> Where do we find ourselves? In a series of which we do not know the extremes, and believe that it has none. We wake and find ourselves on a stair; there are stairs below us, which we seem to have ascended; there are stairs above us, many a one, which go upward and out of sight. But the Genius which, according to the old belief, stands at the door by which we enter, and gives us the lethe to drink, that we may tell no tales, mixed the cup too strongly, and we cannot shake off the lethargy now at noonday. Sleep lingers all our lifetime about our eyes, as night hovers all day in the boughs of the fir-tree. All things swim and glitter. *Our life is not so much threatened as our perception*. Ghostlike we glide through nature, and should not know our place again. (Emerson "Experience" 471, emphasis added)

In Emerson's view, this loss of perception derives from a constitutive moment of a forgetting of origins ("gives us the lethe to drink"), which makes the self confused, out of place,

ghostlike and prevents a relationship with nature which would not be an uncanny return of the relationship between the dead and the living.[88] If for Locke, understanding "comes to know itself […] as a narrative" (Caruth *Empirical* 32), in "Experience" self-reflection loses its place in narrative due to this event of forgetting ("that we may tell no tales").

Within their pursuit of the meaning of self-reflection, the texts of Locke, Wordsworth, Kant and Freud reproduce

> a surprisingly similar scene: the scene of the encounter between a parent and a child, an encounter that uncannily takes place not as an exchange among the living, but as a relation to the dead, as a scene of mourning or of murder, and of the confrontation between a parent and a dead child, or between a child and a dead parent. (Caruth *Empirical* vii)

As many critics have shown, this encounter between the living and the dead, the parent and the child also returns in Emerson's essay as well, as an example for, and allegory of, the impossibility of direct experience.[89] However, if we see the essay from the perspective of empirical philosophy, this loss, which is also a figure for the loss of self-certainty bringing about a general distrust of representation, is recuperated by the reflexive movement of comprehension that is constituted through language (representation).[90]

Locke evokes the narrative of "the madness of the mother endlessly mourning her dead child" in an attempt to distinguish "empirical sanity" from its "mad other" (Caruth *Empirical* 134). Both "death" and "madness" are unavailable to self-reflection deriving from direct experience, so this story of the mother and the child constitutes an account that defines the limits of empirical philosophy.[91] However, as the figure of the child also functions in

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[88] This aspect of confusion can be linked to how White contextualizes "Experience" in contrast to "Nature." He notes that "Experience" was "often linked to a decisive shift away from the optimistic and affirmative transcendentalism of *Nature*, in particular the idea that we are fundamentally at home in the world." (White 286)

[89] In Kevin Newmark's reading, Walter Benjamin, just like Emerson, is also "repeatedly bemoaning the traumatic loss of »experience« entailed for the subject when the mode of all possible experience is recognized as a recurrent strategy of defense against »the inhospitable, blinding age of large-scale industrialism«" (Newmark "Traumatic" 238-239) peculiar to Benjamin's interpretation of modernity.

[90] From this perspective, Emerson's "Experience" can be juxtaposed to Charles Baudelaire's "On the Essence of Laughter" (1855), which also supposes a redoubling within the self, "between the experience itself and what he calls the »disinterested observation« of it," between "empirical experience" and "an analytic cognition of it" that is constituted in language (Newmark "Traumatic" 247-248), and which de Man associates with irony, as "a consciousness of madness, itself the end of all consciousness" (de Man *Blindness* 216, cf. Newmark "Traumatic" 249). However, for Emerson, this split does not occur as "laughter," rather as "mourning": once the doubling happens, there is no direct return to a "purely empirical" self, which impossibility is conceptualized as a loss.

[91] Caruth writes that "madness is precisely that one phenomenon which is neither like nor accessible to experience, and hence represents an otherness for a philosophy that asserts the full power of self-reflection over the entire realm of understanding." (Caruth *Empirical* 20-21, cf. Felman *Madness* 39) Later she argues that

Locke's text as a "central figure of empirical self-understanding," this narrative of death and loss also becomes "the very place in which empiricism loses the transparency of self-observation, and comes up against itself as a monstrous unnameable." (Caruth *Empirical* 40) As opposed to Locke's *Essay*, "Experience" proceeds from a state of "threatened" perception that makes the self ghostlike, imagining the self as already talking from within an experience that is not directly available for conscious reflection. What has been a moment of excess, a "fiction" in empirical philosophy returns in Emerson's essay as a referential moment (the death of his son), and the general condition of speech and thought, which denies the possibility of direct experience. While Romantic poets like Wordsworth or Kantian philosophy regarded this lack of directness, "a fundamental break with, or detachment from, sensory reality" as the condition of possibility for "the turn of the mind upon itself" and a demonstration of the "power of imaginative self-consciuosness" freeing itself "from the constraints of literal, referential meaning," Emerson's stance suggest more of an attitude of mourning for this loss of "meaning grounded in a direct, perceivable link between language and the empirical world." (Caruth *Empirical* 133) His problem seems to lie in the inherent separation between sense experience and its representation, which disjunction evacuates affect from language and makes the ghostlike, fragmented self resemble the dead son he is unable to mourn.[92]

Such an argument (we can call it deconstructive) seems to regard Emerson's "Experience" as implicitly refusing the Romantic ideology of the imagination. However in Stanley Cavell's persuasive interpretation, the essay also promises to fulfill the "Schlegelian demand for the unification of philosophy and poetry," which were set apart by Kant's *Critiques* (Critchley *Very* 124, 85). Kant perceived a division between epistemology and ethics and he hoped to overcome this separation through the notion of the aesthetic (Critchley *Very* 88-89), which would unify poetry and philosophy: "the aesthetic or literary absolute" or '*Gesamtkunstwerk'* of the romantics, "would have the poetic form of the great novel of the

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"death is not an empirical property among others: it is not part of a fully known »experience« that could be shared by mother and child. (Caruth *Empirical* 36)

[92] In *Memoires for Paul de Man* Jacques Derrida asks "What is an impossible mourning? What does it tell us, this impossible mourning, about an essence of memory? And as concerns the other in us, even in this »distant premonition of the other,« where is the most unjust betrayal? Is the most distressing, or even the most deadly infidelity that of a *possible mourning* which would interiorize within us the image, idol, or ideal of the other who is dead and lives only in us? Or is it that of the impossible mourning, which, leaving the other his alterity, respecting thus his infinite remove, either refuses to take or is incapable of taking the other within oneself, as in the tomb or the vault of some narcissism?" (Derrida *Memoires* 6) While "Experience" might be about this "impossible mourning," which rejects to give "any internalized representation of his son" (White 287), Emerson's calling his son "my beautiful statue" (Myerson, ed. 298) in a letter to Margaret Fuller would turn this impossible mourning into its opposite. Emerson's mourning for his son thematizes not only the ethical question of respecting the otherness of the other, but as an experience haunted by the economic metaphor, which implies that one thing is interchangeable by another (cf. Sánchez-Eppler 79). Jay Grossman finds the "missing term" between mourning and economic loss in "slavery" (Grossman 237, footnote 48).

modern world, the Bible of secularized modernity." (Critchley *Very* 105) However, this "literary absolute" that romantics were hoping for was never completed and hence

> The romantic model for the literary absolute, the genre par excellence for romantic expression is the *fragment*. Now the specificity of the fragment, its uniqueness, is that it is a form that is both complete and incomplete, both a whole and a part. It is a form that embodies interruption within itself. That is to say, the fragment fails. […] However, if the fragment enables a plurality of topics to be treated in a single text, it also allows the possibility of a plurality of voices and authors. The fragment opens up the possibility of *collective* and *anonymous* writing, the possibility of genius as a multiple personality (Critchley *Very* 106-107).

Critchley argues that "the Emersonian essay is not a renunciation of fragmentation in the name of wholeness—the great novel of secular modernity—rather Cavell claims that the essay is the realization of the fragment, the fulfillment of this genre." (Critchley *Very* 123) Just like the self struck by grief, the fragment is "both complete and incomplete," and opens up the possibility for speaking in a multitude of voices speaking in discrepant terms.[93] If we connect Emerson's writing style to that of the fragment, these contradictions seem to be either irrelevant as they "embody interruption within themselves," or suggest that the essays, as members of an infinite series, lead to no synthesis. Like the fragments in Critchley's interpretation, due to their ambiguity they "fail" (Critchley *Very* 124) but we also have to notice that, for example, "Experience" is explicitly about failure: a failure to experience the world directly, the failure to mourn the death of his son, or maybe even the failure to unify philosophy and poetry.

"Threnody," or the Testimony of the Literary

If "Experience" fails to register the loss, it becomes the task of literature to testify to the importance of Waldo in Emerson's life. Emerson finished his poem entitled "Threnody" about Waldo in 1844, the same year *Essays: Second Series* was published. Giving a "portrait and feelings of an individual mourner" (Johnson *Persons* 14) through the poetic imagination, the elegy provides an imaginary space for the working through of his feelings for his son, which dimension was not available for the "philosophical." Ellison ascribes the differene

[93] Sharon Cameron argues that "All critics of Emerson have commented on the contradictory feature of the essays—namely on the fact that Emerson fails to take account of his own discrepant statements." (Cameron "Representing" 16)

between the philosophical and the literary to a "difference of genre" (Ellison 149). In her view, most of Emerson's philosophical essays deny direct reference to biographical events, "while his other writings—journals, poems, lectures—frequently embrace these occasions. (Ellison 142) It is as if the philosophical could only come into existence through the denial of direct reference, reminding us how Freud was anxious to disavow the painfully referential moment of his daughter's death while writing *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* (Bronfen *Over* 18). "Experience" is an exception, then, because it thematizes such a biographical moment, but the force of the example is largely blunted by the rhetoric of the text, as this example is inserted into a series of other topics and subjects that deny any directness in experience.

Max Cavitch observes that the title of the poem also suggests what I have referred to concerning the multivocality of the philosophical fragment: threnody is a genre "that still carries with it the suggestion of multiple voices" (Cavitch 166). Another very important generic frame of the poem is constituted by the pastoral, connecting Emerson's "Threnody" with, for example, Milton's "Lycidas." If "Experience" suggests that the recognition of the uniqueness of death and the possibility of mourning is threatened by being inserted into a series, we can also pinpoint a similar problem in elegies: given the overabundance of elegies in the history of poetry (Cavitch 2), individual pain is in danger of being swallowed up by the clichés of the genre and losing its sincerity (Cavitch 167). This poses the question of whether consolation is a matter of expressing "sincerity," or it is brought about merely by mechanical repetition of poetic conventions.

Conjuring up the image of the "South-wind"—reminding us of Percy Bysshe Shelley's "West Wind" that animated the speaker of the poem—, "Threnody" opens with the following lines:

> The South-wind brings
> Life, sunshine, and desire,
> And on every mount and meadow
> Breathes aromatic fire;
> But over the dead he has no power,
> The lost, the lost he cannot restore;
> And, looking over the hills, I mourn
> The darling who shall not return. (Emerson "Threnody" 117)

However, in constrast to Shelley's "Ode to the West Wind," Emerson's lines deny that the performance of poetry personified in the "South-wind" could consist in the reanimation of the

dead. The experience of the other's death is posited beyond the powers of the imagination, and the persona needs to resign to his separation from his son:

> The hyacinthine boy, for whom
> Morn well might break, and April bloom,—
> The gracious boy, who did adorn
> The world whereinto he was born (Emerson "Threnody" 117)

Waldo, who "decorated" with his gaze the trivial objects of domestic life and "adorned" the world and thus became the allegorical figure for personification in the journals, is dead and the animating power attributed to the son leaves the objects and domestic spaces bereft of poetry and life. Waldo is presented in the poem as primarily a voice, which is no longer available:

> And he, the wondrous child,
> Whose silver warble wild
> Outvalued every pulsing sound
> Within the air's cerulean round, (Emerson "Threnody" 117)

> Whose voice, an equal messenger,
> Conveyed thy meaning mild. […]
> his lips could well pronounce
> Words that were persuasions. (Emerson "Threnody" 118)

In this sense, the poem could thus be juxtaposed to Wordsworth's "Boy of Winander" episode in Book V of *The Prelude*, who, in Barbara Johnson's interpretation, becomes "The personification of apostrophe" (Johnson *Persons* 10), and who, just like Waldo, dies, leaving only silence behind (Weinfield 351). The boy's disappearance is made more emphatic, on the one hand by the personification of the south-wind, the Day, as well as Nature and Fate as they are seeking him; on the other hand, by the apostrophes of the persona that try to address the child. Waldo has

> Disappeared from the Day's eye;
> Far and wide she cannot find him; […]
> Nature who lost him, cannot remake him;

Fate let him fall, Fate can't retake him;
Nature, Fate, Men, him seek in vain.

And whither now, my truant wise and sweet,
Oh, whither tend thy feet? (Emerson "Threnody" 117)

In Ellison's opinion, the first part of "Threnody" offers a "catalogue of vacated paths and places" (Ellison 146), for example his "empty house," signifying the emptying-out of the domestic sphere without the boy:

The painted sled stands where it stood;
The kennel by the corded wood;
The gathered sticks to stanch the wall
Of the snow-tower, when snow should fall;
The ominous hole he dug in the sand,
And childhood's castles built or planned;
His daily haunts I well discern,—
The poultry yard, the shed, the barn,—
And every inch of garden ground
Paced by the blessed feet around,
From the road-side to the brook
Whereinto he loved to look.
Step the meek birds where erst they ranged,
The wintry garden lies unchanged;
The brook into the stream runs on;
But the deep-eyed Boy is gone. (Emerson "Threnody" 119)

While "Experience" claimed that "some thing which I fancied was a part of me, which could not be torn away without tearing me, nor enlarged without enriching me, falls off from me, and leaves no scar" (Emerson "Experience" 473), the poem testifies to the opposite:

Covetous death bereaved us all,
To aggrandize one funeral.
The eager fate which carried thee
Took the largest part of me:

For this losing is true dying;
This is lordly man's down-lying,
This is slow but sure reclining,
Star by star his world resigning.

O child of Paradise! […]
I am too much bereft.
The world dishonored thou hast left. (Emerson "Threnody" 121)

However, the death of the child does not only signify the trauma of loss, but heralds an advent of poetry itself as an elegy for the dead (Johnson *Persons* 77), reminiscent of Poe's "most poetical topic," which sublimates death into aesthetics:

For flattering planets seemed to say,
This child should ills of ages stay,
By wondrous tongue and guided pen
Bring the flown muses back to men. (Emerson "Threnody" 120)

Such a passage from loss to poetry is also implicit in Emerson's apostrophe of Waldo as "The hyacinthine boy" (Emerson "Threnody" 117), referring to the myth of Hyacinthus (Ovid 278-280), who was accidentally killed by Apollo and transformed into a flower "bearing the inscription of Apollo's compunction and grief" (Cavitch 162): in Cavitch's view, "the story of Hyacinthus provides Emerson with a figure for the Ovidian substitution of the aesthetic object for the lost child—a substitution that is both a sign of the poet's devastation and an extension of his creative identity." (Cavitch 170) After registering such a loss, which nevertheless also inaugurates poetry, the task of "Threnody" would be to offer consolation through the phenomenalization of voice and thereby reclaim the self from its "true dying." The plea of the persona takes the form a quarrel with "the unreplying Fate" (Emerson "Threnody" 123) in the forms of passionate exclamations and rhetorical questions:

Was there no star that could be sent,
No watcher in the firmament,
No angel from the countless host
That loiters round the crystal coast,
Could stoop to heal that only child,

Nature's sweet marvel undefiled,
And keep the blossom of the earth,
Which all her harvests were not worth? (Emerson "Threnody" 120)

However, consolation for these pressing question did not come "until Time and Thought had brought their healing," suggesting a temporal discontinuity between the two parts of the poem, which was a literal discontinuity given the fact that Emerson wrote the poem through a period of two years (Cavitch 166). The voice that answers is "The deep Heart," which Mark Edmundson associates with the Over-Soul (Cavitch 167). The deep Heart might be, on the one hand, "Emersons's hortatory projection of sublimity" (Cavitch 165), or, on the other hand, a "self-address" disguised as the voice of the other (Cavitch 166, 168) functioning as a mouthpiece for Transcendentalist doctrine. It reproaches the persona submerged in "the blasphemy of grief" (Emerson "Threnody" 122), because he has not understood "the genius of the whole" (Emerson "Threnody" 123), which lies, nevertheless, "beyond the reach of speech" (Emerson "Threnody" 123, cf. Cavitch 165-166):

'Wilt thou freeze love's tidal flow,
Whose streams through nature circling go?
Nail the wild star to its track
On the half-climbed zodiac?
Light is light which radiates,
Blood is blood which circulates,
Life is life which generates,
And many-seeming life is one,—
Wilt thou transfix and make it none? (Emerson "Threnody" 123)

Nature has its own course, regardless of man, and "transfixing" is condemned by the deep Heart as an "annulment" of life. The moment of death, metaphorized as an overflowing, is also part of life. The consolation offered by the poem basically lies in the promise of meeting the loved ones again:

what is excellent,
As God lives, is permanent;
Hearts are dust, hearts' loves remain;
Heart's love will meet thee again. (Emerson "Threnody" 124)

In a letter to Fuller, dated 30 January 1844, Emerson ponders the meaning of a literary parallel to his grief, Ben Jonson's loss of his son—lamented in "On My First Sonne"—and his vision of his son as they might meet again after the resurrection (Belasco 84, cf. Cavitch 143):

> I read lately in Drummond of Hawthornden, of Ben Johnson's [sic] narrative to him of the death of his son who died of the plague in London: Ben Johnson [sic] was at the time in the country, & saw the Boy in a vision, "of manly shape, & of that growth he thinks he shall be at the resurrection." That same preternatural maturity did my beautiful statue assume the day after death, & so it often comes to me to tax the world with frivolity. (Myerson, ed. 298)

The volume Emerson is referring to is *Ben Jonson's Conversations with William Drummond of Hawthornden* which recounts the poet's tragic tale: at the time of his son's death in 1603, Jonson was separated from his family in London because of the plague. He was safe in the country, but his family was in imminent danger. *Conversations* recites this vision, that resembles Freud's dream of the burning child, the following way:

> When the King came in England, at that tyme the Pest was in London, he being in the Country at Sr Robert Cottons House with old Cambden, he saw in a vision his eldest sone (then a child and at London) appear unto him with the mark of a bloodie crosse on his forehead as if it had been cutted with a suord, at which amazed he prayed unto God, and in the morning he came to Mr. Cambdens chamber to tell him, who persuaded him it was but ane apprehension of his fantasie at which he sould not be disjected; in the mean tyme comes there letters from his wife of the death of that boy in the plague. He appeared to him (he said) of a manlie shape, and of that grouth that he thinks he shall be at the resurrection. (Patterson, ed. 25)

According to many critics, the vision testifies to the guilt that Jonson felt over parting with his family. Even though the "manlie shape" of the boy was later explained by the discourse of salvation, in David Riggs's opinion, "the immediate psychological impact of this vision cannot have been so consoling. The dream fused the dreamer's wish to abandon his family—just as his father had abandoned him—and his guilt over the gratification of that wish into a single harrowing image." (Riggs 95) Using this example of Jonson, just like the myth of Hyacinthus, then, suggests Emerson's unresolved, unconscious guilt, a brooding over the

possibility that "through his own assertions of divinity and creative power he has caused his son's death" (Cavitch 162), explaining why "Threnody" no longer seems to believe in the force of its own figures to bring back the child.

As opposed to the testimony of the vision, the only guilt avowed by Jonson's "On His First Sonne" is not deserting his family in the moments of crisis, but having "too much hope of thee, lov'd boy" (quoted by Crewe 17). In Johnson's view, an epitaph "must mark memory, not display the mourner" (Johnson *Persons* 13-14), yet in Crewe's opinion, "On His First Sonne" "is marked by the somewhat chilling self-memorialization pursued in and through a poem on the occasion of the *son's* death." (Crewe 18) As opposed to Jonson's poem, "Threnody" tries to resist such a self-memorialization, as well as the economical discourse addressing the child as property, when Emerson writes about his son that he was "Not mine,—I never called thee mine, / But Nature's heir," and calls him "Not what I made, but what I loved" (Emerson "Threnody" 120).

