

“The Hermeneutical Mafia” and the Age of Deconstruction

By

Gregory Robert Jones-Katz

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This dissertation is approved by the following members of the Final Oral Committee:

Jennifer Ratner-Rosenhagen, Associate Professor, History

Rudy Koshar, Professor, History

Tony Michels, Associate Professor, History

Adam Nelson, Professor, Educational Policy Studies

Hans Ulrich Gumbrecht, Comparative Literature (Stanford University)

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Abstract

“The Hermeneutical Mafia” and the Age of Deconstruction

This dissertation is an intellectual and institutional history of the Yale School of Deconstruction, or, the “Hermeneutical Mafia”—a group of literary critics, theorists, and philosophers of literature affiliated with Yale University from the late-1960s to the 1980s. Despite several members of the Mafia having been born in Europe, it was in North American institutions that they came of age intellectually, with much of their inspiration coming from their dissonances and harmonies with U.S. intellectual and cultural life. This dissertation traces the germination and dissemination of the Mafia’s deconstructive thought, an interpretive habit in which one met claims of “reality,” “originality,” and “genuineness” with skepticism and disbelief. Because an essential part of this history occurred on the “ground floor” of North American institutions, particularly at Yale University and the University of California-Irvine, the intellectual culture as well as institutional framework of deconstruction was largely forged in the U.S. In this way, deconstructive interpretive techniques, often seen as part of European intellectual history, were more a creation of North American intellectual, institutional and cultural contexts than anything else. Ultimately, this dissertation offers a narrative of one of the most formidable and influential hermeneutics of suspicion of the last three decades of the twentieth-century.

Introduction: Whither Deconstruction?

Across North American humanities departments beginning in the 1970s, the smooth-running engines of ideology critiques, the sharp-eyes of symptomatic analyses, and the nimble fingers of meticulously honed interpretive tactics constructed a potent and widely applied hermeneutics of suspicion.¹ This hermeneutics of suspicion was both a disposition and a habit of thought that focused on uncovering concealed causes and unconscious processes in texts and arguments. Its rigorous scholarship thrived off debunking claims of authenticity, naturalness, originality, and primordialness. Lacanian psychoanalysis, Foucaultian discourse analysis, Butlerian investigations into performances of gendered behavior, and Jamesonian ideology critique all fell under the rubric of the hermeneutics of suspicion. This admittedly informal interpretive regime of mistrust came to be seen, especially among its practitioners, as the most advanced and politically progressive way of thinking and acting. Of course, there were detractors—individuals whom hermeneutics of suspicion considered not only to exhibit bad intellectual taste but also to be conservative, perhaps reactionary. And there was more than a fair share of infighting and turf wars, with participants jockeying for critical supremacy and cultural capital. With the best minds ever-refining it and with the most institutionally powerful departments backing it, the hermeneutics of suspicion infiltrated and hardened its grip on several

¹ Among the many texts that have inspired the theoretical orientation of this dissertation, several by two scholars deserve special mention. Rita Felski, *The Limits of Critique* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 2015); *Uses of Literature* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2008); Hans Ulrich Gumbrecht, *The Production of Presence: What Meaning Cannot Convey* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2004); *The Powers of Philology: Dynamics of Textual Scholarship* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2003). Felski's work has provided a number of ways to conceptualize the "hermeneutics of suspicion." See for example "The Stakes of Suspicion," in *The Limits of Critique*, particularly 30-52. Gumbrecht's work has also offered several key ways to approach the material of this dissertation. See in particular "Beyond Meaning: Positions and Concepts in Motion," in *The Production of Presence*, above all 79-90, where Gumbrecht formulates his understandings of a "meaning-culture" in distinction to a "presence-culture."

generations of North American scholars coming of age intellectually during the last quarter of the twentieth-century.

“The Hermeneutical Mafia” and the Age of Deconstruction is an intellectual and institutional history of one of the most powerful—and most discussed—groups of practitioners of a hermeneutics of suspicion in the North American academy: The Yale School of Deconstruction, or, the “Hermeneutical Mafia,” a group of literary critics, theorists, and philosophers of literature—Harold Bloom, Paul de Man, Geoffrey Hartman, and J. Hillis Miller—affiliated with Yale University during the 1970s and early 1980s.

Harold Bloom was born on July 11, 1930 in the Bronx, a borough of New York City. He was raised in an Orthodox Jewish, Yiddish-speaking household, though he learned literary Hebrew and allegedly taught himself English at the age of six. At its peak in 1930, Bloom’s Bronx was almost half Jewish. As a boy, Bloom read Hart Crane’s *Collected Poems*, which was for him an almost spiritual experience, inspiring his lifelong interest with poetry.² Excelling at academics from a young age, Bloom earned his B.A. from Cornell in 1951. Bloom’s undergraduate advisor was American literary critic M. H. Abrams, known for his work on the Romantic poets, above all his *The Mirror and the Lamp: Romantic Theory and the Critical Tradition* (1953), which argued that, until the Romantic poets, literature was understood as a mirror reflecting reality, while for the Romantic poets, the light of the writer’s soul spilled out to illumine the world.³

² Hart Crane, *The Complete Poems and Selected Letters and Prose of Hart Crane*, ed. Brom Weber, (New York, N.Y.: Liveright, 2000).

³ M .H. Abrams, *The Mirror and the Lamp: Romantic Theory and the Critical Tradition* (London: Oxford University Press, 1953).

After Cornell, Bloom attended graduate school at Yale University, earning his Ph.D. in 1955 with a dissertation on English Romantic Percy Bysshe Shelley.⁴ In an unusual move, Yale hired Bloom following his graduation, and he has remained at the institution henceforth, first in the English Department, and then, in 1975, in his own department of one as a Professor of Humanities. Throughout his more than half-century of scholarship, Bloom's contributions have been manifold; in the 1950s and 1960s, he made his career defending the reputations of the English High Romantics—not only the aforementioned Percy Bysshe Shelley, but also W. B. Yeats, Wallace Stevens, and others—against Modernist Anglophiles, such as T.S. Eliot, who had portrayed the Romantics as puerile and unsophisticated. In the 1970s, Bloom published the first of many books on the “anxiety of influence,” a theory of suspicious reading which shows that various ways that poets have struggled to produce their own individual poetic visions without being overcome by the influence of the previous poets who inspired them to write. Though he would later disavow any association with the “Yale Group,” Bloom was close friends and colleagues with Paul de Man, Geoffrey Hartman, and J. Hillis Miller, the last two being Bloom's colleagues in Yale's English Department for several years.⁵

A decade before Bloom's birth in the Bronx and on the other side of the Atlantic was the birth of Paul Adolph Michel Deman on December 6, 1919 in Antwerp, Belgium. De Man was born into a prominent upper class Flemish family. In addition to wealth—his father was a businessman whose company manufactured X-ray equipment—de Man and his family had a cultured heritage. De Man's great-grandfather was the celebrated Flemish poet Jan Van Beers, and his family spoke French at home, the latter a quite common occurrence for prominent

⁴ Bloom's Yale dissertation became his first book, *Shelley's Myth-Making* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1959).

⁵ The most famous, influential, and first of Bloom's texts entirely devoted to this topic was Harold Bloom, *The Anxiety of Influence: A Theory of Poetry* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1973).

Flemish families.⁶ Though he excelled in grade school, de Man eschewed formal study as a young adult—he matriculated in the Université Libre de Bruxelles in 1939 in engineering, but repeatedly failed his exams. De Man instead became an autodidact, a self-taught student of philosophy and literature. When the German army invaded Belgium in May 1940, de Man and his wife and children fled to Southern France, where their escape was halted. De Man returned to Brussels in August 1940, and found employment writing for the Belgian collaborationist newspaper *Le Soir* and the Flemish-language journal *Het Vlaamsche Land*. His articles totaled 180 literary and cultural pieces published between December 1940 and December 1942.

After the war, de Man established Editions Hermès, a publishing house dedicated to fine art monographs. In a few years, de Man's business was failing, and he left Antwerp for New York, while his wife and three children departed for Argentina. De Man's family was to join him after he acquired a stable job. They never did. After spending time with figures of the New York literary world, de Man was recommended for a teaching job at Bard College in Annandale-on-Hudson, New York, where he taught from 1949 to 1951. After Bard, de Man finagled his way into the graduate program in Comparative Literature at Harvard in 1952, from which he earned his Ph.D. after a then-unusually long eight years. In the 1960s, de Man taught in the French and Comparative Literature departments at Cornell University, the Johns Hopkins University, and the University of Zürich, the latter during a number of winter terms. In 1970, Yale University hired de Man as a Professor of French and Comparative Literature, a joint position that he held until his death in 1983. It was during the 1970s at Yale that de Man wrote many of his most influential deconstructive essays and taught many of his most numerous and vocal students. De Man's reevaluation of the poetics—the study of linguistic techniques in poetry or literature—of

⁶ For a useful biographical sketch of de Man, see Evelyn Barish, *The Double Life of Paul de Man* (New York, Liveright, 2014).

Romanticism has been considered his most enduring contribution to North American literary criticism.

Like de Man, Geoffrey Hartman was born in Europe, though in vastly different circumstances. Hartman was born on August 11, 1929 in Frankfurt am Main in Germany into an Ashkenazi Jewish family. In 1939, Hartman escaped Nazi Germany as a young boy of 9 on a Kindertransport. Separated from his family, Hartman resided with other evacuated children in England at the Buckinghamshire country estate of James de Rothschild for the rest of the Second World War. After the War, Hartman reunited with his mother, who had escaped to New York City. There, Hartman became an American citizen. He earned his BA. from Queens College in 1949, and went on to receive his Ph.D. in Comparative Literature from Yale University in 1953. During his time as a graduate student at Yale, Hartman began his lifelong friendship with Bloom; though they differed in temperament—Bloom being aggressive, often polemical; Hartman being allusive, sometimes elliptical—both were Romantic revivalists. After graduate school, Hartman went on to teach English literature and Comparative Literature at Cornell University (alongside de Man), the University of Iowa, and in 1976 at Yale University, where Hartman remained for the rest of his career.

Like Bloom and de Man, Hartman's choice to specialize in the Romantic poets was unusual, considering the routine criticism, sometimes ridicule, heaped on the Romantics by scholars of Modernism. By the 1970s, however, the negative scholarly reputation of the Romantics had been largely overturned, and in part due to the efforts of Hartman, along with M.H. Abrams, Bloom, de Man, and others. For Hartman, this new respect for the Romantics meant above all new esteem for the poetry of his beloved William Wordsworth, whom he first read as a refugee in the English countryside. For Hartman's part in generating interest in and

establishing respect for the Romantics alone, Hartman made an enormous contribution to the study of English literature, and by extension the humanities.⁷ In other academic circles, he is respected most for his contributions to literary theory, particularly his work in the mid- to late-1970s with deconstruction. In still others circles though, Hartman is celebrated for his role in establishing Yale's Video Archive for Holocaust Testimonies and his contribution to trauma studies.⁸

J. Hillis Miller was born on March 5, 1928 in Newport News, Virginia. Hillis Miller's father was a Professor of Psychology at the College of William & Mary, among other institutions, and served as an administrator with the New York Department of Education, helping to found the college system that became the State University of New York system. After graduating from Oberlin College in 1948, Miller earned his Ph.D. from Harvard University in 1952. Following an academic year at Williams College, Miller was hired by Johns Hopkins University, where he became Professor of English from 1953 to 1972. While at Hopkins, Miller became associated with the "Geneva School of Criticism," as Miller adopted and adapted these critics' methods of interpretation to the study of English literature. By the time of his appointment as Professor of English at Yale University in 1973, Miller had incorporated the interpretive techniques of de Man, who was Miller's colleague during the late-1960s at Hopkins, and French Philosopher Jacques Derrida, whom Miller had begun to a champion. At Yale, Miller was central to producing the image of the "Yale School of Deconstruction," penning any essays that drew explicit and implicit intellectual links between his approaches and those of his colleagues. In 1986, Miller left Yale to work at the University of California-Irvine. Like de Man,

⁷ See for example, Geoffrey Hartman, *Wordsworth Poetry: 1787-1814* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1963).