However, the concept of "Lost in God, in Godhead found" (Emerson "Threnody" 124) that ends "Threnody" conjures up nothing else than the return of the specular structure of loss and reimbursement put forward in "Compensation." However, as Emerson's letter goes on, the reciprocal structure seems to be put out of balance:

> Does the Power labour, as men do, with the impossibility of perfect explication, that always the hurt is of one kind & the compensation another. My divine temple which all angels seemed to love to build & which was shattered in a night, I can never rebuild,—and is the facility of entertainment from thought or friendship or affairs, an amends? Rather it seems like a cup of Somnus or of Momus. Yet flames forever the holy light for all eyes, & the nature of things against all appearances & specialties whatever assures us of eternal benefit. But these affirmations are tacit & secular. if spoken, they have a hollow & canting sound; and thus all our being, dear friend is evermore adjourned. (Myerson, ed. 298)

Emerson's plight thus emerges from the non-specular, non-reciprocal and imbalanced relationship between "hurt" and "compensation," which reduces the voice and the "affirmations" of the "deep Heart" in "Threnody" to a mere "hollow & canting sound," a repetition of poetic conventions devoid of meaning, and thus offering no real consolation ("compensation") for the trauma of loss ("hurt"), leaving "all our being […] evermore adjourned," or suspended. Perhaps the discovery of this "purely material sound" devoid of consolation is what Cohen addressed as the most radical insight of Emerson's pragmatism, "a

materiality of language and the *techne* as such, void of subjectivity or romanticism" (Cohen *Mimesis* 111).

Conclusions

For Emerson, the meaning of the loss of his son is negotiated among what I called the "personal" (journals and letters), the "philosophical" (from "Compensation" to "Experience") and the "literary" ("Threnody"). The "personal" testifies to an ambivalence concerning the recognition of grief and its foreclosure; the "philosophical" inserts Waldo's death into a series in which all the members are freely interchangeable and all tell about an impossibility of directness within experience; the "literary" acknowledges the loss and tries to offer consolation. Conflating these categories, as, for example, Sharon Cameron does, risks resisting one of the most radical insights of Emerson. In her view,

> "Experience" is an elegy, an essay whose primary task is its work of mourning, and, in light of that poorly concealed fact, it is surprising that critics have consistently spoken of the child as only one of several causes equal in their provocation of listlessness and despair. In those few discussions in which Waldo's death is acknowledged to have special status, it is still not seen as it crucially must be: the occasion that generates in a nontrivial way all other losses that succeed it. For Waldo's death is not just one of a number of phenomena equally precipitated and having parity with each other. (Cameron "Representing" 25)

In this chapter I wanted to demonstrate that whatever "Experience" is, it is *not* "an elegy whose primary task is its work of mourning." I rather believe that the essay represents Waldo's death as "one of several causes," in its interchangeability and meaninglessness. To claim that "the occasion […] generates in a nontrivial way all other losses that succeed it" is to resist the rhetoric of the text operating through pure enumeration and metonymical interchangeability instead of metaphorical analogy. "Experience" presents the body after the loss as seemingly intact, while the "literary" associates Waldo's death with a mutilation leading to the annihilation, or "true dying," of the self. In other words, the "literary," or the lyrical tries to resist the negative knowledge of the philosophical deriving from the rules of sheer enumeration, confirming, as de Man argues, that "Lyric is not a genre, but one name among several to designate the defensive motion of understanding" (de Man *Rhetoric* 261, cf. Johnson *Persons* 195). Yet, even as a defense, "Threnody" can be shown to offer only a

hollow repetition of poetic conventions delivering no real consolation for the trauma of loss, which shatters the reciprocal economy of "hurt" and "compensation." This demonstrates that for Emerson, the experience of Waldo's death resists being fully inserted into the meaningful, or sublimated into art understood as mourning, marking a point in excess of his Transcendentalist philosophy.

Read through Emerson's example of mourning, trauma theory seems to be haunted by a similar problem of recognition: it recognizes certain experiences of trauma, namely "the traumatic experiences of white Westerners" (Craps and Buelens 2), while foreclosing others, for example instances of "insidious trauma" (Brown "Outside" 107). Critics have identified, for example, a "failure of Western trauma theory to account for a gendered, racialized Other" (Novak 49), and therefore called for a "decolonization of trauma studies" (Rothberg "Decolonizing" 226). In the next chapter of the dissertation, I would like to pursue these issues of rhetoric and ethics further through a reading of the parable of Tancred and Clorinda in Tasso's *Jerusalem Delivered*, which I offered as a parable of deconstruction's ethical turn earlier.

TRAUMA AND ITS LITERARY EXAMPLES: TASSO, FREUD, CARUTH

In *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative, and History*, Cathy Caruth cites Sigmund Freud's literary example of the repetition compulsion from *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, which was taken from Torquato Tasso's epic *Jerusalem Delivered* (1581):

> The most moving poetic picture of a fate such as this can be found in the story told by Tasso in his romantic epic *Gerusalemme Liberata*. Its hero, Tancred, unwittingly kills his beloved Clorinda in a duel while she is disguised in the armour of an enemy knight. After her burial he makes his way into a strange magic forest which strikes the Crusaders' army with terror. He slashes with his sword at a tall tree; but blood streams from the cut and the voice of Clorinda, whose soul is imprisoned in the tree, is heard complaining that he has wounded his beloved once again. (Freud "Beyond" 293, quoted by Caruth *Unclaimed* 2)

This allegorical episode thus illustrates for Freud the unconscious repetition compulsion that traumatized patients display. However, as Elizabeth J. Bellamy warns us, this very same repetitive aspect proved to be one of the most important examples for the feeling of the uncanny as well (Freud "Uncanny" 359), a concept that Freud was theorizing at roughly the same time as *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* (Bellamy 226, Royle 90).

Caruth, instead of focusing on the repetitive, or uncanny aspect of the tragic scene evoked by Freud, chooses to foreground Clorinda's voice, "the moving and sorrowful voice that cries out, a voice that is paradoxically released *through the wound*" that addresses Tancred and "bears witness to the past he has unwittingly repeated." (Caruth *Unclaimed* 2-3) Caruth is convinced that

> Tancred's story thus represents traumatic experience not only as the enigma of a human agent's repeated and unknowing acts but also as the enigma of the otherness of a human voice that cries out from the wound, a voice that witnesses a truth that Tancred himself cannot fully know. (Caruth *Unclaimed* 3)

By using this parable, Freud's text is juxtaposing the "unknowing, injurious repetition and the witness of the crying voice" (Caruth *Unclaimed* 3), which both form a crucial part of Caruth's understanding of trauma. She uses "The example offered by the poetry of Tasso"

> more than a literary example of a vaster psychoanalytic, or experiential, truth; the poetic story can be read, […] as a larger parable, both of the unarticulated implications of the theory of trauma in Freud's writings and, beyond that, of the crucial link between literature and theory (Caruth *Unclaimed* 3).

The episode illustrates for Freud his theory of the repetition compulsion, but it largely ignored its literary quality, the function of the scene within the epic. For Caruth the parable is an allegory that speaks about Freud's theory of trauma, as well as suggesting a crucial link between literature and theory. However, what I found problematic in her usage of this literary example is that—like Freud—she takes its meaning for granted and does not seek its context within Tasso's epic, leaving a blind spot in her project.. This is all the more surprising as, Dominick LaCapra argues, this example is supposed to be, for Caruth, "paradigmatic of the relation between theory and literature, especially with respect to the problem of trauma" (LaCapra *Writing* 181). This doubt about the lack of reading is also shared by Sigrid Weigel, who also argues that "she does not actually read Tasso's epic; instead she uses the scene as the founding myth of her own model of trauma which is set up via the pathos formula of the crying wound" (Weigel 88).

Many critiques of Caruth's book emerged recently from which a feminist and a postcolonial perspective seems the most pressing. In contrast to Shoshana Felman's *What Does a Woman Want?* which can be read as a feminist supplement to *Testimony*, Caruth's *Unclaimed Experience* remains as unresponsive to issues of gender like Felman and Dori Laub's *Testimony*. Wendy S. Hesford argues that Caruth "does not acknowledge how trauma's belatedness and the possibility of history have been rhetorically gendered in classic psychoanalytic theory in ways that influence our understanding of violence against women and its traumatic aftermath" (Hesford 204). What Hesford finds "particularly striking about the Tasso tale is how trauma is signified as an act of violence toward a woman that a man unknowingly commits (Hesford 204). Most recently there is also a call from a postcolonial perspective to "decolonize trauma studies" (Rothberg "Decolonizing" 226) as it is "almost exclusively concerned with traumatic experiences of white Westerners and solely employ critical methodologies emanating from a Euro-American context" (Craps-Buelens 2, cf. Rothberg "Decolonizing" 225 and Neeves 108). Without such a "decolonization," its "self-declared ethical potential" remains void (Craps and Buelens 3). Amy Novak specifically claims that

> the failure of Western trauma theory to account for a gendered, racialized Other is due to its positioning of a very specific conception of the subject at the heart of its psychoanalytic drama. While presented as a neutral and universal formulation for healing, trauma theory is actually the product of a culturally specific (Western Enlightenment) concept of the Self occupying the space of speaking subject, addressing the listener, and mastering the past. (Novak 49)

Ruth Leys's *Trauma: A Genealogy* (2000) was the first text to point out the problems inherent in *Unclaimed Experience*'s usage of the Tasso allegory: both Freud and Caruth takes Tancred for the prototype of the traumatized subject, even though he is not the victim, but the perpetrator of a crime committed against Clorinda (Leys 297, cf. Rothberg *Multidirectional* 89, Novak 32, Neeves 124, LaCapra *Writing* 182). Novak refined this point even further, claiming that "the voice that cries out from the wound is not a universal voice, nor is it a generic female voice: it is the female voice of black Africa." (Novak 32, cf. Rothberg *Multidirectional* 89)

All of these aspects that Weigel, Hesford, Leys and Novak mention—the absence of reading, and ignoring the intersections of gender, race and trauma—are symptomatic in *Unclaimed Experience*. I believe that a reading of this allegory in Tasso's epic that is aware of issues of gender and race can supplement Caruth's otherwise very profound insights into the structure of trauma. In my reading, I will concentrate on the connections (and confusions) between the discourses of courtly love and warfare, the role of prosopopeia and apostrophe, as well as the power of language to create and exonerate guilt within the epic.

The Discourses of Courtly Love and Warfare

It is in Book I. of the epic that Tancred first sees Clorinda and falls in love with her at first sight:

XLVI

Fame tells, that on that ever-blessed day,
When Christian swords with Persian blood were dyed,
The furious Prince Tancredi from that fray
His coward foes chased through forests wide,
Till tired with the fight, the heat, the way,
He sought some place to rest his wearied side,

And drew him near a silver stream that played
Among wild herbs under the greenwood shade.

XLVII

A Pagan damsel there unwares he met,
In shining steel, all save her visage fair,
Her hair unbound she made a wanton net,
To catch sweet breathing from the cooling air.
On her at gaze his longing looks he set,
Sight, wonder; wonder, love; love bred his care;
O love, o wonder; love new born, new bred,
Now groan, now armed, this champion captive led.

The fair Clorinda thus appears “near a silver stream,” “unwares” that she is seen by Tancred who was chasing “coward foes.” Interestingly enough, that we are seeing her only through Tancred’s eyes is reinforced by the fact that her outward description is almost totally substituted by the prince’s desire for her and his “love new born,” which subdues him (“this champion captive led”) more than any physical fight, which, after all, takes place, suggesting that, even though Freud talked about her as “disguised in the armour of an enemy knight,” she is, in fact, an amazon warrior fighting against the crusaders:

XLVIII

Her helm the virgin donned, and but some wight
She feared might come to aid him as they fought,
Her courage earned to have assailed the knight;
Yet thence she fled, uncompanied, unsought,
And left her image in his heart ypight;
Her sweet idea wandered through his thought,
Her shape, her gesture, and her place in mind
He kept, and blew love's fire with that wind.

XLIX

Well might you read his sickness in his eyes,
Their banks were full, their tide was at the flow,
His help far off, his hurt within him lies,

His hopes unstrung, his cares were fit to mow;

Clorinda escapes without physically hurting Tancred, but "her image is in his heart ypight," fixed, pitched, suggesting a stabbed wound, revealing the confusion between love and violence in romances, epics and the courtly love tradition (Burns 32, Gravdal 562). Indeed, the whole story of Tancred's tragic love can be read as an allegory that literalizes this implicit link between the imagery of love and war. Such a reading would locate the trauma haunting this story in a textual tradition that Tasso's epic emerges from. Love seems "traumatic" in the sense that Freud used the word, "as a wound inflicted not upon the body but upon the mind." (Caruth *Unclaimed* 3) When the mortal blow strikes Clorinda, it is always already the repetition, and the literalization, of this "wound" caused by love. Earlier, Clorinda's body was substituted by his desire for her, but now "Her sweet idea," "Her shape, her gesture" comes to substitute everything in Tancred's mind. Love is thus a "sickness" which shows in his eyes ready to burst in tears, like the tide of a river.

I think this first encounter between Tancred and Clorinda can be read in a similar way to how Paul de Man reads metaphor of the word "man" in Jean-Jacques Rousseau's *Essay on the Origin of Language*. The following quote from Rousseau is taken from a hypothetical first encounter between two primitive men which becomes the genesis of metaphor:

> A primitive man [*un homme sauvage*], on meeting other men, will first have experienced fright. His fear will make him see these men as larger and stronger than himself; he will give them the name *giants*. After many experiences, he will discover that the supposed giants are neither larger nor stronger than himself, and that their stature did not correspond to the idea he had originally linked to the word giant. He will then invent another name that he has in common with them, such as, for example, the word *man*, and will retain the word giant for the false object that impressed him while he was being deluded. (quoted in de Man *Allegories* 149)

Tasso's version of this encounter is less hypothetical but no less fictive, and it can be read as the gendered restatement of Rousseau's problem: metaphors substituted by metaphors. Clorinda's otherness in stanza XLVII above is readily apparent, she is a "Pagan damsel," but not in any distress, it seems. Yet this otherness, this difference is at once reduced ("ypight") as she disappears in the process where her description is substituted by Tancred's desire or "love" for her.

Calling the stranger “giant,” the hypothetical primitive man “displaces the referential meaning from an outward, visible property to an »inward feeling.« The coinage of the word »giant« simply means »I am afraid.«” And in de Man’s reading this “Fear is the result of a possible discrepancy between the outer and the inner properties of entities.” (de Man *Allegories* 150) It is only later that the word “giant” comes to be substituted by “man”:

> By calling him a “giant,” one freezes hypothesis, or fiction, into fact and makes fear, itself a figural state of suspended meaning, into a definite, proper meaning devoid of alternatives. The metaphor “giant,” used to connote man, has indeed a proper meaning (fear), but this meaning is not really proper: it refers to a condition of permanent suspense between a literal world in which appearance and nature coincide and a figural world in which this correspondence is no longer *a priori* posited. Metaphor is error because it believes or feigns to believe in its own referential meaning. (de Man *Allegories* 151)

By contrast, the process of substitution in Tasso’s encounter is motivated not by fear, but by desire: “love”—which, for Rousseau, is always negotiated in “the interplay between self-love (*amour de soi*), vanity (*amour propre*), and the love of others” (de Man *Allegories* 164)—becomes a “blind metaphor” to denominate Tancred’s feelings for Clorinda. In de Man’s view, love “is structured like a figure of speech” (de Man *Allegories* 169), it is “a figure that disfigures, a metaphor that confers the illusion of proper meaning to a suspended, open semantic structure.” (de Man *Allegories* 198) By being loved by Tancred, Clorinda’s otherness seems to vanish, and turns into resemblance, which culminates in the scene when the mortally wounded “damsel” asks the prince to baptize her (Book XII, stanzas LXV-LXVIII). It is by not realizing the complex interaction created by “love” between difference and resemblance that Tancred comes to kill Clorinda in the first place.

“Oh woful knowledge, ah unhappy sight!”

She uses a similar interplay between resemblance and difference when in Book XII. she finds herself outside of her fort:

> L
>
> But when appeased was her angry mood,
> Her fury calmed, and settled was her head,

She saw the gates were shut, and how she stood
Amid her foes, she held herself for dead;
While none her marked at last she thought it good,
To save her life, some other path to tread,
She feigned her one of them, and close her drew
Amid the press that none her saw or knew:

Suddenly in enemy territory, Clorinda, "Amid her foes, she held herself for dead" and "feigned her one of them." What is not clear here is the reference of the deictical "them," which can refer both to her "foes," that she is pretending to be one of them, or even the "dead," meaning that she is pretending to be dead. Only Tancred notices her fleeing the battlefield and not recognizing each other, they start fighting, "Like two fierce bulls whom rage and love provoke." (LIII) Erasing the difference between the sexes, this simile repeats Tancred's mistake concerning Clorinda's identity: "He deemed she was some man of mickle might, / And on her person would he worship win" (LII). Here we also encounter the aberrant confusion of the vocabulary of war and love:

LVII

Thrice his strong arms he folds about her waist,
And thrice was forced to let the virgin go,
For she disdained to be so embraced, .
No lover would have strained his mistress so:

As the night approaches, it lends the battlefield a uniform shroud of darkness: "here in silence, and in shade [we] debate / Where light of sun and witness all we miss / That should our prowess and our praise dilate" (LX). It is only through an artifice of literature that we may witness their fight at all:

LIV

Worthy of royal lists and brightest day,
Worthy a golden trump and laurel crown,
The actions were and wonders of that fray
Which sable knight did in dark bosom drown:
Yet night, consent that I their acts display
And make their deeds to future ages known,

And in records of long enduring story
Enrol their praise, their fame, their worth and glory.

The very visibility and our witnessing the whole scene of the tragic duel is thus poetically dependant on the figure of personification, the night must first give its “consent that I their acts display,” until

day-break, rising from the eastern flood,
Put forth the thousand eyes of blindfold night;
Tancred beheld his foe's out-streaming blood,
And gaping wounds, and waxed proud with the sight, (LVIII)

Now that daylight has arrived, Tancred wants to know who his opponent is, but Clorinda denies him, substituting her name, as a signature, with the act of destroying a tower:

Tancred the silence broke at last, and said,
For he would know with whom this fight he made:
[…]
If words in arms find place, yet grant me this,
Tell me thy name, thy country, and estate;
That I may know, this dangerous combat done,
Whom I have conquered, or who hath me won."

LXI
"What I nill tell, you ask," quoth she, "in vain,
Nor moved by prayer, nor constrained by power,
But thus much know, I am one of those twain
Which late with kindled fire destroyed the tower."

Clorinda’s reticence, which refuses to reflect back “worship” (LII) for the knight and denies his recognition as a master, provokes Tancred who finally delivers the mortal blow:

LXIV
But now, alas, the fatal hour arrives
That her sweet life must leave that tender hold,

His sword into her bosom deep he drives,
And bathed in lukewarm blood his iron cold,
Between her breasts the cruel weapon rives
Her curious square, embossed with swelling gold,
Her knees grow weak, the pains of death she feels,
And like a falling cedar bends and reels.

The simile that is used for describing the movement of her dying body, "like a falling cedar bends and reels," also prefigures her soul's entrapment in the tree in the forest. It is only after killing her that Tancred realizes what he has done:

With trembling hands her beaver he untied,
Which done he saw, and seeing, knew her face,
And lost therewith his speech and moving quite,
Oh woful knowledge, ah unhappy sight!

The recognition of the truth can only happen in the rupture of aposiopesis, which tropes one of the key traumatic moments of the epic: the "woful knowledge" strikes the self dumb. Here we find both sense of the notion of trauma: the very literal, bodily wound of Clorinda inflicted by Tancred's act stemming from a lack of recognition; and its psychic reflection by which Tancred is also traumatized by the act he has unwittingly committed. While Tasso, Freud and Caruth focus on the latter, psychical wound, many critics, like Leys, Neeves and Novak, emphasize the former, more literal wound, and show how the very real violence done to Clorinda is overshadowed by the traumatization of the western male subject (Leys 297, Novak 32, Neeves 124).

Clorinda is the mute victim of colonial violence, but Tancred seems both the perpetrator and the victim of trauma. Freud identified that a similar splitting was characteristic of war neuroses too, regardless of the side the soldiers fought the wars for. Tancred's position as perpetrator and victim alludes to "the psychic disempowerment signified by colonial encounter" (Suleri 4) that Sara Suleri has written about in *The Rhetoric of English India*. In her view, "the story of colonial encounter is in itself a radically decentering narrative that is impelled to realign with violence any static binarism between colonizer and colonized." (Suleri 2) Like Homi K. Bhabha, Suleri analyzes the colonial encounter not through the specular terms of colonizer and colonized, power and insubordination, but as a traumatic situation that dislocates both parties. She stresses that

> the stories of colonialism—in which heterogeneous cultures are yoked by violence—offer nuances of trauma that cannot be neatly partitioned between colonizer and colonized. If both are identifiable as victims of traumatic change, then the idiom of trauma itself requires a reformulation that can provide a language for the slippage of trauma from apocalypse into narrative. (Suleri 5)

Instead of being a way of reinforcing it, in Suleri's view, "narration occurs to confirm the precariousness of power" (Suleri 23) which claim is also illustrated by the parable of Tancred and Clorinda in Tasso's *Jerusalem Delivered*.