⁸ For Hartman's own portrait see Hartman, *A Scholar's Tale: Intellectual Journey of a Displaced Child of Europe*, (New York: Fordham University Press, 2007).

Miller, whether at Yale or Irvine, mentored—or at the very least served on the dissertation committees—of several generations North American literary critics.

In their work and in their teaching, which lasted for the better part of the second half of the twentieth-century, these hermeneuts of textual suspicion—Bloom, de Man, Hartman, and Miller—advanced techniques of reading prose and poetry with and against one another. During the 1970s, they frequently did so in relation to the deconstructive philosophy practiced by French philosopher Jacques Derrida, himself considered an informal member of the so-called Mafia, especially after he began his lecturing at Yale in the mid-1970s. Derrida was born on July 15, 1930 in El Biar, a suburb of Algiers, the capital of Algeria and the city where he lived until he was nineteen. Derrida then studied philosophy at the *École Normale Supérieure*, France's chief training ground for future philosophers. His early writings focused on the work of German philosopher Edmund Husserl (1859-1938), who established the school of phenomenology, a style of inquiry which centered on the belief that reality is comprised of objects and events—or, “phenomena”—as they are perceived or understood in human consciousness. In his work of the 1950s and early-1960s, Derrida elaborated a technique of reading that assessed the limits of phenomenology. Derrida's technique of reading became known in the United States as “deconstruction.” In the mid- to late-1960s, Derrida established friendships with Miller and de Man, who were both chiefly responsible for bringing Derrida to Yale in the mid-1970s. Though a philosopher by training, Derrida's deconstructive work in the United States, especially in the 1970s and 1980s and largely due to his intellectual and institutional associations with the Yale School, above all de Man, was seen as a literary theory rather than a comprehensive stance and style of interpretation applicable to any object or event in the world.

It is important to recognize that the Yale School was riven by philosophical, methodological, and even temperamental and stylistic differences. Hartman for example sometimes entertained hope about the salvational aspects of prose and poetry, whereas his close friend de Man habitually wrote with a pathos about the contradictions and dualities of prose and poetry that is hard to ignore, and a bit sad and extremely disconcerting to entertain. Despite their differences—and there were certainly many—the Yale group’s idiosyncratic use of authors to advance their own suspicious techniques of reading, shape their alliances with fellow Mafia, and battle intellectual rivals, not only made Yale School members into an intellectual vanguard of sorts on the North American literary-critical scene, but also produced what so many, by the late 1970s, viewed as deconstructive literary criticism. Ultimately, through their writings, promotional strategies, and the training of their students, the Hermeneutical Mafia helped install a hermeneutics of suspicion as *de rigueur* for innovative humanities scholars of the time.

“*The Hermeneutical Mafia*” argues that because an essential part of the history of deconstruction, including the development of proto-deconstructive reading techniques during the 1960s, occurred on the “ground floor” of North American institutions, including Yale University, the Johns Hopkins University, and the University of California-Irvine, the intellectual culture as well as institutional framework of deconstruction was largely forged in the United States. Despite several members of the Yale School having been born in Europe—Hartman in Germany; de Man in Belgium for example—it was in North American institutions that they came of age intellectually, with much of their inspiration coming from their dissonances and harmonies with United States intellectual and cultural life. Even the work of de Man, which seems almost hermetically sealed, shaped and was shaped by American contexts. What’s more, deconstructive reading practices were taught in classrooms and disseminated in writings, the origins of which

primarily were circumstances peculiar to North America. Readers will see that it is not an overstatement to assert that deconstruction, often seen as part of European history, was more an American creation than anything else.

Whether one endorses the Yale School's interpretive techniques or not, whether one finds their readings of prose and poetry persuasive or not, the Hermeneutical Mafia assumed center stage in a number of debates that shook North American literary-critical culture in the 1970s and 1980s. These debates often revolved around the question of the role of the humanities, particularly that of studying literature. There was for example the recurring question whether deconstructive reading poured so much acid on notions of truth and objectivity that it undermined the personal and cultural maturation assumed as the goal of reading and writing about the "Great Works" of the Western literary and philosophical canon. The Yale School's centrality provoked an avalanche of scholarship on deconstruction and its practitioners.

Roughly speaking, there have been two groups of works on this and related subjects. The first set is comprised of metatheoretical works. The term "metatheoretical" is meant to characterize scholarship that usually includes a theoretical discussion of the underpinnings, organization, or results of the theory under examination. Metatheoretical works on deconstruction include: Frank Lentricchia's *After the New Criticism* (1980), Jonathon Culler's *On Deconstruction: Theory and Criticism after Structuralism* (1982), Christopher Norris's *Deconstruction: Theory and Practice* (1982) and his *Paul de Man: Deconstruction and the Critique of Aesthetic Ideology* (1988), and, more recently, Herman Rapaport's *The Theory Mess: Deconstruction in Eclipse* (2001).⁹ In addition to providing a philosophical discussion of

⁹ Jonathan Culler, *On Deconstruction: Theory and Criticism after Structuralism* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1982); Frank Lentricchia, *After the New Criticism* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1980); Christopher Norris, *Paul de Man: Deconstruction and the Critique of Aesthetic Ideology* (New York and London: Routledge, 1988);

deconstruction, these metatheoretical texts offered an account of the development of the ideas that comprised deconstructive reading. So for example Lentricchia's 1980 book was a "historical account of what has happened [in the United States] since" World War II that ended with chapters on Paul de Man and Harold Bloom and was overall a "critique of the various forces that have shaped contemporary thought about literature and the criticism of literature";¹⁰ Jonathon Culler's 1982 work was principally devoted to demonstrating the effectiveness of Derrida's philosophical texts, with the rest of Culler's attention tracing others' uses of Derrida's views and framing his relevance for the activities of professional literary critics in the North American academy; Norris's 1988 work on de Man was expressly written as a "much-needed corrective to the pattern of extreme antithetical response which marked the initial reception to de Man's writings"¹¹; and Rapaport's 2001 book bemoaned and tracked the "*faux bonds*"—the "missed encounters"—that marked French philosopher Jacques Derrida's reception in the United States, paying particular attention to Anglo-American critics' mistaken applications of Derrida's work during the 1970s and 1980s.

The point to be emphasized here is that, despite their merits, above all offering painstakingly close readings of Derrida's, de Man's, and others' works, these accounts replicated the old History of Ideas approach, a mode of narration that views texts almost wholly in relation to prior texts and only infrequently in relation to the political, cultural, and social events contiguous with and infusing these texts' compositions.¹² To be fair, much of the metatheoretical works on the Yale School and deconstruction written in the History of Ideas mode was authored

Deconstruction: Theory and Practice (London and New York: Methuen, 1982); Herman Rapaport, *The Theory Mess: Deconstruction in Eclipse* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2001).

¹⁰ Lentricchia, *After the New Criticism*, xi.

¹¹ Quoted from the back cover blurb of Norris's text.

¹² Peter C. Herman observed this point about historical accounts of what has been labeled "theory" more than a decade ago. Since then, however, there has been little work that has responded to Herman's criticism. Peter C. Herman, "Introduction: The Resistance to Historicizing Theory," in *Historicizing Theory*, ed. Peter C. Herman (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2004), 1.

by historically-inclined literary scholars and philosophers whose expertise rested in the meticulous interpretation of texts, not in historiography or historical methodologies. These metatheoretical works were never intended to meet the disciplinary needs or expectations of professional historians. It is thus surely unjust to judge these works' value from such a perspective. Nevertheless, such metatheoretical works remain too indebted to the very hermeneutics of suspicion of which they offered appraisals. Like an ouroboros, a serpent that devours its own tail, Lentricchia's, Culler's, Norris's, and others' studies seem to fold in on themselves, leaving readers who seek to be more than spectators of the curious interpretive sport that comprised that strangest of the hermeneutics of suspicion likely feeling shut out.

The second group of works on the Yale School and deconstruction could be labeled historical scholarship. This second group includes: François Cusset's *French Theory: How Foucault, Derrida, Deleuze, & Co. Transformed the Intellectual Life of the United States* (2008); the collected volumes *The Yale Critics: Deconstruction in America* (1983) and *Historicizing Theory* (2004); sections devoted to the Yale School and deconstruction in J. David Hoeveler Jr.'s *The Postmodernist Turn: American Thought and Culture in the 1970s* (1996), Daniel Rodgers' *The Age of Fracture* (2011), and Andrew Hartman's *A War for the Soul of America* (2015).¹³

¹³ François Cusset, *French Theory: How Foucault, Derrida, Deleuze, & Co. Transformed the Intellectual Life of the United States*, trans. Jeff Fort (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2008); Jonathan Arac, Wlad Godzich, and Wallace Martin, eds. *The Yale Critics: Deconstruction in America* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1983); *Historicizing Theory*; J. David Hoeveler Jr., *The Postmodernist Turn: American Thought and Culture in the 1970s* (New York: Twayne, 1996); Daniel Rodger, *The Age of Fracture* (Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2011); Andrew Hartman, *A War for the Soul of America* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2015). Other works on "French Theory," which, as commentators have observed, is a problematic grouping, remain focused on the stakes in French intellectual life but not in North American academic culture. See Edward Baring, *The Young Derrida and French Philosophy, 1845-1968* (Cambridge, 2011); Julian Bourg, *After the Deluge: New Perspectives on the Intellectual and Cultural History of Postwar France* (Lanham, Md.: Lexington Books, 2004); Bourg, *From Revolution to Ethics: May 1968 and Contemporary French Thought* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2007); Tamara Chaplin, *Turning on the Mind: French Philosophers on Television* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007); Ethan Kleinberg, *Generation Existential: Heidegger's Philosophy in France, 1927-1961* (Ithaca-London: Cornell University Press, 2005); James D. Le Sueur, *Uncivil War: Intellectuals and Identity Politics during the Decolonization of Algeria*, 2nd ed. (Lincoln: University of Nebraska, 2005); Samuel Moyn, *Origins of the Other: Emmanuel Levinas between Revelation and Ethics* (Ithaca-London: Cornell University

Each of these histories to some extent, some to a great degree, eschews the History of Ideas approach. Cusset's 2008 work for example described the misunderstandings, mistranslations, and misappropriations of Derrida's deconstruction and that of his French compatriots—Michel Foucault, Gilles Deleuze, Jacques Lacan, among others—that transpired within various internal organizations in France and the United States; Rodgers' magisterial 2011 history incorporated the Yale School phenomenon and deconstruction into a larger narrative about the fragmentation, atomization, and separation of social categories across a series of academic discourses, including economics, law, political science, history, biology, race, gender, and philosophy, during the last twenty-five years of the twentieth-century; like Rodgers' work, Hoeveler Jr.'s 1996 narrative argued that new literary theories during the 1970s such as Derrida's deconstruction so strongly resonated in the North American academy because they reflected the "feel of postindustrial society," a society without a center, an anchor, a weight to which meaning could be attached.¹⁴ And in the volume *Historicizing Theory* (2004), a number of historians and literary scholars took a stab at how political, social, even musical contexts informed the history of theory in the United States, with Marc Redfield's contribution on Harold Bloom being the only essay devoted to a single member of the Yale School.

Notwithstanding their insights, and their efforts to avoid the old History of Ideas approach, these historians did not fully appreciate how individuals and various intellectual and institutional contexts constructed the hermeneutics of suspicion. By failing to do so, such historical accounts—and this is especially the case with Rodgers' *Age of Fracture*—neglected to grasp the very constructedness and, yes, even the historical contingency, of the hermeneutics of suspicion. Such narratives by extension failed to explain how and why the Yale School and

Press, 2005); Camille Robcis, *The Law of Kinship: Anthropology, Psychoanalysis, and the Politics of the Family in 20th-Century France* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 2013).