Tancred and the Work of Mourning

The epic says that Tancred "died not" (LXVIII), but the metaphors through which the story describes him shows him trapped between the realms of the living and the dead:

> Death through his senses and his visage ran:
> Like his dead lady, dead seemed Tancred good,
> In paleness, stillness, wounds and streams of blood. (LXX)

> him deprived
> Of signs of life; yet did the knight remain
> On live, nigh dead (LXXI)

With "Her dead, him seeming so" (LXXII) the epic emphasizes an uncanny resemblance between the dead and the living. This confusion between the living and the dead, the animate and the inanimate does not only happen on the thematic level of the story, but is enacted in its rhetoric as well, through a series of apostrophes. The first of these occurs in the laments of Tancred once he comes to his senses:

> Ah, coward hand, afraid why should'st thou be;
> Thou instrument of death, shame and despite,
> Why should'st thou fear, with sharp and trenchant knife,
> To cut the thread of this blood-guilty life? (LXXV)

In other words, the knight is here addressing his “coward hand,” which killed the lady he loved, in an apostrophe that dismembers the body, or at least disowns a part of it. This dismembering of the body makes it possible to address one of its parts as if it was different from the rest. The performance of apostrophe can also be read in the mode of an excuse (“This hand she knows hath only sinned, not I,” XCVIII). On the constative level these lines suggest that taking full responsibility over what he has done can only lead to the total annihilation of the self (suicide), but the very fact that the address is posed as a rhetorical question reveals that this is not a possible solution for now. The self is also traumatized by the sheer fact of its survival after having unwittingly slaughtered its love object. Such a feeling of guilt leads to nightmares and a splitting of the self in the process of mourning:

> The ugly shades, dark night, and troubled air
> In grisly forms her slaughter still present,
> Madness and death about my bed repair,
> Hell gapeth wide to swallow up this tent;
> Swift from myself I run, myself I fear,
> Yet still my hell within myself I bear. (LXXVII)

The only way to overcome such melancholia (as a confusion between the dead and the living) is to bury the beloved, and stabilize the confusion between the living and the dead: “For where she buried is, there shall I have / A stately tomb, a rich and costly grave.” (LXXIX) Interestingly enough, the wording of these lines (“there shall I have”) suggest that the burial of the beloved also includes the burial of the self, creating a linguistic excess that re-attaches the subject to the dead. The confusion thus returns again, especially in the apostrophes that take place when Tancred visits the body of Clorinda:

> LXXXI
> When he came there, and in her breast espied
> His handiwork, that deep and cruel wound,
> And her sweet face with leaden paleness dyed,
> Where beauty late spread forth her beams around,
> He trembled so, that nere his squires beside
> To hold him up, he had sunk down to ground,
> And said, "O face in death still sweet and fair!
> Thou canst not sweeten yet my grief and care:

LXXXII

"O fair right hand, the pledge of faith and love?
Given me but late, too late, in sign of peace,
How haps it now thou canst not stir nor move?
And you, dear limbs, now laid in rest and ease,
Through which my cruel blade this flood-gate rove,
Your pains have end, my torments never cease,
O hands, O cruel eyes, accursed alike!
You gave the wound, you gave them light to strike.

The silent wound, “his handiwork” seems to shatter the body of Clorinda, and does not enable the self to see, or address to the beloved as a whole, only an enumeration of her “face in death,” “fair right hand,” or “dear limbs,” which, in turn, can be apostrophized.

Finally it is Reverend Peter whose authoritative interpretation of the scene puts Tancred’s mind at ease for a few moments. He sees this situation as a punishment from God himself because the knight has strayed from his “true path”:

To worthy actions and achievements fit
For Christian knights He would thee home recall;
But thou hast left that course and changed it,
To make thyself a heathen damsel's thrall;
But see, thy grief and sorrow's painful fit
Is made the rod to scourge thy sins withal, (LXXXVII)

The priest emphasizes the essential difference between Tancred and Clorinda (a “Christian knight” and “a heathen damsel”), which disappeared the moment the knight fell in love with her. Such a discourse that suggests divine retribution behind the traumatic event inserts it into a meaningful context, and thereby manages to relieve the effects of the trauma:

LXXXIX

This said, his will to die the patient
Abandoned, that second death he feared,
These words of comfort to his heart down went,
And that dark night of sorrow somewhat cleared;

Yet now and then his grief deep sighs forth sent,
His voice shrill plaints and sad laments oft reared,
Now to himself, now to his murdered love,
He spoke, who heard perchance from heaven above.

However, there still is an excess of suffering left in Tancred, which manifests itself linguistically, ranging from “sighs,” “shrill plaints,” “sad laments” as well as the addresses to himself and “his murdered love.” At least he is willing to let Clorinda go and lives up to his promise and creates a tombstone fitting to the lady:

Meanwhile of his dear love the relics sweet,
As best he could, to grave with pomp he brought:
Her tomb was not of varied Spartan greet,
Nor yet by cunning hand of Scopas wrought,
But built of polished stone, and thereon laid
The lively shape and portrait of the maid. (XCIV)

The tombstone is thus “built of polished stone,” but instead of putting an epitaph on it that talks to its reader (“Spartan greet”), the portrait (“lively shape”) of the lady is placed on it, suggesting a gap between the performance of language and the portrait. Somehow language proved ineffective, or rather, uncannily effective, in memorializing the lady, so the silence of the image is the only proper “epitaph.” Such an epitaph also enables Tancred to see the body of the beloved made whole again, after the destruction brought about by the wound. The image on the stone puts it into metonymical relationship with the beloved inside, allowing Tancred to apostrophize it:

"O marble dear on my dear mistress placed!
My flames within, without my tears thou hast.

XCVII

"Not of dead bones art thou the mournful grave,
But of quick love the fortress and the hold,
Still in my heart thy wonted brands I have
More bitter far, alas! but not more cold;
Receive these sighs, these kisses sweet receive,

In liquid drops of melting tears enrolled,
And give them to that body pure and chaste,
Which in thy bosom cold entombed thou hast.

Indeed it is odd to address a piece of stone, still, this act is motivated by the image etched into its surface. The apostrophe also has a personifying effect, the grave is a “bosom cold,” that is able to transmit “these sighs, these kisses sweet.”

Repetitions

Soon, in Book XIII, Tancred is selected for an important quest of exploring the haunted forest “whose ugly shapes affray / And put to flight” the crusaders. Earlier, their foe, the magician Ismeno, enchanted the trees, not to let the Christians use them to build more siege machines:

"Keep you this forest well, keep every tree,
Numbered I give you them and truly told;
As souls of men in bodies clothed be
So every plant a sprite shall hide and hold,
With trembling fear make all the Christians flee,
When they presume to cut these cedars old:" (VIII)

By this act, we witness the return of a well-known topos in *Jerusalem Delivered*, which Bellamy calls “the topos of the haunted, animistic wood where epistemological uncertainty holds sway in the absence of any reality” initiated by “the episode of the Avernus wood,” the passageway to the Underworld, in Virgil’s *Aeneid* (Bellamy 215). The living woods also appear in Book 3 of Lucan’s *Pharsalia*, Canto XIII of Dante’s *Inferno*, as well as Canto 6 of Ariosto’s *Orlando Furioso*. Bellamy argues that while “for Virgil, Lucan, and Dante, the topos of wounded trees is always the *unheimlich* site of dread and horror, for Ariosto the topos is reduced to the occasion for comic absurdity.” (Bellamy 219, cf. Kennedy “Ariosto” 47-48) The relevance of this topos for *Jerusalem Liberated* is even reinforced by the author’s very name, Torquato Tasso, meaning “twisted yew tree” (Bellamy 222).

The first obstacle Tancred needs to overcome when entering these woods uncannily familiar from other epics (Bellamy 225) is a pillar of fire, then a storm blocking his way to the woods (XXXIII, XXXVI). These obstacles seem to suggest a borderline between the real

world and the woods, which perhaps can be renamed the realm of the living and the dead. Having overcome these obstacles, Tancred is free to enter the “forbidden wood” (XXXVII), in which he finds a cypress tree with curious etchings:

XXXVIII

At length a fair and spacious green he spied,
Like calmest waters, plain, like velvet, soft,
Wherein a cypress clad in summer's pride,
Pyramid-wise, lift up his tops aloft;
In whose smooth bark upon the evenest side,
Strange characters he found, and viewed them oft,
Like those which priests of Egypt erst instead
Of letters used, which none but they could read.

The characters thus seem unreadable at first glimpse, but soon he finds the part he can read:

XXXIX

Mongst them he picked out these words at last,
Writ in the Syriac tongue, which well he could,
"Oh hardy knight, who through these woods hast passed:
Where Death his palace and his court doth hold!
Oh trouble not these souls in quiet placed,
Oh be not cruel as thy heart is bold,
Pardon these ghosts deprived of heavenly light,
With spirits dead why should men living fight?"

The etchings on the tree read like an epitaph (“Spartan greet”), as if on a tombstone, addressing its reader from beyond the grave, from the “palace,” or the “court” of Death. The writings equate the woods with the realm of the dead whose address takes the form of a plea to the living to “pardon” them. Just like the fire and the storm earlier, this text also tries to ward off the possibly cruel and tragic encounter between the living and the dead (“With spirits dead why should men living fight?”).

Jerusalem Liberated stages here a scene of reading that redoubles on Dante’s (non)reading of Virgil’s *Aeneid* in Canto XIII of *Inferno*. After Dante has plucked a splinter

from a living tree, thereby causing pain to it, his guide addresses the “wounded soul” the following way:

> "Had he been able sooner to believe,"
> My Sage made answer, "O thou wounded soul,
> What only in my verses he has seen,
> Not upon thee had he stretched forth his hand;

In other words, what made Dante hurt the tree in such a way was a lack of understanding of, or a lack of belief in, its poetic predecessor’s text (Bellamy 218). In Tasso’s epic, the text to be read and understood is even more “available” to Tancred in the material etchings of the tree he is about to tear down. However, like Dante, he is not able to understand it, even though the plea in the text is soon even reinforced by a ghostly voice:

> XL
> This found he graven in the tender rind,
> And while he mused on this uncouth writ,
> Him thought he heard the softly whistling wind
> His blasts amid the leaves and branches knit
> And frame a sound like speech of human kind,
> But full of sorrow grief and woe was it,
> Whereby his gentle thoughts all filled were
> With pity, sadness, grief, compassion, fear.

Even thought the voice fills the knight “With pity, sadness, grief, compassion, fear,” neither the text, nor the voice is enough to stop him from committing the act that is described as even crueler than killing Clorinda for the first time:

> XLI
> He drew his sword at last, and gave the tree
> A mighty blow, that made a gaping wound,
> Out of the rift red streams he trickling see
> That all bebled the verdant plain around,
> His hair start up, yet once again stroke he,
> He nould give over till the end he found

Of this adventure, when with plaint and moan,
As from some hollow grave, he heard one groan.

XLII

"Enough, enough!" the voice lamenting said,
"Tancred, thou hast me hurt, thou didst me drive
Out of the body of a noble maid
Who with me lived, whom late I kept on live,
And now within this woful cypress laid,
My tender rind thy weapon sharp doth rive,
Cruel, is't not enough thy foes to kill,
But in their graves wilt thou torment them still?

XLIII

"I was Clorinda, now imprisoned here,
Yet not alone within this plant I dwell,
For every Pagan lord and Christian peer,
Before the city's walls last day that fell,
In bodies new or graves I wot not clear,
But here they are confined by magic's spell,
So that each tree hath life, and sense each bough,
A murderer if thou cut one twist art thou."

Calling the etchings on the tree epitaphs was indeed right, the tree is like “a hollow grave,” supposedly “imprisoning” the spirit of Clorinda, and mirroring her tomb “built of polished stone” (Book 12, XCIV). Harkening back to Dante’s act of tearing a splinter from a living tree in Canto XIII of *Inferno*, “from that splinter issued forth together / Both words and blood” (Spitzer 88, cf. Bellamy 229, footnote 33), a voice cries out from the “gaping wound” of the tree, repeating “that deep and cruel wound” (Book 12, LXXXI) that Tancred himself has inflicted on Clorinda. Hearing the other’s voice seems to be tied to acts of violence in *Jerusalem Delivered*.

The episode that Freud uses for illustrating the unconscious repetition compulsion in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* is itself a repetition of the story from Dante, suggesting that in *Jerusalem Delivered*, repetition does not only appear at the level of the story, but of poetic diction as well. This compulsion to repeat is necessitated by the poetic conventions of

imitatio, or following the models of great poetic antecedents, and *aemulatio*, which also involves "the attempt to surpass the model" (Pigman 26), turning poetic discourse into a site of combat (Hope 85).

This plea or "plaint" (XLVI) can also be understood as the repetition on the level of the story of the voice of the narrator which was trying to "warn" Tancred of the tragic mistake he is about commit when he and Clorinda was fighting in Book 12:

> Oh vanity of man's unstable mind,
> Puffed up with every blast of friendly wind!
>
> LIX
> Why joy'st thou, wretch? Oh, what shall be thy gain?
> What trophy for this conquest is't thou rears?
> Thine eyes shall shed, in case thou be not slain,
> For every drop of blood a sea of tears:

The intrusion of the narrator's voice here on the level of discourse thus prefigures the voice that cries out from the wound of the tree, bringing an ethical consciousness into the story, the need of which emerges out of the distance between an omniscient narratorial perspective and the limited perspective of Tancred. This ethical demand is only readable in retrospect, in the temporality of dramatic irony. In the woods, in Book 13, the knight encounters a similar ethical demand in the writing on the tree, but it first proves as unreadable as the narrator's foreshadowing intrusion to the scene of the duel in Book 12. A little while later it becomes readable, but it is still not available for understanding. The sound or voice that accompanies the reading of the text, "a sound like speech of human kind" (XL), fills Tancred "With pity, sadness, grief, compassion, fear," (XL) telling of the various emotional responses to another's suffering. However, this emotional understanding is not shared by the rational mind: "once again stroke he, / He nould give over till the end he found / Of this adventure" (XLI). In the name of reaching "the end […] of this adventure," Tancred seems to disavow the ethical knowledge, which amounts to "cruelty" and "murder" in the discourse of the wound.

This reopening, or return, of the wound prompts Caruth to read Tasso's story as a

> staging of the figure of the wound, as a parable of the very term *trauma* […] For the story of the movement from the original wounding of Clorinda to the wounding of the

> tree can also be read as the story of the emergence of the meaning of trauma from its bodily referent to its psychic extension (Caruth *Unclaimed* 116, footnote 8.)

Both Freud's and Caruth's reading is contingent upon the fact that Tancred has repeated his earlier act of murder unwittingly again when he cut deep into the tree. However, this reading, however fascinating it is, might not be accurate:

> XLVI
> Thus his fierce heart which death had scorned oft,
> Whom no strange shape or monster could dismay,
> With feigned shows of tender love made soft,
> A spirit false did with vain plaints betray;

In my reading, these lines reveal that the voice complaining from the wound is not, in fact, Clorinda's. A spirit disguised itself as the dead beloved, to transmit the (ethical) message that it meant to convey. From such a perspective, Tancred's story is less an allegory about committing the same tragic act twice, which Freud reads as the manifestation of the repetition compulsion, then an allegory about a sense of unconscious guilt that cannot be redeemed by the discourse of divine retribution, nor of divine forgiveness.

This is not the first time, though, that Tancred hears Clorinda's voice calling out for him. He first encountered her in his dreams in Book 12: "so mourned, so slept the knight" (XC),

> XCI
> And clad in starry veil, amid his dream,
> For whose sweet sake he mourned, appeared the maid,
> Fairer than erst, yet with that heavenly beam.
> Not out of knowledge was her lovely shade,
> With looks of ruth her eyes celestial seem
> To pity his sad plight, and thus she said,
> "Behold how fair, how glad thy love appears,
> And for my sake, my dear, forbear these tears.
>
> XCII
> "Thine be the thanks, my soul thou madest flit

At unawares out of her earthly nest,
Thine be the thanks, thou hast advanced it
In Abraham's dear bosom long to rest,
There still I love thee, there for Tancred fit
A seat prepared is among the blest;
There in eternal joy, eternal light,
Thou shalt thy love enjoy, and she her knight;

XCIII

"Unless thyself, thyself heaven's joys envy,
And thy vain sorrow thee of bliss deprive,
Live, know I love thee, that I nill deny,
As angels, men: as saints may wights on live:"
This said, of zeal and love forth of her eye
An hundred glorious beams bright shining drive,
Amid which rays herself she closed from sigh,
And with new joy, new comfort left her knight.

In other words, Clorinda appears in Tancred's dreams to forgive and, paradoxically, to thank him for "advancing" her soul to Heaven through the act of baptism. The trauma within the story is thus made meaningful and redeemed by the discourse of divine forgiveness. The other forgives the self, even in the face of her destruction. The Imaginary seems to heal the wound caused by the Real: "Thus comforted he waked" (XCIV), writes Tasso.

There is an obvious disjunction between the two voices that we hear, the voice in the dream, forgiving Tancred for what he did, and the voice resounding from the wound, complaining and accusing the knight for an act he has just repeated. Are these two voices the same? Freud in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* seems to suggest that the voice is Clorinda's, showing his perspective closer to Tancred's limited knowledge than to the omniscient point of view of the narrator hinting at the acts of a "spirit false" (XLVI). Read through this literary example, Freud's theory of trauma seems always already to speak from a traumatic situation it set out to describe,[94] verifying Caruth's claims that

[94] LaCapra voices the same doubt about Caruth: "The language of literary theory—at least in Caruth's variant of this language—itself seems to repeat, whether consciously or unconsciously, the disconcertingly opaque movement of post-traumatic repetition in a seeming attempt to elucidate that moment." (LaCapra *Writing* 184)

> the Tasso example suggests that the language of trauma does not simply originate in a theoretical knowledge that stand outside of trauma but may emerge equally from within its very experience. Yet this inner link between the experience of trauma and its theory, or between the language of survivors and the language of theoretical description, need not imply a lack of objectivity or truth, but the very possibility of speaking from within a crisis that cannot simply be known or assimilated. (Caruth *Unclaimed* 116-17, footnote 8)

According to the dream, Clorinda is in Heaven, thus she is no longer within the reach of Ismeno's dark magic hastening the spirits of the underworld to inhabit the trees of the woods (Book 13, VIII). This interpretation would suggest that the voice speaking from the tree is, indeed, not hers, but a voice which is speaking out of the residue of guilt that the discourse of forgiveness could not eliminate from Tancred's soul. There might be another reading, though, that questions the epistemological status of the dream and interprets it only as a wish fulfillment (a la Freud). In such an understanding, the dream is only an excuse invented by Tancred's mind to exonerate himself, the forgiveness is only imaginary, and the voice in the woods might be Clorinda's, whose accusations now seem all the harsher. The problem is that we cannot decide whether an actual or only an imaginary forgiveness took place, which decision could underlie an accurate reading of the episode.

Through Ismeno's act of "personifying" the trees, the ethical potential implicit in the rhetorical figure of prosopopeia can also be hinted at. By personification, the other—meant both in the sense of a person, as well as the residue of guilt that could not be redeemed by the discourse of divine retribution or forgiveness—can return to address the self, to forgive or to accuse. That is the haunting experience that Tancred's account of his journey testifies to:

> XLIX
>
> "What would you more? each tree through all that wood
> Hath sense, hath life, hath speech, like human kind,
> I heard their words as in that grove I stood,
> That mournful voice still, still I bear in mind

Tancred says "a witness true am I" (XLVII), but to what? On the one hand, from Freud and Caruth's perspective, he is a witness to the retroactive structure of trauma and the repetition compulsion; on the other hand, the power of language to create and exonerate guilt, as well as the impossibility of absolution.

Conclusions

From a postcolonial perspective it may be argued that divine forgiveness and divine retribution are both part of a Western religious ideology that was used to justify the very occurrence of the crusades. After all, Tasso' epic is about the crusades, and talks out of the very same discourse (Tylus "Reasoning" 111). Such a perspective would also enable the critic to understand Tancred's unexplained and irresolvable residue of guilt as the return of this cultural repressed, illustrating the hardly masked violence of Catholicism advocating a crusade. I think it was this inability or impotence of religious discourse to act as a metanarrative that could have resolved all the ambiguities within the epic that led Tasso to rewrite his *Jerusalem Delivered,* his "tainted romance" into the "godly epic" *Jerusalem Conquered* (Tylus "Review" 1236).

Read through the tale of Tancred and Clorinda, *Jerusalem Delivered* thus portrays the crusades as an encounter with the other that is structured like trauma—very much like how Suleri glosses the colonial situation through the very same metaphor. The residue of guilt emerging in the story thus owes to a certain blindness to the suffering of the other, the unethical nature of which can only be properly demonstrated if the other takes the shape of the dead beloved. While for Reverend Peter, Clorinda, the "heathen damsel" (Book 12, LXXXVII), is otherness that needs to be eliminated and conquered, Tancred seeks to "love" her, and feels utter guilt for unwittingly destroying her. What Tancred did was, in a way, a literalization of the aims of Reverend Peter's discourse. If we examine the relationship between these two different modes of representing the other, it is obvious that the first threatens to eclipse the latter, but even then, it cannot redeem the residue of guilt emerging from the traumatic encounter with the other.