¹⁴ Hoeveler Jr., 15.

associated colleagues, working in and with assorted contexts, cultivated a suspicious mood in which deconstructive stances and styles of interpretation were not simply produced but given the highest value, revered as the most rigorous way of reading literary texts, and, more broadly, the objects and events of the world.¹⁵

The fact that the tradition of mistrust in the North American academy has recently been challenged by a diverse group of thinkers and writers, a group which initially included Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick and George Steiner in the 1990s and today includes comprises Yves Critton, Hans Ulrich Gumbrecht, and Eelco Runia, suggests that a sea change has occurred. The once formidable habit of thought that was deconstruction, arguably the most powerful manifestation of the hermeneutics of suspicion, no longer commands the prestige it once did. This is not simply because the Yale School is no more—it was informally disbanded with the 1983 death of de Man. The collapse of the reign of the hermeneutics of suspicion is instead linked to specific changing institutional, intellectual, and cultural contexts that no longer place a premium on reading against the grain—and it is precisely these changed contexts that the above studies do not properly historicize.

One scholarly work warrants special attention on these issues: Marc Redfield's *Theory at Yale: The Strange Case of Deconstruction in America* (2016), which attempted to be both a

¹⁵ This dissertation does not enter into recent historiographical debates on the linguistic turn. Gabrielle Spiegel for example explores the “‘semiotic challenge’ to ‘traditional’ ways of writing history that arose in the period following the Second World War.” For Spiegel, this challenge, of which Derrida’s deconstruction was an important part, “took on great significance for the generation of...historians who came of age in the 1960s and 1970s,” encouraging them to “pose new questions about the objects and subjects of historical knowledge.” Kerwin Lee Klein puts an American-centric spin on this narrative, arguing that “cultural history’s reception of French structural linguistics and post-structuralism” in the U.S. academy “was shaped by earlier linguistic turns in American anthropology and analytic philosophy.” And, Judith Surkis, in contrast to Spiegel’s and Klein’s work, has suggested that the very idea of a “linguistic turn” is “reductive and constraining” and that the linguistic turn “might be better understood...as specifically located...dynamic constellations.” See Gabrielle M. Spiegel, “The Task of the Historian,” 2008 AHA Presidential Address, *American Historical Review* 114 (2009): 1–15. Quoted in Judith Surkis, “When Was the Linguistic Turn? A Genealogy,” *The American Historical Review* 117 (2012): 702-703; Kerwin Lee Klein, *From History to Theory* (Berkeley: The University of California, Berkeley, 2011), 15; and Surkis, 702, 722.

metatheoretical and historical work.¹⁶ But, though marketed as the first book-length history on the Yale School of Deconstruction, Redfield's *Theory at Yale* instead offered a series of artful deconstructive readings of “the event of ‘theory’ in the American academy,” with “theory” chiefly referring to “a certain kind of reflection on language and literature that garnered the tag ‘deconstruction’ in the 1970s, and in distorted form became a minor mass-media topic in the 1980s.”¹⁷ Redfield was not interested in “a systematic, detailed account of the work of the four Yale Critics”; his study was “not at all the same as a properly descriptive or historical account,” because for him “narratives”—“biographical, intellectual, and institutional”—were “appendages to an argument that...has little to do with the Yale Critics as a group, or with individual oeuvres in a traditional sense.”¹⁸ Redfield's argument was essentially that the power of deconstruction—above all de Manian reading—not only triggered, but also has been demonstrated by the existence of hysterical misreadings of deconstruction in America. Redfield therefore applied the very deconstructive reading techniques developed by his historical subjects—de Man and Derrida above all others—to literary scholars' and mass media's interpretations, which for Redfield are always misrepresentations or phantasms of some sort, of the Yale School and deconstruction.

Over the years, several influential deconstructors have advanced claims similar to Redfield's. Andrzej Warminski, a former student of de Man's at Yale University, suggested that “there *was* no ‘deconstruction’ at Yale—ever!”¹⁹ And in 2015 none other than (former) Yale School member J. Hillis Miller emphasized the “sharply different stances and procedures in

¹⁶ Marc Redfield, *Theory at Yale: The Strange Case of Deconstruction in America* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2016).

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 1.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 2, 3.

¹⁹ Andrzej Warminski, interview by Stuart Barnett, “Interview: Deconstruction at Yale,” in *Material Inscriptions: Rhetorical Reading in Practice and Theory* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2013), 219-221.

criticism of the five members of the Yale School.”²⁰ Now, of course Warminski and Miller, vigilant deconstructors to the core, would differentiate either any suggestion of a stable meaning of “deconstruction” or any notion that there was coherence or harmony between Yale School members—that’s arguably how any reader who has thoroughly adopted the deconstructive stance and style of reading would interpret any topic. The reasoning for Redfield’s aversion to using historical scholarship and methodologies was related to Warminski’s and Miller’s positions. Redfield’s reason was coiled up within the following sentence, found on the first page of his first chapter: “[T]he historian of ideas objectifies [the] event, so as to know it as a subject knows an object...[but] as soon as the historian sets out to know [an ‘act that questions how best to question ‘historical objects’,’ as de Man’s and Derrida’s work did], [the historian] mistakes what it is.”²¹ In the end, Redfield’s stringent implementation of deconstructive reading practices to the strange event of “deconstruction in America” made his *Theory at Yale* a work that primarily scored metatheoretical points against an ostensibly befuddled historian of ideas rather than provided new perspectives on the Yale School and deconstruction.

“The Hermeneutical Mafia” and the Age of Deconstruction steers clear of any overt theorizing about deconstruction. Instead, it attempts to understand the development of the Yale School and their colleagues’ deconstructive techniques of reading prose and poetry in relation to a variety of intellectual, institutional, and cultural contexts. *“The Hermeneutical Mafia”* distinguishes itself from previous historical scholarship because it sees the hermeneutics of suspicion, most importantly deconstruction, as an attitude and shape of thought whose time has passed. *“The Hermeneutical Mafia”* further argues that the intellectual culture as well as

²⁰ J. Hillis Miller, “Tales out of (the Yale) School,” in *Theoretical Schools and Circles in the Twentieth-Century Humanities: Literary Theory, History, Philosophy*, eds. Marina Grishakova and Silvi Salupere (New York and London: Routledge, 2015), 115, 120,

²¹ Redfield, 19.

institutional framework of deconstructive reading were largely forged by and in circumstances peculiar to North America. In this regard, it helps stake out some new terrain in the field of transnational history. By focusing on the interconnectedness of ideas, peoples, and cultural objects with other regions of the globe, transnational historians challenge the notion that any nation-state is “exceptional” or “unique” with “exceptional” or “unique” ideas, peoples, and cultural objects.

Two recent examples of transnational intellectual and cultural histories are Jennifer Ratner-Rosenhagen’s and Mark Woesner’s works.²² Ratner-Rosenhagen, in *American Nietzsche: A History of an Icon and His Ideas* (2011), explored how German philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche’s influence “crossed the perceived intellectual borders between America and Europe,” a border crossing that birthed a transnational Nietzsche as well as an American Nietzsche, the latter who “traversed the borders traditionally thought to divide ‘elite’ from ‘average’ Americans.”²³ In his study *Heidegger in America* (2011), Woesner focused on the story of German philosopher Martin Heidegger’s American reception, which he argued, “could not be told without including . . . the slow, transnational, migratory process” in reviews, discussions of his work, translations, monographs, and conferences of his work.”²⁴ Ratner-Rosenhagen’s and Woesner’s works both challenge the conceit that ideas are exclusively tied to a nation.

Though in no way aiming to return to the kind of historical analysis that sings the praises of American exceptionalism, *The Hermeneutical Mafia” and the Age of Deconstruction* situates the emergence of the Yale School and development and application of deconstructive reading techniques within the peculiarities of late-twentieth-century North American intellectual,

²² Jennifer Ratner-Rosenhagen, *American Nietzsche: A History of an Icon and His Ideas* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2011); Martin Woesner, *Heidegger in America* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2011).

²³ Ratner-Rosenhagen, 26.

²⁴ Woesner, 133.

institutional, and cultural life, but it does so with an eye to transnational contexts. This approach stands in contrast to that of historians who have routinely narrated the history of deconstruction as a story of importation and translation of foreign, usually French, ideas or interpretive methods onto the native soil of North America. François Cusset for example claimed that the Yale School was “a quartet of major [literary] critics” whose work became the “point of entry for Derridean deconstruction”; though a “highly diverse, deeply learned, and complex constellation of scholars,” Hoeveler Jr. argued, the Yale group “effected, as it were, an ‘American translation’ of the French methodologies and literary philosophies.”²⁵ For Cusset and Hoeveler Jr., the Yale School was either a North American conduit of or a medium for French deconstruction. Still other historians have used the word and concept “deconstruction” so loosely as to dilute its historical specificity—and this lack of precision has led to disregard for the idiosyncrasies of North American intellectual and cultural life that informed and were informed by deconstructive reading practices. Andrew Hartman, though he gave a nod to the “new theoretical elocution” of French philosopher Jacques Derrida and acknowledged that Paul de Man was the “best-known American deconstructionist,” accepted a culture war-based definition of deconstruction. In doing so, Hartman observed that, “[b]y the late 1980s[,] *deconstruction* had become a generic if pretentious signifier for much of what went for academic inquiry.”²⁶ While useful for his own project on the culture wars and the “battle for the soul of America,” Hartman barely scratched the surface of the local American contexts of the Yale School and deconstruction.

Not only historians have portrayed the history of deconstruction in North America as a story of the importation and/or translation of mostly French ideas. Even scholars within the deconstructive camp have emphasized the transformation of French or more generally European

²⁵ Cusset, 114; Hoeveler Jr., 26.

²⁶ Hartman, 239.

ideas into North American contexts. Jonathan Arac, Wlad Godzich, and Wallace Martin in the preface to their 1983 volume *The Yale Critics: Deconstruction in America* situated the essays of their book in the “‘gap’ between Anglo-American and Continental criticism and philosophy”; contributing authors, the editors wrote, addressed the problem “of ‘translation,’ not only literal matters of turning one language into another, but also the larger matter of cultural transference in general.”²⁷ Oddly enough, Arac, Godzich, and Martin’s story those of mirrored unsympathetic observers’, who have also told a narrative of an invasion, though this time sinister, from abroad. Philosopher Allan Bloom, at the end of his 1987 blockbuster *The Closing of the American Mind*, lambasted North American professors of comparative literature for getting too deeply into the import business of dangerous European ideas, of which deconstruction was but the latest and most dangerous; rightwing columnist Charles Krauthammer wrote in 1990 that the practice of deconstruction by the political left led to the “Balkanization of America” and “pose[d] a threat that no outside agent in this post-Soviet world can match.”²⁸ As evidenced by such a wide range of historians, literary critics, and cultural and political commentators, the notion that deconstruction was some sort of intellectual virus from the Sorbonne that “destroyed academic programs, disciplinary specializations, institutional structures, indeed the university and perhaps reason” itself seemed to be a virus.²⁹ Lodged from all political sides, the charge that deconstructive reading threatened—well, whatever what one was passionately defending—obscured the more local and national circumstances that fashioned and were fashioned by deconstructive interpretative techniques.

²⁷ Jonathan Arac, Wlad Godzich, and Wallace Martin, “Preface,” in *The Yale Critics: Deconstruction in America*, x.

²⁸ Allan Bloom, *The Closing of the American Mind How Higher Education Has Failed Democracy and Impoverished the Souls of Today’s Student* (New York & London: Simon & Schuster Paperbacks, 1987); Charles Krauthammer, “After Socialism, Balkanization of U.S.,” *The Seattle Times*, December 26, 1990.

²⁹ Jacques Derrida and John D. Caputo, “The Right to Philosophy,” in ed. Jon D. Caputo, *Deconstruction in a Nutshell: A Conversation with Jacques Derrida* (New York: Fordham University Press, 1997), 49. See also Amy Gutmann, “Relativism, Deconstruction, and the Curriculum,” in John Arthur, Amy Shapiro, eds. *Campus Wars: Multiculturalism and the Politics of Difference* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1995), 57.