At first glimpse, it seems odd that Freud and Caruth, who are interested in the ethical potential invested in narratives of trauma should use an example taken from a work about the crusades, which was predicated upon the destruction of the other. In the end, Tasso's epic may speak from a discourse of violence peculiar to Catholicism, but through the literary qualities of his text, and especially in the allegory about the tragic love of Tancred and Clorinda, *Jerusalem Delivered* in a deconstructive reading becomes one of the implicit critics of the discourse it emerges from. This implicit criticism can help us recover the ethical resources which theoreticians of trauma theory are looking for and which might help in the "decolonization of trauma studies" that Michael Rothberg is calling for.

CHAPTER IV. DECONSTRUCTION AND LEGAL THEORY

DECONSTRUCTION, LAW AND LITERATURE

> "The poet, according to the tradition which has ever prevailed among us, and is accepted of all men, when he sits down on the tripod of the muse, is not in his right mind; like a fountain, he allows to flow out freely whatever comes in, and his art being imitative, he is often compelled to represent men of opposite dispositions, and thus to contradict himself; neither can he tell whether there is more truth in one thing that he has said than in another. This is not the case in a law; the legislator must give not two rules about the same thing, but one only." (Plato, *The Laws*)

This chapter of the dissertation aims to explore how the relationship between deconstruction, law and literature figures in the texts of Shoshana Felman, Barbara Johnson and Cathy Caruth. Felman's most recent book, *The Juridical Unconscious*, offers two closely interrelated models of law and literature: literature being a supplement to the law; and literature constituting a rupture of the legal framework. Johnson's texts analyze this relationship within the context of sexual politics as well as of legal personhood, the study of which proved to be crucial for Caruth's "The Claims of the Dead," too. The various theories these writers offer about the intricate and complex relationship between deconstruction, law and literature, I believe, have contributed a lot in opening up fascinating new possibilities in our understanding of these notions.

Between Law and Literature

"To many," write Drucilla Cornell, Michel Rosenfeld and David Gray Carlson in the introduction to *Deconstruction and the Possibility of Justice* (1992),

> the very title of this book […] would seem to be an oxymoron. At least by its critics, deconstruction has been associated with cynicism toward the very idea of justice. Justice, so the story goes, demands reconstruction, not deconstruction. […] For them, deconstruction purportedly undermines public reason, rejects communitarian standards of morality, mocks legality and denies even the possibility of shared reality given to us in language." (Cornell, Rosenfeld and Carlson, eds. ix-x)

The coordinate conjunction in the title ("and") thus seems as problematic here as it proved to be in Felman's analysis of psychoanalysis *and* literature, Jane Gallop's reading of feminism *and* deconstruction, or Simon Critchley's study of deconstruction *and* ethics. For Felman the coordination was, in fact, hiding subordination (literature was subordinated to psychoanalysis). Gallop's analysis of the "and" revealed how feminism and deconstruction had very different approaches to politics and subjectivity. Critchley also asked "what could deconstruction possibly have to do with ethics, apart from radically putting into question the possibility of the latter?" (Critchley *Ethics* 2) It is enough to swap "ethics" with "justice" in this quote and we can begin to understand the anxiety that certain thinkers feel when deconstruction starts "meddling" with issues of law and justice.[95] Indeed, deconstruction *and* the possibility of justice is, for some critics, structured like an oxymoron: their understanding of deconstruction would never allow for the possibility of justice to emerge, as it is a "cynical" discourse that "mocks legality," dismissing it as mere fiction. Caruth, in her introduction to *Critical Encounters: Reference and Responsibility in Deconstructive Writing* (1995),[96] identified these critical standpoints as stemming from a misreading of deconstruction in terms of its views on referentiality: "the possibility that reference is indirect seems to mean that we have no reliable access to experience or to history and hence no basis for political action or ethical decision." (Caruth "Insistence" 1)

In reaction to these views, the aim of Cornell, Rosenfeld and Carlson is to deepen "our understanding of deconstruction and its relation to questions of law and justice" and "to widen the horizon of how justice can and should be conceived." (Cornell, Rosenfeld and Carlson, eds. x) In a similar way, Caruth also asks, "In what ways could we define a politics or ethics that derives from a position in which full understanding is not possible?" (Caruth "Insistence" 1) In her view, the theories of reference that take cognition or perception as their model, "rather than assuring us access to reference, thus eliminate the possibility of recognizing it where it does not occur in preconceived conceptual terms" (Caruth "Insistence" 3). This does

[95] Deconstructive philosophy did not leave legal studies unaffected either, as Johnson argues "deconstruction has had a career equal in controversy and importance to the career it has had in literary studies, particularly through the work of what has been called Critical Legal Studies. The Critical Legal Studies movement, which took shape during the 1970s, has been described by Mark Tushnet as loosely organized around 'three propositions about law: that it is in some interesting sense indeterminate; that it can be understood in some interesting way by paying attention to the context in which legal decisions are made; and that in some interesting sense law is politics.' Critical Legal Studies thus bring together the questions raised by deconstruction and political critique." (Johnson *Wake* 37) Jack M. Balkin notes that the implicit philosophical problem involved in legal deconstruction was that to use deconstruction "lawyers would have to adapt it so that it could serve a critical and normative function" (Balkin 721), which largely neutralized its critical potential.

[96] Interestingly enough, both books originate in 1989. *Deconstruction and the Possibility of Justice* "grows out of a symposium entitled *Deconstruction and the Possibility of Justice*, held at the Benjamin N. Cardozo School of Law on October 1-2, 1989" (vii), while *Critical Encounters* "emerged from a conference" that "took place in April 1989, under the title »Deconstruction Reviewed«." (vii)

not mean, however, that the impossibility of knowing entails revoking the claims of responsibility, quite the contrary, "the demand for responsible action arises most urgently in the impossibility of a pregiven self-understanding or knowledge." (Caruth "Insistence" 5)

Probably the most essential disagreement between deconstruction and legal discourse flows from their different concepts of consciousness. While deconstruction focuses on moments with rational discourse where consciousness falters (blind spots, aporias), in Felman's view, the law is "traditionally calling for consciousness and cognition to arbitrate between opposing views, both of which are in principle available to consciousness" (Felman *Juridical* 4), and is in principle, ahistorical, universal (Felman *Juridical* 11). Yet all the papers collected in *Critical Encounters* as well as *Deconstruction and Possibility of Justice* are interested in the blind spots that inevitably reside within the discourse of the law, given its textual nature as a narrative (Brooks "Law" 14): legal discourse thus

> finds itself either responding to or unwittingly involved with processes that are unavailable to consciousness or to which consciousness is purposefully blind. What has to be heard at court is precisely what cannot be articulated in legal language. […] the law has quite conspicuously and remarkably its own structural (professional) unconscious. (Felman *Juridical* 4-5)

We could hypothesize that legal discourse itself emerged out of the need to settle undecidable matters, yet it seems to contain certain symptomatic elements that disrupt its authority. To point these out, like Felman, Johnson or Caruth does, is far from dismissing it as an unnecessary institution: it means that we can gain a more profound insight into the nature of law when we examine it in the moments it eludes consciousness, where it does not occur as sense. These moments are associated by Felman as the literary occurring at the heart of the legal. It can be suggested that, much like psychoanalysis, literature functions as an unconscious of the law, dismantling its blind spots and rethinking the judgment it passes.

Both Paul Gewirtz and Peter Brooks in their introductions to *Law's Stories: Narrative and Rhetoric in the Law* problematize in a Felmanian/Gallopian/Critchleyan fashion the conjunction between law and literature, as it may connote different approaches: "It is no secret that »law and literature« has become something of a movement, a subject addressed in scholarly journals and even an occasional law school course. But the rubric covers different uses of that »*and*.«" (Brooks "Law" 14, emphasis added) Brooks and Gewirtz primarily differentiate between two separate models: "law *in* literature," which basically means a thematic approach to the representations of the law in literary texts (Gewirtz 3, Brooks "Law"

14, Felman *Juridical* 55, 192); and "law *as* literature," which examines legal texts with the help of methods developed by literary theory and criticism (Gewirtz 4, Brooks "Law" 15, Felman *Juridical* 55, 192-194).[97]

In Felman's view, the problem with thematic interpretations is that they are "essentially conservative of the integrity and of the stable epistemological boundaries of the two fields" (Felman *Juridical* 55), they submit literature to the mastery of a legal perspective, reducing literature to a mere illustration of the law. Most often, these approaches are examples of what Robert Eaglestone has called "epi-readings," for which "language is transparent, a window through which the world of people, actions and events can be seen." (Eaglestone 3) Such an approach that reduces language to a mere instrument might satisfy law scholars, but it leaves much to be desired for a literary critic.

Brooks argues that law, just like literature, is comprised of language (Brooks "Law" 14), and can thus be analyzed with the tools familiar from literary theory. The critical vocabulary for reading language as rhetoric has been most radically broadened by deconstructive criticism, or "graphi-reading," which "prioritises language, text and reading over a nostalgia for the human" (Eaglestone 4). This approach has led to a reconsideration of legal hermeneutics, and the various "rhetorical interpretations of legal opinions, statutes and legal texts," as well as, for example, "narratological interpretations of legal storytelling" (Felman *Juridical* 192, 193). However, this model also runs the risk that the law is swallowed up by literature, which might also entail the loss of its persuasive and performative powers—that is precisely why critics opposed to deconstruction condemn it as "cynical."

Felman, Johnson and Caruth's approaches to the question of law and literature can be regarded as belonging mostly to the latter category, yet with certain limitations. As Felman explains her approach in *The Juridical Unconscious* the following way:

> My approach here will be different. I will compare a trial to a text. My starting point will be their comparably real and comparably astounding *impact*, the striking similarity of their historical reception. I will proceed, then, to compare the trial's and the text's narratives of crime and trial. This juxtaposition between legal facts and literary facts is, admittedly, quite bold. Its rewards will be assessed by the surprises it

[97] For a nuanced history of the relationship between law and literature, see C.R.B. Dunlop's "Literature Studies in Law Schools" and Brook Thomas's "Reflections on the Law and Literature Revival." There have been attempts to address this subject in Hungarian critical discourse too, for example the 2007/2 issue of *Iustum Aequum Salutare* was devoted to "law and literature." This field of inquiry is still relatively new here and has not received the critical attention it deserves (Simon 72), although there are researchers, like Tamás Nagy or Attila Simon, whose essays provide a good introduction to the study of law and literature. This chapter of the dissertation also wants to contribute to these debates in Hungary by introducing the theoretical insights of Felman, Johnson and Caruth.

> reserves. The ground for juxtaposition will be, therefore, not just an analogy of theme (of meaning) but an analogy of impact. I read the impact (of the trial, of the text) as itself a *symptom* of the (unarticulated) meaning, or as itself part of the evidence presented by the case. (Felman *Juridical* 55)

Felman's grounds for comparing law and literature proceed from both their thematic preoccupations and their impact (which need not be conscious at all) within their legal or literary context, which is symptomatic of the often ungrasped meaning of the case. In her approach, legal and literary texts mutually illuminate and displace each other—in surprising ways—through their different views of language, rhetoric, trauma and subjectivity. In this chapter I will examine two examples of the relationship of literature and law that Felman proposes: in the first instance, literature becomes a supplement to the law; in the second example, literature appears in legal discourse as a rupture.

This element of surprise that we find in Felman, is what Harold Schweizer also emphasized in Johnson's approach to the interrelationship between law and literature: "aesthetic and textual concerns are then perhaps in surprising ways applicable to the political situation" (Johnson *Wake* 82). As Johnson explains, "certain political problems are based on rhetorical structures or are thoroughly shaped and overdetermined by rhetorical structures." (Johnson *Wake* 81-82) I have already written extensively about the figure of abortion which proved crucial in Johnson's dislocation of deconstruction and feminism. In this chapter I will also address her other essays dealing with the relationship between law and literature, especially "Anthropomorphism in Lyric and Law," which essay can be regarded as a rewriting of Paul de Man's "Anthropomorphism and Trope in the Lyric," as well as her own "Apostrophe, Animation and Abortion." Caruth's "The Claims of the Dead: History, Haunted Property, and the Law" deepens Felman's understanding of the relationship between legal discourse, trauma, history and literature through a reading of Honoré de Balzac's *Colonel Chabert* (1832), which in her interpretation becomes an allegory of "how the law, in this tale, at the same time comes to recognize, and fails fully to comprehend, the legacy of a traumatic history." (Caruth "Claims" 421)

Literature as the Rupture of the Legal Framework

Felman and Dori Laub's *Testimony* was a unique book in the sense that it opened up a whole new discourse for talking about trauma, history and literature. Its double perspective focusing on psychoanalysis and literature initiated, together with Caruth's *Trauma:*

Explorations in Memory, what we now call trauma studies. As a "sequel" to *Testimony*, *The Juridical Unconscious* argues that in "the past half-century, two works have marked what can be called *conceptual breakthroughs* in our apprehension of the Holocaust" (Felman *Juridical* 106): Hannah Arendt's *Eichmann in Jerusalem* (1963) and Claude Lanzmann's *Shoah* (1985). Felman believes that

> We needed trials and trial reports to bring a conscious closure to the trauma of the war, to separate ourselves from the atrocities and to restrict, to demarcate and draw a boundary around, a suffering that seemed both unending and unbearable. Law is a discipline of limits and of consciousness. We needed limits to be able both to close the case and to enclose it in the past. Law distances the Holocaust. Art brings it closer. We needed art – the language of infinity – to mourn the losses and to face up to what in traumatic memory is not closed and cannot be closed. Historically, we needed law to totalize the evidence, *totalize* the Holocaust and, through totalization, to start to apprehend its contours and its magnitude. Historically, we needed art to start to apprehend and to retrieve what the totalization has left out. Between too much proximity and too much distance, the Holocaust becomes today accessible, I will propose, precisely in this space of *slippage between law and art*. But it is also in this space of slippage that its full grasp continues to elude us. (Felman *Juridical* 107)

Felman in *Testimony* has already begun exploring how Lanzmann's film, which is "about the *relation between art and witnessing*" (Felman and Laub 205), tries to reclaim a voice for the witness through a multitude of personal testimonies narrated in many different languages. The author finds a legal parallel for *Shoah* in the 1961 Eichmann Trial and claims that

> Law is a language of abbreviation, of limitation and totalization. Art is a language of infinity and of the irreducibility of fragments, a language of embodiment, of incarnation, and of embodied incantation or endless rhythmic repetition. Because it is by definition a discipline of limits, law distances the Holocaust; art brings it closer. (Felman *Juridical* 153)

While the Nuremberg Trial of 1945-46 chose to disregard the personal testimonies of survivors in order to establish the case against the Nazi leaders purely on the basis of documents, "the Eichmann trial chose to rely extensively on witnesses as well as documents to substantiate its case" (Felman *Juridical* 133). Seen in such a light it becomes

understandable that the Nuremberg Trial had more influence on international jurisprudence, creating the precedents of "crimes against humanity" (Felman *Juridical* 1, 134, cf. Menyhért 65), while the Eichmann Trial had more impact on collective memory (Felman *Juridical* 134), creating for the first time the collective narrative of the Holocaust and a new language of recuperation (Felman *Juridical* 123, 127, cf. Sun, Peretz, Baer, eds. 399).

In Felman's interpretation the Eichmann trial incorporated a "literary" moment: a witness, K-Zetnik, himself a writer, fainted at the witness stand while giving a testimony. In Arendt's interpretation, this scene can be regarded "as symptomatic of the general misfire of the trial" (Felman *Juridical* 140), while Felman reads it, like the judge of the case, as "a profoundly meaningful and not a senseless moment of the trial" (Felman *Juridical* 156), where the body as an other "spoke" and disrupted the rational discourse of the law (Rottenberg 1099, Murav 236):

> The writer's collapse can be read as a parable of the collapse of language in the encounter between law and trauma. It reveals the literary as a dimension of silence in the courtroom, a dimension of speechless embodiment, which brings to the fore through the very failure of words the importance of the witness's body in the courtroom. Thus, the Eichmann trial includes this dimension of the body's collapse as a legally meaningful dimension. (Felman *Juridical* 9)

This scene also reflects the different relationship of law and literature to trauma and testimony, and thus they are condemned to misunderstand each other. K-Zetnik's body "speaks" here inasmuch as it falls to silence, interrupting, in a subversive "literary moment," the legal procedure, showing what the law is unable to grasp: "law's story focuses on ascertaining the totality of facts and events. Art's story focuses on what is different from, and more than, that totality." (Felman *Juridical* 152) This is one of the most important insights gained by Felman from the Eichmann trial: the event and its interpretation testifies to the centrality of "the expressionless" (she is using Walter Benjamin's term here from "The Storyteller") within the case, and attributes legal meaning and significance to a moment that seemed to subvert the legal frame (Felman *Juridical* 165).[98]

[98] The "expressionless" is not only attributable to the silence of K-Zetnik, but in Felman's view, which can also be traced in Arendt's book, which can also be read as a work of mourning for Walter Benjamin.

Felman's *The Juridical Unconscious* picks the thread up where *Testimony* had left off, focusing on "the hidden link between trials and traumas" (Felman *Juridical* 1), the question of how the voice of the witness can be reclaimed after a traumatic event that was structured by its annihilation. Yet it presents the argument in a new context that remained mostly implicit in *Testimony*: she explores how a legal perspective can reflect upon the complex relationship between trauma and recovery. In other words the book is trying to understand "the relation between law and literature and between law and trauma, and […] the dialectic between social injury and justice" (Felman *Madness* 6). In "The Return of the Voice: Claude Lanzmann's *Shoah*," art provided a way for reclaiming the missing voice of the witness, while *The Juridical Unconscious* critically "examines the cultural conviction that the law sutures the wounds of collective violence" (Sun, Peretz and Baer, eds. 9). Felman believes that each trial "is related to an injury, a trauma for which it compensates and which it attempts to remedy and overcome" (Felman *Juridical* 60), in other words, it is through judgment that our culture tries to integrate into a meaningful discourse the symbolic (and most of the time all so real) violence done by traumatic events:

> As a pattern inherited from the great catastrophes and the collective traumas of the twentieth century, the promised exercise of legal justice—of justice by trial and by law—has become civilization's most appropriate and most essential, most ultimately meaningful response to the violence that wounds it. (Felman *Juridical* 3)

Austin Sarat also writes in his response to Felman's work that "It is the distinctive work of law to confront the catastrophic and to try to restore sense to a shattered world." (Sun, Peretz and Baer, eds. 390)

In an ideal case, a trial "is supposed to be precisely a translation of the trauma *into consciousness*" (Felman *Juridical* 122, cf. 150),[99] in Felman's view, however, the law in general, or trials in particular, cannot fully integrate or "translate" traumas within its discourse which results in "the trauma inadvertently repeat[ing] itself as an unconscious legal memory under the conscious legal process" (Felman *Juridical* 85, 146, cf. Rottenberg 1099). The law also has its unconscious and its blind spots, but in the author's interpretation this blindness

[99] Harriet Murav glosses these terms the following way: "Trauma, a devastating, hidden psychical wound, remains unavailable to consciousness, but nonetheless spills over into conscious life, making its effects known by symptomatic repetition. Trials, in contrast, deal with what is known, clear, and subsumable under rational categories, and most importantly, bring conflicts to closure." (Murav 234)

goes well beyond the emblematic figure of the blind Justitia in front of whom everyone is equal (Felman *Juridical* 80).[100]

Precisely such a repetition of trauma happened in the O. J. Simpson case as well, which was heralded in the media as the "trial of the century." In 1994 Simpson was accused of killing his ex-wife, Nicole Brown-Simpson and her companion, Ronald Goldman (Felman *Juridical* 194). From this moment on, the trial was broadcast just like a soap opera, attracting a massive number of viewers, up until October 1995 when the jury unanimously acquitted Simpson from under the charges. The legal procedure, however, did not end here, as the family members of the victims initiated a civil court suit which ruled in 1997 that the accused was responsible for the death of the victims, and was liable for paying damages, despite having been acquitted from the charge of homicide earlier. The verdict was also upheld by the appeals court in 2001(Felman *Juridical* 194).

During the trial, both the defense, and the prosecution intended to locate the significance of the events in broader contexts: the prosecution emphasized the domestic violence aspect of the case, while the defense argued against the implicit racism of the legal system:

> On the side of the prosecution, the issue that made its claim in court became the trauma of abused women, and on the side of the defense, the issue that imposed itself was yet another trauma, here again the massive fact of race: the trauma of being black in America. (Felman *Juridical* 4)

Two "competing traumas," "that of race and that of gender" (Felman *Juridical* 91, Rottenberg 1098, Murav 235) emerged during the trial, however, in the end, only one of them could be recognized in front of the law. The law could not but remain blind to the fact that these two discourses that define the subject (gender and race) historically came into existence with an implicit reference to each other (McClintock 68, Loomba 161, Butler *Bodies* 181, 182). The jury's verdict chose "race solidarity" (Felman *Juridical* 91), and had to ignore the domestic violence, symbolically repeating the murder of the victim through the erasure of her perspective (Felman *Juridical* 77). This necessary blindness of the legal procedure has often been criticized ever since.

[100] "Justice, as is well known, is customarily represented as a blindfolded goddess (see Raphael's fresco Justice). In this concrete image, the blindness stands of course for impartiality. The metaphor of the blindness of justice has been underscored by the vocabulary of legal liberalism: an impartial constitution is often presumed to be color-blind as well as gender-blind." (Felman *Juridical* 200, footnote 31)

Tolstoy's *The Kreutzer Sonata* had a similar feverish impact on nineteenth-century Russia like the Simpson trial had at the end of the twentieth-century (Felman *Juridical* 66-67). As opposed to Simpson, there was no doubt that Tolstoy's protagonist, Pozdnyshev killed his wife for her supposed infidelity. During his trial, he was acquitted "since his crime is deemed to be a crime of passion caused by the betrayal of his wife." (Felman *Juridical* 74) It seems that patriarchy has an "unwritten rule," or a "prerogative" for betrayed husbands to kill their infidel wives and their lovers, revealing an "invisible relation between marriage and domestic violence." (Felman *Juridical* 79) However, the conclusion of the legal case did not mean the end of the story as the main character thought that justice was never able to understand the "essence" of the events: the traumatic gap between the sexes, which coulc only momentarily be covered over by marital love and bliss (Felman *Juridical* 88-89). Felman believes that "Both verdicts," Simpson's and Pozdnyshev's, "are in turn traumatic in that they *deny, in fact, the very trauma that the trial was supposed to remedy*." (Felman *Juridical* 81)

If "Law relates to history through trauma" (Felman *Juridical* 84), reading Felman's *The Juridical Unconscious* makes us realize that the most crucial figure linking law and literature is the notion of trauma, too. Yet law and literature offer two very different ways of relating to traumas:

> Another dimension through which I read the cultural significance of these historic trials is the complementary dimension of literature. Literature emerges from the very tension between law and trauma as a compelling existential, correlative yet differential dimension of meaning. An encounter between law and literature—understood in new ways and methodologically conceived in utterly noncustomary terms—will thus beckon in the background of these trials. I analyze the ways in which the testimony of some literary writers in the face of trauma and in the face of the events of law corroborates and complements the testimony of the critics and the thinkers, the theorists of trauma. I will show how […] in every culturally symptomatic and traumatic case, legal meaning and literary meaning necessarily inform and displace each other. The complexity of culture, I submit, often lies in the discrepancy between what culture can articulate as legal justice and what it articulates as literary justice.
>
> What indeed is literary justice, as opposed to legal justice? How does literature do justice to the trauma in a way the law does not, or cannot?
>
> Literature is a dimension of concrete embodiment and a language of infinitude that, in contrast to the language of the law, encapsulates not closure but precisely what in a given legal case refuses to be closed and cannot be closed. It is to this refusal of

> the trauma to be closed that literature does justice. The literary writers in this book thus stand beyond or in the margin of the legal closure, on the brink of the abyss that underlies the law, on whose profundity they fix their vision and through whose bottomlessness they reopen the closed legal case. (Felman *Juridical* 8)

When Felman aims "to illuminate legal obscurities with literary insights and to reflect on ambiguities the trial has left by using textual issues that will turn out (surprisingly) to be quite relevant to them" (Felman *Juridical* 55), she is implicitly also suggesting that what remained unresolved by law manifests itself as an excess that can only be narrated as literature.

She later writes that

> A trial and a literary text do not aim at the same kind of conclusion, nor do they strive toward the same kind of effect. A trial is presumed to be a search for truth, but, technically, it is a search for a decision, and thus, in essence, it seeks not simply truth but a finality: a force of resolution. A literary text is, on the other hand, a search for meaning, for expression, for heightened significance, and for symbolic understanding. (Felman *Juridical* 55)

Law tries to provide closure and resolution, but can only temporarily cover up the gap in the depth, while literature, as a supplement to the law, can expose the "abyss between the sexes" or the "abyss between the races" (Felman *Juridical* 90) in its most radical form (Felman *Juridical* 95, cf. Rottenberg 1102):

> the purpose of the literary text is, on the contrary, to show or to expose again the severance and the schism, to reveal once more the opening, the hollowness of the abyss, *to wrench apart what was precisely covered over, closed or covered up by the legal trial*. The literary text casts open the abyss so as to let us look, once more, into its depth and see its bottomlessness. (Felman *Juridical* 95)

In the concept of literature above, we again recognize Felman's notion of *la chose littéraire*, an aspect of literature that cannot be fully grasped within a critical narrative, creating an excess that threatens to subvert critical accounts. While Felman elsewhere associated literariness with rhetoric, or irony, here literature gets an ethical function as well, speaking about a residue of guilt that could never be fully resolved within legal discourse. From this perspective, it is worth considering the "Afterword" attached to *The Kreutzer Sonata* as well,

which is somehow neglected in Felman's reading. The afterword was attached to the text, because of the "confusing" meaning of the story. Tolstoy wrote that "I have received, and continue to receive, a great deal of letter from people I don't know asking me to explain in clear and simple terms, what I think about the subject of the story" (Tolstoy 163). However, by "explaining the story," it transformed the radical insights of the tale into a moral allegory, limiting its interpretive possibilities, resembling the closure necessitated by legal discourse. The case of the afterword also points out a problem inherent in the relationship between literature and criticism: in the movement from literature to theory, the "literariness" of the text often disappears.

Interestingly enough, Johnson's first text dealing with law and literature can be found in *The Critical Difference*, which contains a chapter on Herman Melville's enigmatic *Billy Budd*, which imagines the relationship between law and literature in terms similar to Felman's: literature opens up and becomes a supplement to the legal closure of the narrative. The story in Johnson's interpretation stages "the twisted relations between knowing and doing, speaking and killing, reading and judging, which make political understanding and action so problematic." (Johnson *Critical* 108) "Melville's Fist: The Execution of *Billy Budd*" thus connects the notion of unreadability and ambiguity with questions of politics as well as judgment. She argues that it is "by means of misreading of gaps in knowledge and of discontinuities in action that the plot of *Billy Budd* takes shape" (Johnson *Critical* 95), leading to the protagonist's crime and subsequent execution. The impact of the story stems from the incongruity between two different modes of narrative, allegory and legal discourse: the allegorical encounter between good and evil (Billy and Claggart) is thus overwritten by legal discourse that represents Billy's fatal act as an act of insubordination against authority.[101] However, the obvious discrepancy between these two modes of discourse that shape the outcome of the narrative returns to haunt the readers and the critical reception of the tale. One of the key interpretive moments of the tale revolves precisely around Captain Vere's very harsh verdict: "Judgment, however difficult, is clearly the central preoccupation of Melville's text, whether it be the judgment pronounced *by* Vere or *upon* him." (Johnson *Critical* 101) In fact, the history of the tale's reception can be written based on how the critics regarded Vere's judgment (Johnson *Critical* 101). Relying on strict martial laws stemming from the urgency of the historical situation, Vere's rationale for his decision reveals the law as less "an

[101] Johnson notes how critics frequently associated Billy with good and Claggart with evil (Johnson *Critical* 98-99) and "For many readers, the function of Captain Vere has been to provide »complexity« and »reality« in an otherwise »oversimplified« allegorical confrontation" (Johnson *Critical* 98), and "to insert »ambiguity« into the story's »oversimplified« allegorical opposition." (Johnson *Critical* 105)

absolute, timeless, universal law," but "a historical phenomenon" (Johnson *Critical* 100).[102] In Johnson's view, "Judgment, then, would seem to ground itself in a suspension of the opposition between textuality and referentiality" (Johnson *Critical* 104), and its function is "to convert an ambiguous situation into a decidable one" (Johnson *Critical* 105).

Law thus moves from cognition to performance, which performance is "nothing less than the wielding of the power of life and death though language." (Johnson *Critical* 102) However, this decision is contingent upon a "repression of ambiguity" (Johnson *Critical* 106), which reveals judgment as an essentially political act leaving behind an insistent residue to meaning that paradoxically makes the closure necessitated by the law impossible. Johnson believes that "what Melville shows in *Billy Budd* is that authority consists precisely in the impossibility of containing the effects of its own application" (Johnson *Critical* 108), which is most apparent in the triple ending of the story (the ending proper; the story recounted in a naval chronicle that reverses the roles of Claggart and Billy; and a ballad about the Handsome Sailor):

> far from totalizing itself into intentional finality, the story in fact begins to repeat itself retelling itself first in reverse, and then in verse. The ending not only has no special authority: it problematizes the very idea of authority by placing its own reversal in the pages of an "authorized" naval chronicle. To end is to repeat, and to repeat is to be ungovernably open to revision, displacement, and reversal. The sense of Melville's ending is to empty the ending of any privileged control over sense. (Johnson *Critical* 81)

Even though legal discourse is introduced to the story as a counterpoint to the allegorical narrative, it fails to contain the tension that is created by these two different modes of discourse, leaving the story open-ended and prone to repetition.[103] In *Billy Budd* literature becomes a powerful supplement to law, its unique impact emerging from the blind spots of legal discourse. Similarly to Felman, Johnson believes that whereas law enacts "the forcible transformation of ambiguity into decidability" (Johnson *Critical* 107), "literature can best be

[102] The role of history is ambiguous both within the tale and its history: "The ultimate irony in the tale is thus that our final judgment of [Captain Vere] the very reader who takes history into consideration is made problematic by the intervention of history; by the historical accident of the author's death" (Johnson *Critical* 102), which left the story unfinished.

[103] Johnson notes that "Interestingly enough, reversibility seems to constitute not only *Billy Budd*'s ending but also its origin: the *Somers* mutiny case, which commentators have seen as a major source for the story, had been brought back to Melville's attention at the time he was writing *Billy Budd* by two opposing articles that reopened and retold the Somers case, forty-six years after the fact, in precisely antithetical terms." (Johnson *Critical* 151-152, footnote 7) She is referring here to the fact that the legal impasse in the story was loosely "based on the real and widely debated problem that had confronted Captain Mackenzie of the U. S. brig *Somers* in I842." (Ives 31)

understood as the place where impasses can be kept and opened for examination, where questions can be guarded and not forced into a premature validation of the available paradigms" (Johnson *Feminist* 13).

Law and Sexual Politics

In the first chapter of *Mother Tongues*, "Correctional Facilities," Johnson is contemplating the relationship between law and literature through a reading of Plato's banning of poets from the Republic, as well as the trials of Gustave Flaubert's *Madame Bovary* and Charles Baudelaire's *The Flowers of Evil*. Whereas literature is traditionally defined as exempt from legal judgment, here the "autonomous" sphere of aesthetics is condemned and censored by the law. To be able to condemn these literary pieces, legal discourse must posit them as having direct reference to the outside world, even though the notion of l'art pour l'art aimed to separate the realm of aesthetics from any sort of reference to the outside world (Johnson *Mother* 3), constituting an "ivory tower" of art. Johnson identifies the central anxiety of the law over Baudelaire's volume of poetry in sexual difference in general, and lesbianism in particular:[104] "what is censored in the Western tradition derived from Plato is always the fact of sexual difference." (Johnson *Mother* 4) The prosecutor Pinard was worried about "what will happen to public decency with the mass circulation" (Johnson *Mother* 7) of "immoral" texts like Baudelaire's *The Flowers of Evil*. Rita Felski in *The Gender of Modernity* has already called our attention to the problems of representing mass culture as female, secondary, supplementary, and Johnson's analysis in this chapter adds further depth to the interrelationship of sexuality, art, economy, society and the technologies of reproduction in the age of French *modernité*. Talking about Benjamin's reading of Baudelaire, Felski claims that "the lesbian's status as heroine of the modern derived from her perceived defiance of traditional gender roles through a subversion of 'natural' heterosexuality and the imperatives of biological reproduction." (Felski 20) Seen in this light, the punishment against the Baudelaire (he had to pay a fine and remove some poems from the volume) can be regarded as a way of assuming legal control over the "excesses" not only of female sexuality (lesbianism), but female readership as well. As Johnson suggests, because of the fact that sexual difference "leaves a residue, it has to be legislated" (Johnson *Mother* 24). In other words, female desire—should we encounter it in the form of lesbianism, or in Emma Bovary's marital infidelity—must be made normative, suppressed under the guise of compulsory heterosexuality and motherhood.

[104] One of the subtitles of *The Flowers of Evil* could have been "Les Lesbiennes."

These trials thus tried to regulate what remains only an implicit subtext in Johnson's reading of *Billy Budd*: the story is also structured by homosocial desire that fails to correspond to, and exceeds the traditional models of sexual difference (Segdwick 92). Literature in this train of thought becomes the imaginary space where the licentiousness of sexual desire might gain representation and hence it needs to be censored and regulated. In *The Kreutzer Sonata*, the law was unable properly to respond to the violence between the sexes; the law in Baudelaire's trial becomes a normative force that tries to contain the ambiguities that emerge from homosocial desire, forcibly reintegrating it within the confines of compulsory heterosexuality and marital bliss. Johnson's reading of the vicissitudes of *The Flowers of Evil* reveals a symptomatic constellation of law and literature when both discourses encounter issues of gender and desire: once again, the verdict passed by the law proves to be less than impartial and inherently political.

One of Johnson's strangest contribution to the relationship between law and literature is "Double Mourning and the Public Sphere" opening *The Wake of Deconstruction*. She relates in the final part of the essay that she was asked by the *Harvard Law Review* to respond to an essay entitled "A Postmodern Feminist Legal Manifesto" by Mary Joe Frug. Even though this text was left unfinished because of the author's brutal murder near hear home on April 4, 1991, the editors of the *Harvard Law Review* decided to publish it in its fragmented form, followed by the responses of Johnson, Ruth Colker and Martha Minow. (Johnson *Feminist* 183, Johnson *Wake* 37, 42) Mary Joe Frug's death "textually" occurs in the middle of a sentence she was writing, leaving a gap in her text that Johnson calls "the lesbian gap" (Johnson *Wake* 38):

> Women who might expect that sexual relationships with other women could
>
> [to be completed by:
> economic and security incentives which make a male partner more advantageous for non-sexual reasons than a same-sex partner for women. (quoted by Johnson *Feminist* 191, Johnson *Wake* 39-40)

This "lesbian gap" testifies to a "return of history" very much like we find in de Man's "Shelley Disfigured": the text being "molded by an actual occurrence" (de Man *Rhetoric* 120), which interrupts the writing process, revealing death as "a displaced name for a linguistic predicament" (de Man *Rhetoric* 81, quoted by Johnson *Wake* 38). From Johnson's essay it becomes obvious that these are precisely the gaps that legal discourse cannot tolerate

(Johnson *Wake* 39): for example her question posed in the essay "How does this gap signify?" has constantly been changed during the editing procedure to ask "What does this gap mean?" (Johnson *Wake* 38, Johnson *Feminist* 191) This systematic rewriting of Johnson's text[105] points out the fact that

> law review writing is a resistance to opening up meaning as a question, as a non-given, as a bafflement, as the possibility that what is intended and what is readable might not be the same. […] The ideology of law review style would thus seem to attempt to create a world saturated with meaning, intention, and consciousness—without discontinuities or gaps. (Johnson *Wake* 39)

Johnson included some of her points about this case into "The Alchemy of Style and Law" in *The Feminist Difference*, where the latter sentence reads: "The ideology of law review style attempts to create a world saturated with meaning, without gaps, and, indeed, *doubtless without lesbians*." (Johnson *Feminist* 174, emphasis added) Legal style thus believes what Caruth has called

> the assumption that experience is constituted in large part by self-awareness and thus by meaningful perception, that history is available primarily as the completed knowledge of a past, that political and ethical decisions can and do arise only from a position of understanding and self-understanding. (Caruth "Insistence" 1)

As opposed to such views, deconstructive criticism problematizes meaning, intention as well as consciousness. It conceives of meaning as a question, rather than a given, brackets intention as the only source of meaning, shows that understanding can occur even where consciousness is absent. Making this "lesbian gap" meaningful by completing it would imply its reinscription within the system of compulsory heterosexuality (Johnson *Wake* 40), a reinscription which is made impossible by Mary Joe Frug's tragic death.

The afterlife of this text in the *Harvard Law Review* shows uncanny resemblances to the appearance of Billy Budd's story in the naval chronicle, which completely reversed the roles of Billy and Claggart: at the first anniversary of Mary Joe Frug's death, in 1992, the *Harvard Law Revue*, a "spoof" edition of the *Harvard Law Review* appeared (Johnson

[105] This systematic rewriting by legal discourse is by no means peculiar only to Johnson's texts. In "The Alchemy of Style and Law," she writes about how, for example, "Patricia Williams repeatedly documents the revisions, erasures, and displacement her writing undergoes in it encounters with the rules of legal style and citation." (Johnson *Feminist* 171)

Feminist 173), which "contained a parody of Mary Joe Frug's essay entitled 'He-Manifesto of Post-Mortem Legal Feminism,' authored by 'Mary Doe, Rigor-Mortis Professor of Law,' dictated from beyond the grave." (Johnson *Wake* 42) In the misogynistic text "The victim of sexual violence is […] confused with the perpetrator" (Johnson *Wake* 43), totally reversing the roles of killer and victim in the brutal murder, a line of argumentation all so familiar from rape cases: "*she* asked for it, it was *her* fault," so the familiar argumentation goes, emphasizing the victim's responsibility for her fate and contributing to a myth of the "willing victim" (Brown "Outside" 105-106).

Johnson also sees a surprising parallel between the case of de Man and Mary Joe Frug:

> Both were admired and loved; both were deeply mourned; and in both cases, mourners had to confront—though very differently—a second traumatic event which opened up a heated controversy in the public sphere. But now I see another parallel between the two cases that I had not seen before. Paul de Man, writing in his early twenties with a precocious sense of entitlement, served as a mouthpiece for a dominant ideology that belittled, demeaned, excluded, and eventually killed millions of Jews. He did not himself commit murder, but he expressed a complete failure to imagine himself in the place of the other whom he was willing to dismiss from Europe. Is his case different from the case of the authors of the Frug parody, also presumably in their early twenties, also speaking with entitlement, also not murderers, yet refusing to take seriously the magnitude of the problem of violence against women, incapable of imagining themselves in the place of the violated other? (Johnson *Wake* 47)

In the O. J. Simpson trial, legal discourse repeated the violence done to the victims by not being able to register their trauma, silencing their voices. Felman called upon literature to thematize the residue of guilt which could not be redeemed by the legal process. In Johnson's case literature as parody grants voice to the victim through prosopopeia (Johnson *Wake* 42) only "to turn the fiction of her voice, the instrument of her survival, into a weapon with which to violate her again (Johnson *Wake* 43). To reverse Felman's model, legal discourse was called upon to condemn the excesses of literature. However the investigation regarded it as a "private, sophomoric, interpersonally regrettable, and isolated" (Johnson *Wake* 46) case rather than "a symptom of a pervasively hostile or unwelcoming" (Johnson *Wake* 45) attitude of Harvard Law School to women, or as a piece affirming the violence done to women in our society. In this sense, the law's inability properly to respond to trauma (of literature) or the repetition of violation is what makes this case similar, once again, to the Simpson trial.

In the chapter about deconstruction and feminism, I have written extensively about how "Apostrophe, Animation and Abortion" argues that the political issue of abortion—the meaning of which is negotiated between the discourses of law and literature—hinges on the structure of apostrophe, the rhetorical figure which is precisely about giving (figural) life, animation and presence to something dead, inanimate, or not present (Johnson *World* 184). Twenty years after publishing "Apostrophe, Animation and Abortion," Johnson's *Persons and Things* returns to the very same problem from a different perspective. Undoubtedly one of the most revealing parts of this book is "Anthropomorphism in Lyric and Law," the title of which consciously evokes de Man's famous essay, "Anthropomorphism and Trope in the Lyric." In the author's view the discussions of law and literature "tended to focus on prose—novels, short stories, autobiographies, even plays—rather than lyric poetry" (Johnson *Persons* 188), yet a study of lyric from a legal perspective (as well as studying law from a lyrical perspective) might prove very rewarding in terms of crucial insights: for Johnson, "lyric and law might be seen as two very different ways of instating what a 'person' is" (Johnson *Persons* 188). These two notions of personhood are quite different though: "lyric person" is "emotive, subjective, individual," while "legal person" is "rational, rights bearing, institutional" (Johnson *Persons* 189).