Overview

“The Hermeneutical Mafia” and the Age of Deconstruction is a history of the Yale School, a group including Harold Bloom, Paul de Man, Geoffrey Hartman, and J. Hillis Miller, and the development and applications of their deconstructive stances and styles of reading prose and poetry. The following five chapters and epilogue tell this story in more or less thematic and chronological sequence from 1965 to 1987. Ultimately, *“The Hermeneutical Mafia”* uses a combined intellectual, institutional, national, and transnational approach to interpret historical materials. These historical materials were gathered from the Critical Theory Archive at the University of California-Irvine, the Manuscript and Archives collections at Yale University, the Special Collections and University Archives at the University of Iowa, the Archives and Special Collections at the University of Minnesota-Twin Cities, the Schlesinger Library, the Radcliffe Institute at Harvard University, state archives in Antwerp, Belgium, the Deutsches Literaturarchiv Marbach in Marbach, Germany, and the personal papers of a number of individuals who were kind enough to grant the author access. The gathered historical documents of *“The Hermeneutical Mafia”* include: published writings, unpublished manuscripts, course materials, transcripts of conferences and these conferences promotional materials, professional and family correspondence, ephemera, notebooks, photographs, and interviews with historical figures. The author’s interviews with over thirty-five scholars with connections to the Yale School and deconstruction in America were particularly valuable, as they helped fill in gaps in the historical record.

Chapter One, “Launching A Deconstructive Front; Or, Innovation and the Ur-Yale School,” investigates three professionally and intellectually important conferences for the history of deconstruction in the United States: the 1965 Colloquium on Literary Criticism at Yale

University, the 1966 Johns Hopkins Symposium, and the 1968/69 La Jolla/Bellagio conference. Two or more future Yale School members gathered at these events and used the occasions to articulate and learn from one another aspects of proto-deconstructive stances and styles of reading literature. However, these three junctures do not simply provide a window onto how future Yale School members oriented themselves towards the similar methodological problems that eventually produced deconstructive literacy criticism. Rather, at these events, Ur-Yale School members and their colleagues found themselves questioning the limits of literary formalism, and doing so from North American intellectual and institutional perspectives, as they chiefly were concerned with questioning the then-dominant Anglo-American New Critical reading technique, an interpretive method in which the reader isolated the text itself to discover its organic union of opposing meanings. What emerged from these conferences and colloquiums and subsequent publications that resulted from these events was a shared sense between participants of a mission to solve the “problem” of formalism and, for some, a desire to apply their innovative formalist methods of reading to humanist scholarship. Taken together, the 1965 Yale Colloquium, the 1966 Hopkins Symposium, and the 1968/1969 La Jolla/Bellagio conference helped solidify the Ur-Yale School members and their colleagues’ robust conviction in the scientific and humanistic promise of literary theory and criticism. This joint confidence in the potential of revised formalist reading techniques not only undergirded the Ur-Yale School members’ friendships, but, by the early-1970s, also resonated with a younger generation of students’ distrust towards institutions of all forms, political, educational, or religious. In the broader arc of the history of deconstruction in the United States, the shift from a shared confidence in the 1960s to a shared distrust during the 1970s of the promise of literary study and

humanistic studies in general aided the broader institutionalization of the hermeneutics of suspicion in the North American academy.

Chapter Two, “Literature X and The Literature Major: An Institutional Crucible of Proto-Deconstruction in America,” examines the response at Yale University in the early-1970s to the growing awareness of a crisis at Yale and North American departments of literature more broadly regarding the proper role and place of literary studies. This chapter specifically investigates Professors Peter Brooks, Michael Holquist, and Alvin Kernan’s local response to this crisis: the development and teaching of the experimental course Literature X, introduced to Yale curriculum in 1970, and the establishment of the Literature Major, an undergraduate program inspired by Lit X and which first ran in 1973. The innovative—and proto-deconstructive—curriculum of Lit X and the Lit Major inculcated a mood of distrust in undergraduates towards the accepted meanings and boundaries of literature, encouraging pupils to interrogate and break down the divisions between high and low, prose and poetry, literary and non-literary, canonical and non-canonical, Western and non-Western. Though Brooks, Holquist, and Kernan undeniably derived components for their curricula from European, chiefly French and Russian, formalist interpretive methods, the core elements, not to mention the classroom experiences, of Lit X and the Lit Major were directly shaped by contexts in New Haven and the North American political and cultural landscape. And, because Lit X and the Literature Major laid the intellectual and institutional groundwork for Geoffrey Hartman, Paul de Man, and J. Hillis Miller’s takeover of Lit X and development of new Lit Major courses during the mid- to late-1970s and early-1980s, it is not an exaggeration to assert that Lit X and the Literature Major was a central—and homegrown—crucible for deconstructive literary criticism in the United States. Situated in the larger sweep of the institutionalization of the hermeneutics of suspicion,

Lit X's and the Lit Major's proto-deconstructive techniques of reading prose and poetry placed undergraduates, rather than solely professors or graduate students as is usually suspected, on the front lines of the North American literary-critical vanguard.

Chapter Three, "A Schwerpunkt in New Haven: The Yale School of Deconstruction," investigates how and why de Man, Bloom, Hartman, Miller, and finally Derrida—all teaching in some capacity at Yale by 1975—extended their earlier-established shared mission to revise formalist methods of reading. These hermeneuts of textual suspicion's further refinements of their joint undertaking produced what became known in the 1970s as deconstructive reading practices—those techniques of reading that concentrated on the irresolutions, contradictions, and dualities of prose and poetry. In contrast to previous sketches, which have cast de Man, Harold Bloom, Hartman, and Miller as either united by their a-historical variations of Derridean deconstruction or simply too different to gather under the same roof, this chapter emphasizes that the Yale School was a philosophical school in the ancient Greek sense—the so-called Hermeneutical Mafia used their deconstructive techniques of reading to orient their teaching, their writings, and even their intellectual relationships, including those with their fellow Yale School members.

Chapter Three also explores how Yale School members' confidence in their techniques of suspicious reading nourished and drew strength from the local and national atmosphere of crisis. The Yale School's 1975 formation coincided with the vacuum left after the deaths of Yale's oldest and most prominent literary scholars; the Yale School's formation also overlapped with the widespread insistence on the relevance of literature and language programs and the humanities more generally after the 1973-1975 recession. And, while the Yale School's formation coincided and resonated with the local and national mood of crisis produced by

intellectual changes and financial retrenchment, the Yale School members' undergraduate classes reverberated with a post-1960s skeptical attitude among undergraduates towards norms and institutions of all types. A key undergraduate class was de Man, Hartman, and Miller's Literature Z course, which instilled pupils with the intellectual virtues of duality and contradiction. In the longer arc of the story of deconstruction in the United States, the Yale School members' publications and teaching helped institutionalize distrust in any claim of authenticity, naturalness, originality, and primordialness.