Johnson discusses in detail "Anthropomorphism and Trope in the Lyric," and poses the (rhetorical) question: "Does lyric poetry try to give a psychological gloss to disruptions that are purely grammatical?" (Johnson *Persons* 195) referring to de Man's reading of the word *comme* in Baudelaire's "Correspondences," which can suggest both "metaphorical similarities among the senses point[ing] to a higher spiritual unity" or a "sheer enumeration [which] would disrupt that claim" (Johnson *Persons* 194). Such a reading would deny the claims of anthropomorphism over personification and open up the text to the random interplay of language, which does not allow subjectivity or consciousness to emerge. Johnson claims that "anthropomorphism depend[s] on the givenness of the essence of the human while personification does not" (Johnson *Persons* 206) and we can never safely tell them apart, which leads to an anxiety over humanness and personhood as such.

We might think that law should help us when trying to find a definitive answer to the relationship between persons and things, but Johnson's examples show that American legal history has ambivalences of its own revealed in the *Reconstruction Act* (the act that gave full citizenship, that is, personhood to slaves), the *Dictionary Act* (which extended personhood to corporations), in test cases like *Roe v. Wade* (ruling when the fetus becomes a person), or

Rowland v. California Men's Colony, a case which in Johnson's reading seems to revolve around "what a person is, and how you can tell the difference between a natural person and an artificial person" (Johnson *Persons* 198). The judges in the case did not find themselves in an easy situation as the legal language they use became opaque and "the task of reading becomes an infinite regress of glossing terms that are themselves supposed to be determinants of meaning" (Johnson *Persons* 199). To refuse the claim of the prisoners to be able to sue *in forma pauperis* (to deny their natural personhood as they are to be considered artificial persons), Justice Souter even has to refer to an anthropomorphism of the Congress to put an end to this infinite regress of language resulting in the deferral of meaning.

Caruth's "The Claims of the Dead: History, Haunted Property, and the Law" focuses on a similar aspect of the law that we find in Johnson's writings, that of revoking, as well as restoring legal personhood. The essay presents a reading of one of Balzac's stories, *Colonel Chabert* (1832), in which the title character, a colonel of Napoleon's army who had supposedly died in the battle of Eylau, asks for help from a lawyer to grant him "legal recognition that will restore to him his lawful identity, his property, and his wife." (Caruth "Claims" 419) His death was actually a "legal fiction" stemming from a misrecognition (Caruth "Claims" 424): "My death," says Chabert,

> was announced to the Emperor who took the trouble (he rather liked me, did the boss!) to find out if there really was no chance of saving the man to whom he owed such a dashing charge. He sent two surgeons with instructions to try and recognize me and bring me back to the ambulance wagons, telling them, perhaps rather negligently—he did have a lot on his hands at the time—"Just go and see if by any chance my poor Chabert is still alive." Those bloody medics who'd just seen me trampled underfoot by two regiments'-worth of horses no doubt couldn't be bothered to feel my pulse, and reported that I was indeed dead. So my death certificate was probably drawn up in accordance with the rules established by military jurisprudence. (Balzac *Colonel* 19)

This "legal fiction" contributed to his status as a war hero, but deprived him of his name, his identity, his property, in fact, his life. In Caruth's reading, he seeks the law to come to life again, to get back his property, as well as original identity, "to revive himself legally." (Caruth "Claims" 427) His "death"—having been trampled by the horses—undoubtedly scarred his body, making him disfigured, unrecognizable (Caruth "Claims" 419), leading to a defacement that disrupts the continuity of his existence before and after the battle. His face seems "cadaverous," "dead," making his figure "vaguely funereal":

> Colonel Chabert was as completely motionless as a waxwork figure […]. His eyes seemed to be covered with a transparent veil: they looked like dirty mother-of-pearl, with their blueish reflections shining tremulously in the light of the candles. His pale, livid 'hatchet face', if we may use that common expression, seemed dead. His neck was tightly enclosed by a dingy black silk cravat. The shadows concealed so well the part of the body that extended downwards from the brown line drawn by this tattered neckpiece that a man of imagination might have taken his old head to be a silhouette created by chance, or an unframed Rembrandt portrait. The rim of the hat covering the old man's brow cast a black furrow across his upper face. This strange, albeit natural effect contrasted dramatically with the white wrinkles, the cold meanderings, and the sense of being washed out evident in this cadaverous physiognomy. Finally, the absence of any movement in the body, or any warmth in the gaze, was in keeping with a certain expression of gloomy dementia, with all the degrading symptoms that characterize idiocy, and made of this figure something vaguely funereal, something that no human words could describe. But an observer, and in particular a solicitor, would have also found in this stricken man the signs of a deep sorrow, the marks of a misery that had worn down that face, just as the drops of water falling from the sky on a beautiful marble sculpture eventually erode it. A doctor, an author, a magistrate would have guessed at an entire drama on seeing this sublime horror whose least merit was that it resembled those fantasies that painter enjoy doodling at the bottom of their lithographic stones while chatting to their friends. (Balzac *Colonel* 16-17)

The dead man's (Balzac *Colonel* 18, 58) face resist description, yet compulsively invites reading, just like the face of the old man in Edgar Allan Poe's "The Man of the Crowd." Poe's narrator evoked the ideology of the flaneur to ascribe to himself preternatural skills of reading, while here solicitors, doctors, authors or magistrates are imbued with such an ability to guess the stories behind such faces.

The performance of the law thus needs to return the face, making the legal case an allegory of prosopopeia, which would grant "the unrecognizable figure before him the recognition of a human being" (Caruth "Claims" 429) through "translating the traumatic story into recognizable legal terms" (Caruth "Claims" 428). Even though Chabert's "death" proves

to be a "legal fiction" through his return, because of his defacement, the continuity in his identity can only be established, once again, through fiction.[106]

> 'Colonel, your case is extremely complicated' […]
> 'It seems perfectly simple to me,' said the soldier. 'They thought I was dead, and here I am! Give me back my wife and my wealth; give me the rank of general, as I deserve, for I was made a colonel in the Imperial Guard on the eve of the Battle of Eylau.'
> 'That's not how things work in the legal world,' replied Derville. (Balzac *Colonel* 40)

The case is made even more complicated because of the legal framework: Caruth situates the story within the context of the change of political as well as of the legal system, from the (Revolutionary-Napoleonic) Civil Code of 1807 which "in a certain sense redefined the human around the notion of rights" (Caruth "Claims" 428), and the Charter of 1814, a "historical attempt to return to the past effected by the Restoration" (Caruth "Claims" 422, cf. 427): the confusion generated by the return of Chabert was that "At the point that the Restoration would return property to the aristocrats, here a figure of the Revolution comes to demand that his own property be returned to him." (Caruth "Claims" 422-423)

To deal with this complicated situation, the truth seems insufficient for legal discourse, and its persuasive powers need to be augmented by fiction. Derville, Chabert's lawyer wants his client to trust his solicitor to the utmost (Balzac *Colonel* 45) and suggests a "compromise": "'We might have to compromise,' said the solicitor. 'Compromise?' repeated Colonel Chabert. 'Am I alive or am I dead?'" (Balzac *Colonel* 31) In Caruth's interpretation, such a compromise would allow

> the possibility of recreating a smooth succession between past and present and incorporating the legal history of the Revolution and postrevolutionary periods (the extended history of the Revolution as the foundation of modern law) into the continuity of a nontraumatic history. (Caruth "Claims" 432)

The compromise, as we later learn, is contingent upon the nonpersonal, purely legal relationship between Countess Ferraud and Colonel Chabert. Derville thus stages "a literary

[106] In Felman's reading of Balzac's "Adieu," it is through fiction, yet again, that Philippe tries to cure Stéphanie, by recreating the traumatic moment when they were separated from each other during the Napoleonic Wars: "he decides to reproduce the primal scene of »adieu« and thus to re-present theatrically the errant signifier's lost significance, its proper signified." (Felman *Woman* 37) But just like Derville's compromise, the therapy fails miserably: "Stéphanie will die; Philippe will subsequently commit suicide." (Felman *Woman* 38)

encounter" between them where the details of the compromise are to be agreed upon.[107] They are led into different rooms, with the lawyer shuttling between them. Because of Chabert's impatience, however, the compromise fails. He steps into the room where his wife is sitting:

> 'Yes, we'll go to Court,' exclaimed hoarsely the Colonel, opening the door and appearing suddenly in front of his wife, with one hand placed over his stomach underneath his waistcoat and the other pointing to the parquet floor, a gesture which the memory of his adventure made all the more terrible and dramatic.
> 'It's him,' the Countess said to herself. (Balzac *Colonel* 62)

However, this "personal recognition," as it might be called, is a moment later replaced by an official refusal: "'But this gentleman is not Count Chabert!' exclaimed the Countess, with feigned surprise." (Balzac *Colonel* 62) The compromise thus fails because of the impossibility of the recognition of the face: Derville explains to Chabert, "When you made your appearance, the Countess' reaction could only mean one thing. But you've lost your case, your wife knows that no one will recognize you!" (Balzac *Colonel* 63, Caruth "Claims" 435)

The law thus fails to give Chabert the recognition he is longing for, denying his humanity, which he later tries to reclaim through complete renunciation of what he used to be:

> 'My dear,' said the Colonel, seizing his wife's hands, 'I have resolved to sacrifice myself entirely to your happiness—'
> 'That's impossible,' she cried, with a convulsive shudder. 'Think what you're saying; you'd have to renounce your identity, by signing an official paper—'
> The word official pierced the Colonel to the heart and awoke an involuntary sense of mistrust. (Balzac *Colonel* 70)

This mistrust of the law and its confusion of truth and fiction prompts Chabert not to sign any further papers. Still, he gives his word not to harass the Countess again: "I will never lay claim to the name which I have perhaps given luster to. From now on I'm just a poor devil name Hyacinthe[108] who merely wants his place in the sun." (Balzac *Colonel* 75, Caruth "Claims" 439) Through the performative act of the promise, he renounces his claims to his

[107] In Caruth's opinion, "Balzac would appear, in this scene, to put on stage not only the two characters but precisely the highly theatrical language used by historians of the period to describe the Revolution; it is not only *the artifice of the literary text* but the language of historians that Derville thus imitates." (Caruth "Claims" 432, footnote 13, emphasis added)
[108] Chabert turning into Hyacinthe might suggests the tragic outcome of Hyacinthus's tale in Ovid's *Metamorphoses* (Ovid 278-280), the accidentally killed youth turning into a flower of mourning.

name and to his old identity. Caruth believes that "In addition to recalling the centrality of the promise in the *Social Contract*, generally considered to be one of the philosophical sources of the Revolution, Chabert's act draws on the power of the speech act constituted by the 1789 *Declaration*. (Caruth "Claims" 439, footnote 24)

Having denied his claim to humanity within the framework of law, Chabert metaphorically turns into literature as a living testimony to the failure of the law.[109] He later even renounces this new name, "'Not Chabert! Not Chabert! My name is Hyacinthe,' replied the old man. 'I'm not a man, I'm number 14, room 7'" (Balzac *Colonel* 81), turning himself into a number, a cipher, devoid of any humanity. Yet, paradoxically, this renunciation is precisely what returns the face of the colonel: during this meeting, "Chabert's face is now described as noble, rather than ghastly and ghostly." (Caruth "Claims" 440, footnote 26)

In the end, Chabert's example makes Derville ponder his own position as a solicitor, a representative of the law:

> 'Do you know, my friend,' Derville continued after a pause, 'that there are three types of men in our society—the Priest, the Doctor, and the Lawyer—who are quite unable to view the world with any esteem? They all wear black, perhaps because they are in mourning for all virtues and all illusions. The unhappiest of the three is the solicitor. When a man comes for the priest, he is impelled by repentance, by remorse, by beliefs which make him an object of sympathy, raise him in stature, and give the mediator's soul a certain consolation, so that his task is not without its pleasures: he purifies, he repairs, and he reconciles. But we solicitors, we see the same bad feelings coming into play repeatedly, nothing can improve them, our offices are sewers that can never be swept clean. How many things have I not learnt in the discharging of my duties! I have seen a father dying in an attic, without a penny to his name, abandoned by two daughters to whom he had given an income of forty thousand livres! I've seen wills being burnt. I've seen mothers despoiling their children, husbands stealing from their views, wives killing their husbands by using the love they had kindled in them to drive them to a state of madness or imbecility so they could live at peace with some lover.

[109] When Derville and Godeschal later meet the Colonel, Godeschal observes: "'I say, Derville,' said Godeschal to his travelling companion, 'have a look at that old man. Doesn't he look like those grotesque characters who come over from Germany? To think he's alive, and maybe even happy!' Derville raised his lorgnon, scrutinized the poor man, gave an involuntary start and said, 'That old man, my friend, is a whole poem, or, as the romantics would say, a drama." (Balzac *Colonel* 80) Andrew Brown associates Godeschal's reference to "those grotesque characters who come over from Germany" in literary terms, too: in his reading, it is "Probably a reference to the 'grotesque' characters in the tales of the German writer E.T.A. Hoffmann, much admired by Balzac." (Balzac *Colonel* 86, footnote 19) We can also think about Poe's "The Man of the Crowd" again which associated the old man in the title with a German book which does not let itself to be read.

> I've seen women giving to the child of a first marriage tastes bound to lead to its death so they could bequeath their wealth to a love-child. I can't tell you all that I've seen, for I have witnessed crimes against which justice is impotent. At all events, all the horrendous things that novelists think they are making up always fall short of the truth. (Balzac *Colonel* 82-83)

While the priest offers purification, reparation and reconciliation, in Derville's interpretation, the law can give none of these, a view that is in striking opposition to what the law the stands for in its traditional self-representations (offering truth, justice, recuperation, or reconciliation). Legal procedures always leave behind a residue of guilt metaphorizing the law offices as "sewers that can never be swept clean." These last words of the novel testify to the powerlessness of the law as well as literature to grasp the truth of what people are capable of, "fiction" (legal or literary) can never catch up with the "real." Balzac must have had a profound insight into both worlds, initially having been trained as a law clerk, which profession he later abandoned for becoming a literary writer, a fate mirrored by Derville's in *Colonel Chabert* (Caruth "Claims" 441, footnote 27). Paradoxically enough, this inefficiency or impotence of literature and law in the face of trauma can only be voiced from within a literary work, and, in fact, the examples that Derville cites are examples taken from Balzac's *Comédie humaine*: *Le Père Goriot*, *Ursule Mirouët*, *Gobseck*, *La Muse de département*, and *La Rabouilleuse* (Balzac *Colonel* 86, footnote 21). It might as well be that both law and literature tell us the most about the unreadable precisely through their failures. In the next part of the dissertation, I will read Herman Melville's "Bartleby the Scrivener" in a similar way to Caruth's reading of Balzac's *Colonel Chabert*, focusing on the supplementary relationship of law and literature as they try to comprehend the enigmatic figure of Bartleby.

"AN IRREPARABLE LOSS TO LITERATURE": LAW AND LITERATURE IN HERMAN MELVILLE'S "BARTLEBY THE SCRIVENER"

> "A figure of such interpretive dualism, what Melville in 'The Whiteness of the Whale' calls 'a dumb blankness full of meaning,' can be found on Melville's grave in Woodlawn Cemetery in the Bronx. Carved onto the granite headstone is a blank stone scroll—a haunting testament, perhaps, to the mysteries of silence but a tantalizing invitation as well to further inscription." (Robert S. Levine, *The Cambridge Companion to Herman Melville*)

At the end of Honoré de Balzac's *Colonel Chabert*, the lawyer Derville comes to the following conclusions about certain cases that he had to witness in his praxis: "I can't tell you all that I've seen, for I have witnessed crimes against which justice is impotent. At all events, all the horrendous things that novelists think they are making up always fall short of the truth." (Balzac *Colonel* 82-83) The lawyer's words testify to the inability of both literature and the law to understand and deal with "the horror of the real." However, as we could argue, law and literature are two very powerful discourses that we have for apprehending the unnarratable, yet in Derville's view, they are both bound to miss. As a way for thinking through the theoretical issues stemming from the unique relationship between law and literature uncovered by Shoshana Felman, Barbara Johnson or Cathy Caruth, this part of the dissertation will be devoted to a reading of Herman Melville's "Bartleby the Scrivener" (1853). The short story's significance in both Melville's oeuvre, as well as in American literature in general, is beyond doubt, despite the fact that its meaning constantly eludes us, or, it might be argued, precisely because it eludes us. The narrative involves many of the concepts that I have written about in the dissertation: the notion of unreadability and transference; the ethical question; literature as an interruption of the legal framework; literature as a supplement to law; or the notion of legal personhood.

J. Hillis Miller argues that "A large secondary literature has grown up around »Bartleby,« remarkable for its multiplicity and diversity. All claim in one way or another to have identified Bartleby and to have accounted for him, to have done him justice." (Miller *Versions* 173) Dan McCall calls this multitude of critical accounts "the Bartleby Industry" (McCall x, cf. Knighton 185, Zlogar 505), while Andrew Knighton argues that "The critical machinery of that uncommonly productive industry has long strained to dissect the tale's various ambivalences; innumerable critical ventures enter into contradiction, overwhelm each

other, and refuse to work together" (Knighton 185), revealing that the history of criticism is far from heading towards a possible synthesis, or a "solution." Following Dieter Meindl, Katalin Kállay G. sums up the various critical approaches to the short story in the following way:

> Bartleby can be—and has been—seen as a rebel against and a victim of American business-like, money-making society, as a nihilistic rebel, as the lawyer's subconscious personified, as a lunatic suffering from dementia praecox, as a mental case of catatonia or anorexia, as a new incarnation of Jesus Christ, as a representative of the Derridean *ecriture*, as a symbol of death, the story can be—and has been—further understood as a parable of Melville's own fate and the fate of the artist during Melville's time, as a prefiguration of modern absurdity, or a demonstration of the human situation itself (Kállay 126).

From this long enumeration it seems obvious that Bartleby is like the "blank stone scroll" on Herman Melville's tombstone missing an epigraph, which is, in George S. Levine's interpretation, "a haunting testament, perhaps, to the mysteries of silence but a tantalizing invitation as well to further inscription." (Levine, ed. 10) Instead of trying to add yet another interpretation to the long list, thereby inscribing the "blank stone scroll," I would like to focus on (failed) acts of reading in the short story, as they are negotiated between law and literature.

The History of the Oppressed

After a cursory glimpse at his present condition, the narrator of the story begins his narrative by talking about an "oppressed class" of people:

> I am a rather elderly man. The nature of my *avocations* for the last thirty years has brought me into more than ordinary contact with what would seem an interesting and somewhat singular set of men, of whom as yet nothing that I know of has ever been written—I mean the law-copyists or scriveners. (Melville "Bartleby" 92, emphasis added)

The lawyer is writing a story about a group of people, giving a voice and a face to these scriveners, who have never been properly represented in (legal or literary) narratives. In this sense, the text's master trope seems to be *prosopopeia*, the rhetorical figure, which Paul de Man defines as "the fiction of an apostrophe to an absent, deceased, or voiceless entity, which posits the possibility of the latter's reply and confers upon it the power of speech." (de Man *Rhetoric* 75-76) The relevance of this rhetorical figure to a legal context is first demonstrated by Quintillian's *Institutio Oratoria*, where the Roman rhetorician "places under the rubric of prosopopeia […] the invention of a hypothetical voice for a client in a court of law" (Paxson 17), thereby placing the figure at the heart of legal representation.[110] The story in this sense is shaped by the structure of legal representation, in which the lawyer is representing someone who does not have a voice. In a way, what the narrator is trying to do here is similar to what Walter Benjamin was calling for in his "Theses on the Philosophy of History": the recognition of the "history of the oppressed" (Felman *Juridical* 31), who were deprived of their language during the Second World War. In a certain reading, the final aim of Melville's lawyer could be to translate the unresponsive silence and the insistent refusal of Bartleby into an eloquent plea to redeem the hopelessness of the human condition in the world of business, even though—as it is suggested by the latent meaning of the word *avocation*—this can only be a *diversion* from the "original" voice.[111] It seems that when this translation is successful, its failure becomes more and more evident as well. The authority of the narrator to represent these law-copyists or scriveners, as he explains, comes from the fact that

> I have known very many of them, professionally and privately, and if I pleased, could relate diverse histories, at which good-natured gentlemen might smile, and sentimental souls might weep. But I waive the biographies of all other scriveners for a few passages in the life of Bartleby, who was a scrivener the strangest I ever saw or heard of. While of other law-copyists I might write the complete life, of Bartleby, nothing of the sort can be done. I believe that no materials exist for a full and satisfactory biography of this man. It is an irreparable loss to literature. Bartleby was one of those beings of whom nothing is ascertainable, except from the original sources, and in his case those are very small. What my own astonished eyes saw of Bartleby, *that* is all I

[110] Tom Cohen locates the origin of apostrophe in legal discourse too: "Literally a »turning aside, « the figure of apostrophe locates *its* own origin in Greek law courts, as a strategy of persuasion in arguing a case. It derives from the device used when an advocate turned away from the jury to address (and personify) an absent *third* party, thing, or god." (Cohen *Mimesis* 166)

[111] *Webster's Dictionary* lists the following meanings for avocation: 'diversion,' 'distraction' (this usage is glossed as archaic); 'vocation'; 'hobby,' and links the etymological root of the word to the Latin *vox*, voice.

> know of him, except, indeed, one vague report which will appear in the sequel. (Melville "Bartleby" 92)

What interests me the most in this passage is how the lack of a satisfactory account of Bartleby's life becomes "an irreparable loss to literature." In what sense is literature meant here? 'Literature' here may refer to both 'literature' as Felman would have it (*la chose littèraire*), but, as Miller warns us, it can also refer to the sum total of previous legal cases; that is, legal case histories can also be thought of as a body of 'literature' (Miller *Versions* 146). Apostrophe and prosopopeia, two of the most important figures of literature can be shown to originate from legal rhetoric, and this is the second instance that reveals us how literature and law are intertwined in this story.

Lacking a detailed life story, Bartleby becomes a blind spot ("an irreparable loss") in the text that the story constantly tries to comprehend, yet the narrative we are to read, just like Edgar Allan Poe's "The Man of the Crowd," presents us with *failed acts of understanding*. He seems to elude legal definition, constituting a blind spot of legal inquiry too, revealing a "literariness" at the heart of legal theory and practice. The only way of dealing with this lack or loss is through literature, which, in Felman's or Johnson's view, is the *other* of, or a supplement to, legal discourse. Legal inquiry in this sense needs something other than itself (literature) to give a proper account of what it had missed and cannot recover. Literature in this sense is also the "conscience" of law, as the lawyer's narrative emerges from a moral residue of the unjust legal procedure against Bartleby. But, in a way, literature, if it is structured around the model of legal representation, runs the risk of repeating the blindness of legal discourse, which could not understand the title character. If this is so, this would turn the story into an allegory that Derville was talking about: the inability of legal discourse and literature to give a proper explanation to the enigma of the text. In other words, the case the narrator-lawyer is about to present us is in excess of his usual "avocations" and, in Gregory S. Jay's opinion, "occasions for the first time in the lawyer's experience the challenge of an ethical decision, in other words, a decision for which no absolute law can provide an a priori judgment." (Jay 26)

The narrator presents his legal career the following way:

> I belong to a profession proverbially energetic and nervous, even to turbulence, at times, yet nothing of that sort have I ever suffered to invade my peace. I am one of those unambitious lawyers who never addresses a jury, or in any way draws down public applause; but in the cool tranquility of a snug retreat, do a snug business among rich men's bonds and mortgages and title-deeds. (Melville "Bartleby" 92-93)

He is thus "a conveyancer and title hunter, and drawer-up of recondite documents of all sorts" (Melville "Bartleby" 99), dealing with legal documents about property: "the lawyer's offices are the site where properties are subject to representation and reproduction" (Jay 20). Melville's short story depicts a capitalist society where property thus becomes synonymous to "selfhood" (Caruth "Claims" 430, footnote 10).[112] Such documents about property in Caruth's interpretation involve "the very possibility […] to achieve a recognizable identity" (Caruth "Claims" 428), and they are thus similar to the ones that established through a "legal fiction" the death of Colonel Chabert in Balzac's novella: their performance lies in the very recognition or denial of legal personhood based on property.[113] In this way, "Bartleby the Scrivener" can be read as a literary supplement to Karl Marx's redefinition of the subject and the self within capitalist society (cf. Cohen *Mimesis* 159, Jay 23, West 225, Brown 134, Levine ed. 9).[114] Among its various levels of meaning, the story also offers itself as an

[112] Caruth argues that "Against the background of the reduced notion of property as mere possession, Derville thus resuscitates, with Chabert, the sense in which the *Declaration of the Rights of Man and Citizen*, rather than recognizing the human through his property, precisely constituted the subject as proprietor, as the one who is recognized through his very right to claim." (Caruth "Claims" 432) David Kuebrich also argues how the radical working class spokesmen, Thomas Skidmore "called for an immediate and equal redistribution of property, argued that the Declaration of Independence had failed to articulate a crucial unalienable human right. All citizens were entitled to property, Skidmore declared, »not because they had a certain being for a parent ... not because of purchase, of conquest, of preoccupancy, or what not; but BECAUSE THEY ARE; BECAUSE THEY EXIST. I AM; THEREFORE IS PROPERTY MINE.«" (Kuebrich 388).

[113] There is, indeed a punishment by law called "civil death": "In criminal law the living dead are produced through »civil death,« a legal fiction indicating »the status of a person who has been deprived of all civil rights« […]. Historically, U.S. civil death statutes have dictated that the felon may not vote or make contracts. He loses his property. In some states his wife becomes a widow, free to remarry without divorcing him. Thus the incarcerated convict retains his »natural life«—his heart beats on, he labors, and he consumes—but he has lost the abstract life that made him fully human in the eyes of the law." (Smith "Detention" 245)

[114] Examining the political context of the story, Jay situates the short story at a time of transition "from a feudal mode of economic production to a capitalist one" (Jay 20), while Kuebrich's argues that "by 1850 Melville was well aware of the tensions, political struggles, and ideological discourse that characterized relations between New York workers and their employers." (Kuebrich 384) He warns that "An awareness of the many correlations between »Bartleby« and current social conditions and debates does not in itself explain the mysteries of the story, but it does make a strong prima facie case for viewing it as an historicized text more concerned with then-contemporary economic realities than is usually acknowledged. But this is not to suggest that the author of

allegory struggling with the very *definition of the human* within a capitalist society basing itself on written contracts and deeds regulating property—after all, as the subtitle says, this is "A Story of Wall-Street."[115] However, this personhood, or the definition of the human derived from legal documents is not at all straightforward, due to the documents being "recondite" or obscure, even suggesting "unreadable," or at least requiring professional aid in interpretation.

This legal machinery regulating property and personhood is contingent upon what Tom Cohen calls "a certain vision of the logos and mimesis itself": the meticulous work of copying, "the production of copies based on originals." (Cohen *Mimesis* 8, 152) The story stages various threats to this mimetic function of logos: preceding the age of mechanical reproduction, the very materiality of copying seems to interrupt the authority of the documents. Turkey, one of the scriveners, "would be reckless and sadly given to making blots in the afternoon, but some days, he went further, and was rather noisy." (Melville "Bartleby" 94) These blots are touches, or residues, of error that nevertheless refer to the dimension of the "human" within the obscure, inhuman discourse of legal documents. Nippers, the other copyist symbolizes a different threat to the mimetic logos: at times he shows "a certain impatience of the duties of a mere copyist, an unwarrantable usurpation of strictly professional affairs, such as the original drawing up of legal documents." (Melville "Bartleby" 96) In other words, he tries to usurp the master-narrator's position by writing texts on his own for his shady clients. Even with these threats, the cogwheels of the "logos-machine" are working fine, up to a point:

> Some time prior to the period at which this little history begins, my avocations had been largely increased. The good old office, now extinct in the State of New York, of a Master in Chancery, had been conferred upon me. It was not a very arduous office, but very pleasantly remunerative. I seldom lose my temper; much more seldom indulge in dangerous indignation at wrongs and outrages; but I must be permitted to be rash here and declare, that I consider the sudden and violent abrogation of the office of Master in Chancery, by the new Constitution, as a--premature act; inasmuch as I had counted upon a life-lease of the profits, whereas I only received those of a few short years. But this is by the way. (Melville "Bartleby" 93)

»Bartleby« is a social or socialist realist. The story's primary concern is not to expose underlying economic structures, mirror the midcentury New York workplace, or advance a particular ideology. Rather, Melville practices what might be termed a »short-hand realism« that assumes or merely intimates the existence of certain economic conditions so that he can concentrate on his chief interest, which is to disclose the underlying ideological assumptions (that is, the largely unconscious modes of thought and behavior) these new conditions engender." (Kuebrich 388-389)

[115] Miller, Cohen and Jane Desmarais have very interesting things to say about the role of walls in the story (Miller *Versions* 150-152, Cohen *Mimesis* 158-161, Desmarais 31).

This aside comment is far from just being "by the way," it refers to an issue central to the short story. The office of the Master in Chancery was a legal construct called into effect to remedy what common law could not guarantee.[116] It operated on the basis of "a system of rules developed to counterbalance the rigours of statute and common law by the Courts of Chancery so as to allow for fairness in individual cases." (Hudson xix) It fulfilled a paternalistic, protective, or "balancing" (Hudson 5, Thomas *Cross-Examinations* 172-173) function of the law, and as an instrument of equity, it strived to rectify the injustices that were possible within the existing legal framework (for example unjust actions committed against workers). David Kuebrich argues that "The original purpose of the system of chancery was to supplement the regular judicial system and to temper and correct the rigidity of written law by allowing for the imposition of judgments based upon natural law and conscience." (Kuebrich 399) In this way, equity became a supplement to common law, by trying to think what was excluded from market regulations: "equity 'mitigates the rigour of the common law' so that the letter of the law is not applied in such a strict way that it may cause injustice." (Hudson 3) To paraphrase Ortwin de Graef here, equity law embraces "the liminal promise of ethical substance left gratuitously suspended" in common law (de Graef "Instance" 252). It is somewhat ironical from this perspective that the office came to "abrogated" later, situating the story on the margins of a legal reform: Article XIV. § 8. of the Third Constitution of New York (1846) abolished the "anachronistic" office of master in chancery (Smith "Recalcitrant" 736). This change strikes the narrator mostly as a loss of prestige and wealth, rather than as an allegorical loss of legal conscience that could regulate the law: "the abolition of the chancery a few years later suggests the growing power of capital and the diminution of natural rights and moral argument." (Kuebrich 399)

Bartleby's very appearance stems from the narrator's acquisition of this office, which was predicated on the slippage between equity and market law:

> Now my original business—that of a conveyancer and title hunter, and drawer-up of recondite documents of all sorts—was considerably increased by receiving the master's office. There was now great work for scriveners. Not only must I push the

[116] We find more about the role of this office in Anglo-American law in Herbert F. Smith's essay: "While primitive law is concerned only with the maintenance of public order and strict law (common law) is principally interested in individual security, equity draws its principles from »natural law,« and is concerned with what can only be described as the ideal application of justice. Aristotle defined equity as »that idea of justice which contravenes the written law,« and that definition has hardly been improved upon. Courts of Equity or Chancery, then, are not »higher« than courts of common law, but are courts wherein different principles of law are extended-principles of ideality instead of precedent, principles of absolute instead of relative justice." (Smith "Recalcitrant" 736-737)

> clerks already with me, but I must have additional help. In answer to my advertisement, a motionless young man one morning, stood upon my office threshold, the door being open, for it was summer. I can see that figure now—pallidly neat, pitiably respectable, incurably forlorn! It was Bartleby. (Melville "Bartleby" 99)

"There was now great work for scriveners,"[117] so the title character is at once inserted into the mimetic structure of the office, and he does his job quite well:

> At first Bartleby did an extraordinary quantity of writing. As if long famishing for something to copy, he seemed to gorge himself on my documents. There was no pause for digestion. He ran a day and night line, copying by sun-light and by candle-light. I should have been quite delighted with his application, had he been cheerfully industrious. But he wrote on silently, palely, mechanically. (Melville "Bartleby" 100)

Interestingly enough, the lawyer's only criticism about him is that he lacks the periodical insubordination of his other scrivener, he writes "mechanically," like a machine, fulfilling every expectation. He is working laboriously until one fine day he refuses to work anymore, seeking refuge in his polite, but firm "I would prefer not to" (Melville "Bartleby" 101), which completely baffles and "unmans" (Melville "Bartleby" 109) the narrator.[118] Miller reads this turn of phrase as

> neither constative nor performative, or perhaps it might be better to say that is an exceedingly disquieting form of performative. It is a use of words to make something happen, but what it makes happen is to bring about the impossibility of making anything happen with words. It performs the blockage of all those forms of performative language by which the narrator lives and makes his living. (Miller *Versions* 256)

Jay suggests that "Bartleby's withdrawal from writing and his refusal to copy may be interpreted as a willed disobedience to every prescription in his culture's »general text,«" and thinks that "Bartleby's is a pure negation that frustrates every attempt that the law makes to

[117] Johannes Dietrich Bergmann suggests that Melville's idea of the story might have come from James A. Maitland's *The Lawyer's Story; Or, The Wrongs of the Orphans. By a Member of the Bar*, a novel which shows considerable similarities to the short story. (Bergmann 433)
[118] David S. Randall reads this act of insubordination as a subversion of Hegel master-slave dialectic presented in *The Phenomenology of Spirit* (Randall 94).

recuperate it." (Jay 21-22)[119] Cohen interprets this refusal as a "dispossession" of the Law Offices (Cohen *Mimesis* 8), an interruption of the mimetic system of logos (Cohen *Mimesis* 152-153). This interruption of work also entails an interruption of sense, leaving the narrator, the reader, and the critics of the tale wonder why he is refusing to work. By trying to find an answer to this question pertaining to the meaning of the story, the critical accounts also risk reinscribing Bartleby to the very system his refusal came to "dispossess."

The lawyer soon comes to imagine Bartleby as a responsibility coming from "fate":

> Gradually I slid into the persuasion that these troubles of mine touching the scrivener, had been all predestinated from eternity, and Bartleby was billeted upon me for some mysterious purpose of an all-wise Providence, which it was not for a mere mortal like me to fathom. (Melville "Bartleby" 121)

Yet this model of responsibility as destiny is soon substituted by another model, which is predicated on pure "chance":

> I thought all was going well, when a perturbed looking stranger visited me, inquiring whether I was the person who had recently occupied rooms at No.— Wall-street.
> Full of forebodings, I replied that I was.
> "Then, sir," said the stranger, who proved a lawyer, "you are responsible for the man you left there. He refuses to do any copying; he refuses to do any thing; he says he prefers not to; and he refuses to quit the premises." (Melville "Bartleby" 124)

This metonymically structured notion of responsibility ("you are responsible for the man you left there") is also the model that legal discourse is advocating, the visitor being a lawyer too. From here on, Bartleby becomes a "fixture," a "millstone" for the narrator: "not only useless as a necklace, but afflictive to bear. Yet I was sorry for him." (Melville "Bartleby" 115) However, this feeling of sorry soon passes, as he comes to see Bartleby as an undermining of his authority:

> And as the idea came upon me of his possibly turning out a long-lived man, and keep occupying my chambers, and denying my authority; and perplexing my visitors; and

[119] However, I would not go as far as Jay, to claim that "Bartleby allegorizes a Derridean solicitation of the law […]. Bartleby occupies the very premises of the law, disobediently. He refuses the social contract, disbands the state by withdrawing his signature from its constitution. In this he takes seriously both Jefferson's and Thoreau's thesis that the state originates in the individual's economic choice to trade part of his freedom for the benefits that political association brings." (Jay 22)

> scandalizing my professional reputation; and casting a general gloom over the premises. (Melville “Bartleby” 122)

The narrator is a man of appearances, and in a sense, Bartleby defaces him, and becomes an “apparition,” a “ghost,” or even an “intolerable incubus” for him (Melville “Bartleby” 108, 123, 122, cf. Miller *Versions* 162). He clearly has to come up with a solution: “What shall I do? what ought I to do? what does conscience say I should do with this man, or rather ghost.” (Melville “Bartleby” 123) He asks his former employee: “What earthly right have you to stay here? do you pay any rent? Do you pay my taxes? Or is this property yours?” (Melville “Bartleby” 119) These questions all pertain to the capitalist definition of legal personhood based on property. The little property Bartleby has (a little savings bank in his drawers) is hardly enough to count him as a person. The lawyer seems convinced that

> something severe, something unusual must be done. What! surely you will not have him collared by a constable, and commit his innocent pallor to the common jail? And upon what ground could you procure such a thing to be done?—a vagrant, is he? What! he a vagrant, a wanderer, who refuses to budge? It is because he will not be a vagrant, then, that you seek to count him as a vagrant. That is too absurd. No visible means of support: there I have him. Wrong again: for indubitably he does support himself, and that is the only unanswerable proof that any man can show of his possessing the means so to do. No more then. Since he will not quit me, I must quit him. I will change my offices; I will move elsewhere; and give him fair notice, that if I find him on my new premises I will then proceed against him as a common trespasser. (Melville “Bartleby” 123)

Here we have a legal solution that forecloses the notion of responsibility that the literary mode is predicated upon. Bartleby’s “non-acts” escape clear-cut legal definitions, for example, he cannot be a vagrant if he stays in one place all the time. The only way of fixing Bartleby’s uncanny meaninglessness as a “common trespasser” is to “evacuate” the offices (Cohen *Mimesis* 152). In spite of the fact that he is not a vagrant, he is taken into custody:

> When again I entered my office, lo, a note from the landlord lay upon the desk. I opened it with trembling hands. It informed me that the writer had sent to the police,

> and had Bartleby removed to the Tombs as a vagrant. Moreover, since I knew more about him than any one else, he wished me to appear at that place, and make a suitable statement of the facts. (Melville "Bartleby" 127)

In other words, Bartleby was put to the Manhattan Tombs based on a "fiction" similar to the one at the end of "The Man of the Crowd" ("he is unreadable, so he must be a criminal"), and the one that led to the legal death of Colonel Chabert. In fact, the name of the prison suggests that this conscious act of legal misinterpretation is in fact a symbolic murder that transfers the title character from the realm of the living to the realm of the dead. It is there, in fact, that he literally dies later on. The narrator meets him one last time in the Tombs, which encounter proves to be another crucial moment in the tale: "'I know you,' he said, without looking round,—'and I want nothing to say to you.'" (Melville "Bartleby" 128) It seems that the narrator's non-understanding stands in contrast to Bartleby's recognition and knowledge of the lawyer ("I know you"), which leads to his refusal to speak to the lawyer. This very last act of rejection leaves the narrator of the tale in a symbolic "debt," which stems from a residue of guilt translated into economic terms. This debt is, in turn, repaid by telling Bartleby's story (cf. Miller *Versions* 171-172), recuperating his blank face from multitude of faces forgotten by history.

Literary Failure

Melville's tale represents the acts of legal understanding as essentially unethical, only aimed fixing Bartleby's identity to "remove him to the Tombs as a vagrant" (Melville "Bartleby" 127), while literature emerges as a supplement to this legal framework. The story as literature tries to embrace the ethical potential that was foreclosed in legal discourse. Within literature Bartleby can come alive again through the artifice of prosopopeia, which, however, exhibits once again some of the ambivalences that necessitated the recourse to the literary mode in the first place.

The narrator first thinks that Bartleby's initial refusal not to work is only a misunderstanding so he asks the reason: "'And what is the reason?' 'Do you not see the reason for yourself,' he indifferently replied." (Melville "Bartleby" 115) This is an absolutely crucial scene in the story: it represents a failed act of (legal) understanding. After the failure of rational understanding, the lawyer proceeds to "endeavor charitably to construe to his imagination what proves impossible to be solved by his judgment." (Melville "Bartleby" 104) Where reason falters, the literary imagination enters as a supplement for understanding,

enacting the primal scene of the story itself, where legal failure flows into the literary through prosopopeia.

> What miserable friendlessness and loneliness are here revealed! His poverty is great; but his solitude, how horrible! […] For the first time in my life a feeling of overpowering stinging melancholy seized me. Before, I had never experienced aught but a not-unpleasing sadness. The bond of a common humanity now drew me irresistibly to gloom. A fraternal melancholy![120] (Melville "Bartleby" 109-110)

The story in this sense allegorizes Caruth's notion that ethics and an ethical relation to the other can flow from non-understanding (Caruth "Insistence" 1).[121] Jay argues too that "For the lawyer, the questions of will, freedom, and responsibility present themselves exactly as the effect of Bartleby's undecidability." (Jay 26) The problem is that even this reading proves unstable because of a possible tinge of irony the story. This ambiguity is probably most apparent when the narrator looks into Bartleby's face after he refused to work anymore:

> I looked at him steadfastly. His face was leanly composed; his gray eye dimly calm. Not a wrinkle of agitation rippled him. Had there been the least uneasiness, anger, impatience or impertinence in his manner; in other words, had there been any thing ordinarily human about him, doubtless I should have as soon violently dismissed him from the premises. But as it was, I should have as soon thought of turning my pale plaster-of-paris bust of Cicero out of doors. (Melville "Bartleby" 101)

He is like a statue, a "pale plaster-of-paris bust of Cicero," yet as the narrator confesses, "had there been anything ordinarily human about him," he would have been dismissed at once. This reveals a pressing ambivalence in the narrator's storytelling enterprise. He intended to give a face and a voice to people ("the law-copyists or scriveners") who have never been represented in literature. The performance of prosopopeia would humanize this unseen class of people who he feels responsibility for, in accordance with Kuebrich's call for "an initial,

[120] Brook Thomas argues that "A number of critics have speculated that the lawyer/narrator in »Bartleby« manifests attributes of Judge Shaw and that the relationship between the lawyer and Bartleby is Melville's comment on the relationship between himself and his socially superior father-in-law." (Thomas "Legal" 34. Cf. Jay 21 and Randall 89)

[121] Miller would have it the other way though, for him, the story is "the story of the failure of the narrator to tell the complete story of Bartleby. It is also the story of the corollary of this failure: the narrator therefore cannot determine his ethical responsibility toward Bartleby and act on it." (Miller *Versions* 142) For him, the absence of a biography entails an impossibility of constructing a correct ethical stance towards Bartleby, revealing that Miller is working with a surprisingly metaphysical notion of responsibility in his reading of the story.

minimal step" requiring "the lawyer stop treating Bartleby as a commodity and recognize him as a fellow human being." (Kuebrich 401) Yet if he humanizes Bartleby (the ethical act par excellence), based on the quote above he paradoxically sets himself a pretext for dismissing him at once.

It is very interesting to ponder whether the one final "biographical rumor" the narrator hears about Bartleby helps in understanding him:

> There would seem little need for proceeding further in this history. Imagination will readily supply the meager recital of poor Bartleby's internment. But ere parting with the reader, let me say, that if this little narrative has sufficiently interested him, to awaken curiosity as to who Bartleby was, and what manner of life he led prior to the present narrator's making his acquaintance, I can only reply, that in such curiosity I fully share, but am wholly unable to gratify it. (Melville "Bartleby" 131)

Bartleby's interruption of the mimetic structure of the law/logos/sense as well as his unreadability proves that rational/legal understanding is insufficient to account for his enigmatic behavior. The story thus evokes literature as a mode of discourse, which, through the literary imagination, might be able to give a proper answer to the pressing question: "who is he?" However in the final reading literature is "wholly unable to gratify" this question, and it has to (re)turn to the biographical, which only exists as an unconfirmed rumor:

> Yet here I hardly know whether I should divulge one little item of rumor, which came to my ear a few months after the scrivener's decease. Upon what basis it rested, I could never ascertain; and hence, how true it is I cannot now tell. But inasmuch as this vague report has not been without certain strange suggestive interest to me, however sad, it may prove the same with some others; and so I will briefly mention it. The report was this: that Bartleby had been a subordinate clerk in the Dead Letter Office at Washington, from which he had been suddenly removed by a change in the administration. When I think over this rumor, I cannot adequately express the emotions which seize me. Dead letters! does it not sound like dead men? Conceive a man by nature and misfortune prone to a pallid hopelessness, can any business seem more fitted to heighten it than that of continually handling these dead letters, and assorting them for the flames? For by the cart-load they are annually burned. Sometimes from out the folded paper the pale clerk takes a ring—the finger it was meant for, perhaps, moulders in the grave; a bank-note sent in swiftest charity—he

> whom it would relieve, nor eats nor hungers any more; pardon for those who died despairing; hope for those who died unhoping; good tidings for those who died stifled by unrelieved calamities. On errands of life, these letters speed to death.
> Ah Bartleby! Ah humanity! (Melville "Bartleby" 131)

The epistemological status of the rumor is highly dubious, yet it is infinitely suggestive (cf Miller *Versions* 158). These "dead letters," which, in the narrator's enumerated examples, all testify to individual tragedies, are in striking contrast to the "letters of the law," the abstract documents regulating legal personhood. Even if they "speed to death" after missing their real destination, they escape the mimetic system of logos based on copying. They speak from beyond the grave, reminding the narrator of ethical responsibilities he owes to the dead and the dispossessed. The final question is: can he heed their call?

Conclusion

In my reading, Melville's masterpiece shows the title character as a person thoroughly defined (and crippled) by the notions of legal personhood based on property, negotiated by the slippage between common law and equity law.[122] Bartleby's cessation of copying comes to obstruct the law, which is contingent upon the mimetic reproduction of logos. Because of his inscrutability, he becomes a figure for unreadability that escapes legal definition; yet he is taken to prison based on a "legal fiction." This forcible act leaves behind a residue of guilt in the narrator that can only be redeemed through literature, which, as a "history of the oppressed," emerges as a supplement to the cold and rational discourse of the law. However, even the literary imagination is unable to exonerate the guilt it originates from, as its master trope, prosopopeia, seems to exhibit the same aberrant structure that governed legal discourse in the first place. In the end, neither legal discourse, nor its supplement, literature can solve the central enigma of the text, and do justice to Bartleby, constituting one of the most profound insights of Melville's prose.[123] An insight, which—together with his

[122] This notion of personhood is in striking contrast to the romantic individualism coming from Thoreau, even if their methods of "passive resistance" are similar. For more on what kind of intertextual dialogue can be initiated between Thoreau and Melville, see Jay's "Styles of Civil Disobedience" and Desmarais's "Preferring not to."
[123] Jay argues that "By focusing on the lawyer, Melville situates the dilemma of the modern subject when confronted by an otherness that cannot be accounted for by the traditional economies of religious prophecy or capitalist profit making." (Jay 26) Elizabeth Renker also claims that "Melville famously referred to his books as 'botches.' His frustration with his work, fed by his failures in the marketplace, ran deeper: it was essentially an epistemological problem with the condition of writing itself. He conceived of writing as what he called the 'great Art of Telling the Truth,' but he simultaneously believes that the truth could not be told frankly. […] Melville's frustration over his thwarted desire to speak the Truth through art is intimately related to the material conditions of his scene of writing." (Renker 115) She thinks that "writing failed Melville in a most crucial sense, in fact in

"disgruntlement with the demands of the literary marketplace" the short story can also be an allegory of (Jay 24, cf. Thomas "Legal" 38-39)—nevertheless, condemned him to silence. As Cohen argues,

> In a sense what makes "Bartleby" unique may be that it seems to be "about" the cessation of writing (as copying), like a black-hole in the continuum of literary history. […] It is common to remark that after this text in his own scripto-biography Melville ceased writing prose during the long lyrical hiatus ending only with "Billy Budd." (Cohen *Mimesis* 152-153)[124]

Johnson suggests that the lyric, with its central figures of apostrophe, prosopopeia, anthropomorphism and personification is "by nature working against a decline of humanness and a thingification that go on all the time and have only accelerated with commodity capitalism." (Johnson *Persons* 23) Even though he was suspicious of the performance of prosopopeia, by turning to lyric, then, Melville was momentarily able to forget his insights into the rhetoric of law and literature suggested by this short story. But the very fact that *Billy Budd* exists hints that the questions of law and literature continued to haunt him as much as the various texts written in response to "Bartleby the Scrivener."

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the sense that mattered most to him: in enabling him to penetrate the world of the material in order to attain a transcendent realm of Truth." (Renker 132)

[124] In fact, it was only after the publication of *The Confidence-Man* (1857) that Melville turned to poetry. That novel was profoundly concerned, in Levine's view, with "the tendencies of letters, characters, and tautologies to block and occlude meaning. Melville's increasing interest in the page, Renker posits, made his move to poetry after the publication of *The Confidence-Man* all but inevitable." (Levine, ed. 8) Lawrence Buell also concludes that "The reflexive, fabulizing style of *The Confidence-Man* (1857), Melville's last published work of prose fiction, shows a sensibility pushing at the outer limits of the genre and ready to exchange it for another form that the persona can dominate more fully—that is, either poetry or nonfictional prose. Melville tried both. If there is a mystery about the turn at the point in Melville's career, it is not that he ceased to write prose narrative (except for the posthumously published *Billy Budd*), but that he chose poetry over the essay," which would have been "a much more logical next step in Melville's development." (Buell 135)

CONCLUSIONS: BETWEEN THEORY AND HISTORY

Much has happened in literary theory and literary criticism in the thirty years that the trajectory of the dissertation is about. If we would like to give a rough—and therefore oversimplifying—sketch of this itinerary, the story began with a reinterpretation of the relationship between deconstruction and psychoanalysis in the second half of the 1970s. It continued with the encounter between deconstruction and feminism in the 1980s, then went on to examine deconstruction and trauma theory within the ethical turn taking place in the 1990s, to conclude with the interface between deconstruction and law at the end of the 1990s and the beginning of the new millennium Shoshana Felman, Barbara Johnson and Cathy Caruth were active participants in these theoretical debates that helped to create critical positions in place today. They came up with various theoretical constructions for the study of literature: unreadability and transference; the performance of mimicry; apostrophe as an intermediary between rhetoric and politics; the relationship between trauma and testimony; prosopopeia as a reclaiming of the other from forgetting; apostrophe conceptualized as an address to and as a call from the other; literature as a rupture of the legal framework and as a supplement to law; or the juxtaposition of legal and literary personhood. Some of these notions find their roots in Paul de Man's texts, but many others are conceptualized through an extended dialogue or quarrel with discourses other than deconstruction. Despite their possible errors and occasional blindness, these concepts revolutionized literary theory and literary criticism. Reading their texts I always have the impression that if deconstruction is "dead," its afterlife, or haunting, looks all the more fascinating.

For Felman transference became a mastertrope of reading, which testifies to the rhetorical mechanisms of the text as well as to the various misreadings of criticism. Mimicry emerges in her oeuvre as a crucial strategy of interrogating patriarchal texts, but which nevertheless runs the risk of appropriating rhetorical ambiguities in a text for the feminine. In Johnson's texts, apostrophe, the rhetorical figure giving personhood, becomes a nodal point around which rhetoric, politics, law, feminism, legal studies and deconstruction can converge, while Caruth and Felman reconceptualized the figure as an address to and a call from the other that enacts the advent of the ethical. Felman's notion of literature as a testimony for trauma inserts the literary into a historical and a legal framework, which position is explored fully in *The Juridical Unconscious*, a book outlining different approaches to the question of law and literature. In her reading of the Eichmann trial justice was conceptualized as a suturing of the wounds of symbolic or real violence, giving hope for recuperation and healing in contrast to the endless repetitions of trauma. Yet the law sometimes fails to fulfill this role,

and it becomes the burden of literature to emerge as a supplement to what the law was not able to recognize and resolve.

In the dissertation I tried to juxtapose the examination of these theoretical figures with the reading of texts coming (with some exceptions) from 19th century American literature. I am aware that the literary texts I read in the thesis are all Western, white, male fantasies about otherness. Still, I think that through the blind spots uncovered in the process of reading, they can reveal a different narrative than the ideologies that they emerged from. The lesson I gained from these readings was that the real theoretical force of the notion of unreadability that de Man and deconstructive criticism came up with can be shown when dealing with concrete literary texts. However, these texts also transform the deconstructive concepts by juxtaposing their historical testimony to the universalizing tendency of theory. As the texts of Edgar Allan Poe, Honoré de Balzac, Leo Tolstoy, Ralph Waldo Emerson, or Herman Melville suggest, there is a growing need of reading and interpretation in the 19th century: signs appear in the city streets, newspapers, books enter mass-publication, and with this proliferation of language, comes the haunting notion of unreadability, too. These stories stage unreadability as a historically determined phenomenon pertaining to, among other things, class, gender, or race, rather than as a general category of interpretation. The enigmatic or the unreadable usually appears in them through liminal figures or experiences.

For contemporary criticism, the experience of death is the unrepresentable par excellence, it is unavailable as a "lived experience," it can only be mediated through representation, which inevitably prove to be misrepresentations. Emerson's ambivalence towards grief revolves around the recognition and the foreclosure of the other's death, which ultimately destabilizes his texts; Poe's aesthetics is based precisely on the death of the other, the death of a beautiful woman. However, Poe's aesthetics is haunted by the return of these women, leading to a deconstruction of his aesthetic theory. While the violence towards the other is only implicit in Emerson and Poe, Torquato Tasso's parable of Clorinda and Tancred struggles with death as the result of the violence inflicted by the subject.

Poe's "The Man of the Crowd" posits the flaneur as a "natural reader" of the city crowd, and the unreadable figure is a social outcast who roams the streets endlessly, in a repetitive and meaningless itinerary that is nevertheless made meaningful through a strong misinterpretation. Such a misreading or "fiction"—as a reduction of unreadability to sense—condemns both Balzac's Colonel Chabert and Melville's Bartleby to die in an almshouse, revealing an uncanniness of "downward mobility" between the classes.

Johnson's reading of Balzac's *Sarrasine* encounters the unreadable in the figure of La Zambinella, the castrato, who is "simultaneously outside the difference between the sexes as

well as representing the literalization of its illusory symmetry. He subverts the desire for symmetrical, binary difference by fulfilling it." (Johnson *Critical* 10) Felman interprets Paquita in "The Girl with the Golden Eyes" as unreadable because she "resists sexual appropriation" due to her bisexuality (Felman *Woman* 4, 44). Stéphanie in "Adieu" is the victim of the trauma of parting, which Philippe misreads and "mistreats," leading to her death.

Given the cultural significance of the "peculiar institution" of slavery in antebellum American literature, the issue of race also proves to be involved with unreadability. For example in Melville's "Benito Cereno," Babo orchestrates an elaborate play to mislead the helpful but ignorant Captain Amasa Delano, who is unable to understand the mimicry he sees, because "he is a prisoner of his inherited and axiomatic cultural stereotypes." (Virágos 180, cf. Kavanagh 354-355 and Thomas *Cross-Examinations* 99). Even though the mutiny on the ship is resolved by a legal trial at the end of the story, there remains an unreadable residue that is inextricably involved with the heritage of racial violence. Even though many of Johnson's texts engage seriously with the question of race, this dimension is probably the most important lack in the dissertation, as it is only touched upon in my reading of *Jerusalem Delivered*. Just like in the oeuvres of Felman and Caruth, it constitutes a not yet fully explored theoretical position within the thesis, which, as the chapter on Tasso suggests, might prove very effective in displacing the hegemony of deconstructive criticism and its heirs. It is possible to briefly sketch the outline of such inquiry by looking at the texts of Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, whose thesis about W. B. Yeats (*Myself Must I Remake: The Life and Poetry of W.B. Yeats*) was also supervised by de Man in the 1970s, and who, just like Johnson, entered the critical scene as the translator of Jacques Derrida's *Of Grammatology* to become one of the most eminent postcolonial critics today. The reason I could not include her texts in the dissertation is that I feel that the discourse her books speak is very much unlike de Man's, and owes much more to Derrida.

I see the most important contribution of the critics studied in the dissertation to literary theory and literary criticism in inflecting these notions of rhetoric and unreadability familiar from deconstructive texts with historically determined issues, like that of class, gender, race, or ethics, the importance of which were never denied, but neither were they fully explored in de Man's writings. If these are misreadings of de Man, then so be it; according to some critics, like Rodolphe Gasché, or Jeffrey Nealon (Cohen *Mimesis* 3), it was precisely this kind of misreading that produced "American deconstruction" or "deconstructive criticism" in the first place.

ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

The dissertation analyses the theoretical texts of Shoshana Felman, Barbara Johnson and Cathy Caruth, which are driven by the aim of inflecting Paul de Man's rhetorical deconstruction with other trends in contemporary literary theory: psychoanalysis, feminism, trauma-, or legal studies. My thesis is that through certain crucial notions, Felman, Johnson and Caruth are trying to create a dialogue between different theoretical positions that, as Johnson suggests, "remain skeptical of each other."

Transference becomes a mastertrope of reading in Felman's books, which testifies to the rhetorical mechanisms of the text as well as to the various misreadings of criticism. Mimicry emerges in her oeuvre as a crucial strategy of interrogating patriarchal texts, but which nevertheless runs the risk of appropriating rhetorical ambiguities in a text for the feminine. In Johnson's texts, apostrophe, the rhetorical figure giving personhood, becomes a nodal point around which rhetoric, politics, law, feminism, legal studies and deconstruction can converge, while Caruth and Felman reconceptualizes this figure as an address to and a call from the other that enacts the advent of the ethical as well. Felman and Caruth's notion of literature as a testimony to trauma inserts the literary into a historical and a legal framework, which is conceptualized as a suturing of the wounds of symbolic or real violence, giving hope for recuperation and healing in contrast to the endless repetitions of trauma. Yet the law sometimes fails to fulfill this role, and it becomes the burden of literature to become a supplement to what the law was not able to recognize and resolve properly.

Recognizing the importance of the "literary" in these theoretical positions, the thesis also reads literary texts in conjunction with these theories, to show how literature can help transform the deconstructive concepts by juxtaposing their historical testimony to the universalizing tendency of theory. With some exceptions, these texts come from 19th-century American literature: Edgar Allan Poe's "The Man of the Crowd" comments on the encounter between deconstruction and psychoanalysis; the chapter about deconstruction and feminism examines Poe's treatment of "the most poetical topic"; two pieces, Ralph Waldo Emerson's texts about the death of his son, Waldo, and the parable of Tancred and Clorinda from Torquato Tasso's *Jerusalem Delivered* illuminates the encounter between deconstruction and trauma studies; while Herman Melville's "Bartleby the Scrivener" sheds further light on the encounter between deconstruction and the law. All of these texts, with all their different subject matters can help us perceive the historical-ideological contexts of key deconstructive notions.

A DISSZERTÁCIÓ MAGYAR NYELVŰ ÖSSZEFOGLALÓJA

A disszertáció Shoshana Felman, Barbara Johnson és Cathy Caruth teoretikus szövegeit elemzi részletesen, amelyeknek tézisem szerint az a célja, hogy a Paul de Man-féle retorikai dekonstrukciót egyéb, a kortárs elméletben kiemelkedő fontosságú diszkurzusokkal vegyítse, úgymint a pszichoanalízis, a feminizmus, a traumaelmélet, vagy a jogelmélet. Szövegeiken keresztül ezek a szerzők tehát egy dialógust próbálnak létrehozni különböző elméleti pozíciók között, még akkor is, ha egyes esetekben az elméletek közötti különbözőségek áthidalhatatlannak látszanak is.

Felman írásaiban az áttétel válik az olvasás mestertrópusává, tanúságot téve a szövegek retorikai mechanizmusairól és strukturálva az irodalomról szóló kritikai narratívák olvasatait. Később a mimikri válik szövegeiben a patriarchális szövegek kritikus olvasásának kulcsfontosságú stratégiájává, ám ez helyenként azzal a veszéllyel is fenyeget, hogy Felman a nőiségnek tulajdonítja a szövegek retorikai ambivalenciáit. Johnsonnál az aposztrofé, a megszólítás trópusa válik egy olyan vezérfonallá, amely mentén elképzelhető a retorika, a politika, a feminizmus, a dekonstrukció, vagy a jogelmélet dialógusa, míg Caruth és Felman tanulmányai e retorikai alakzat etikával való implicit kapcsolatát bontják ki. Kettejük szövegeiből kitűnik, hogy a trauma tanúságtételeként értett irodalom koncepciója hogyan illeszthető be egy történeti és jogi kontextusba, amely eredetileg a szimbolikus, vagy a nagyon is valós erőszakot által okozott sebeket kívánja orvosolni, lehetőséget adva a trauma ismétléskényszeréből való szabadulásra és gyógyulásra. Ám az igazságszolgáltatás nem mindig képes ezt a funkcióját betölteni, így az irodalomra hárul az a feladat, hogy a jogi diszkurzus szupplementumaként „igazságot szolgáltasson.”

Az irodalmiság rendkívül fontos szerepet tölt be a disszertációban szereplő tudósok szövegeiben, a dolgozat pedig arra mutat rá, hogy az irodalmi szövegek hogyan lehetnek képesek megváltoztatni az univerzális dekonstrukciós fogalmakat a saját történeti nézőpontjuk segítségével. A dolgozat ennek demonstrálására főként a XIX. századi amerikai irodalomból származó szövegeket választ: Edgar Allan Poe „A tömeg embere” című novellája világít rá a dekonstrukció és a pszichoanalízis párbeszédére; a dekonstrukció és feminizmus kapcsolatát boncolgató fejezet Poe „legköltőibb témáját” járja körül; a dekonstrukció és trauma fejezet Ralph Waldo Emerson fia halálát feldolgozó szövegeit, valamint Torquato Tasso *Megszabadított Jeruzsálemének* Tancred és Clorinda történetét olvassa; végül Herman Melville „Bartleby, a tollnok” című szövegét kapcsolja szervesen a dekonstrukció és a jog dialógusának elemzéséhez. Úgy gondolom, hogy e különböző szövegek mindegyike képes láttatni egyes dekonstruktív alapfogalmak történeti-ideológiai determináltságát.

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