Chapter Four, "An Organ of Deconstruction: The Theory and History of Literature Series," investigates the most influential publishing venture of the last half-century in the North American humanities: The Theory and History of Literature book series (THL). Housed at the University of Minnesota, and run by UMinn faculty members, Jochen Schulte-Sasse and Wlad Godzich, and Editor-in-Chief Lindsay Waters, the THL series was unusual by contemporary standards. Rather than traditional scholarly disciplines, the THL publications were defined through critical method and perspective, specifically social and cultural theory and interdisciplinary inquiry. Like many of the texts and theories they published, Schulte-Sasse, Godzich, and Waters' intellectual program, which developed out of their graduate school experiences and early scholarship, transcended disciplinary boundaries, recasting all knowledge as genres of literature. And the THL series' distribution of deconstructive stances and styles of reading helped to generate the deconstructive academic culture of the 1980s. Furthermore, because the THL series included North American critics' work, which though partly inspired by the European models, developed out of and was geared toward the blossoming theoretical community in the U.S, even the vision implemented by Godzich, Schulte-Sasse, and Waters was largely an American one. In fact, at every step of the publication process, the THL editors

planned and executed their publications to meet the needs of their target audience. The history of the THL series therefore reveals another avenue through which, not so much a “deconstructive invasion of America” occurred, but a flowering of deconstructive interpretive techniques happened in North America.

Chapter Five, “Undoing Patterns of Effacement: The ‘Female’ School of Deconstruction and the Transformation of American Feminism,” hopes to once and for all explode the representation of the Yale School as being comprised of four (or five if one counts Derrida) men. First at Yale and then at other university and college campuses across the United States during the mid-1970s and 1980s, female critics’ deconstructions reorganized the gendered reasoning that structured canonical interpretations of literature. This deconstructive movement drew intellectual energy and institutional support from feminist curriculum and thought as well as the politics of the women’s and gay liberation movement. This feminist undertaking initially included Barbara Johnson, Shoshana Felman, Mary Poovey, and Gayatri Spivak, and then Judith Butler, Eve Sedgwick, and others. While Johnson, Felman, Poovey and Spivak trained and worked alongside the members of the Yale School in the 1970s, Butler, Sedgwick and others comprised a younger cohort, who, though educated at Yale, continued to practice and advocate for feminist acts of deconstruction elsewhere during the 1980s.

These luminaries—who comprised a “‘Female’ School of Deconstruction”—became central to fields of scholarly inquiry across America, transforming Mary Shelley Studies, Romantic Studies, Lacanian Studies, and Subaltern Studies, and founding others, such as Trauma Studies, Queer Theory, and Gender Studies. They partly accomplished all this by moving deconstructive reading away from a concern with self-conscious interpretations of French and English prose and poetry—a type of deconstructive reading typified by the Male School, above

all de Man and Miller—towards an outspoken interest in gender, race, psychoanalysis, and social justice in a wide range of texts. As the 1970s gave way to the 1980s, these female deconstructionists increasingly treated their close readings and curricula—like other radical feminists in other areas of American intellectual and cultural life—as counter-movements against the gendered logic that (re)produced the pattern of female effacement. And often, female deconstructionists’ acts of deconstruction developed from and were enmeshed in their teaching, specifically their efforts during the 1970s and early-1980s to establish Yale’s Women’s Studies Program.

Chapter Five, “Deconstruction to Theory; Yale to Irvine,” investigates how central members of the deconstructive camp—Miller, Derrida, and others—found an intellectual and institutional home during the 1970s and 1980s at the University of California-Irvine. The chapter first explores the development and then establishment in 1976 of The School of Criticism and Theory (SCT) at The University of California-Irvine. The architects of the SCT, UCI Professors of English and Comparative Literature Murray Krieger and Hazard Adams, intended the SCT to help North American academics confront the Continental philosophical and literary movements that ostensibly dominated humanities departments during the 1960s and early-1970s in the United States. In this regard, a central aim of the SCT was to foster homegrown stances and styles of interpretation; in fact, a good deal of what came to be known as “theory” in the North American academy during the last three decades of the twentieth-century was either the direct or indirect result of the work done or fostered at the SCT. A related goal of the SCT was to broaden the humanistic relevance of literature as it was presented in undergraduate classrooms. The SCT’s second aim was a concerted response to the crisis of humanities and the increased questioning of the relevance in the late-1970s. Chapter Five secondly examines how the SCT

attracted and then facilitated the move of key members of the Yale School to UCI. While intellectual friendships certainly played their part, it was UCI's intellectual culture and institutional support for the development of "theory" that primarily lured Miller, Derrida, and others to the West Coast institution. This transfer to UCI assimilated various deconstructive projects to that of "theory" more generally, further institutionalizing the hermeneutics of suspicion in the North American academy.

Lastly, the Epilogue, "The Eclipse of the Age of Deconstruction," briefly explores the "de Man affair" and the lasting reverberations of the Yale School and deconstructive reading practices in the North American academy in the 1990s and early-twentieth century. In 1987 it was revealed that de Man, who had died four years earlier and was Derrida's closest friend in American intellectual life as well as the most prominent exponent of deconstruction in the United States, had written approximately two hundred pro-German articles—at least one explicitly anti-Semitic—in 1941 and 1942 during his youth under the German occupation of Belgium. Derrida's deconstructive readings of his friend's wartime writings proved highly controversial, and became red meat for hungry enemies of deconstruction, who offered them as proof of deconstruction's nihilism. The ensuing debates over de Man's wartime writings and his mature scholarship exposed the limits of deconstructive techniques of reading, revealing the limitations of solely adopting a hermeneutics of suspicion for the interpretation of objects and events of the world. The revelation of de Man's wartime writings marked the beginning of the end of deconstruction, which the Yale School and their colleagues helped install as the most fashionable and innovative mode of interpretation in the North American academy during the last three decades of the twentieth-century.

1

Launching A Deconstructive Camaraderie; Or, Innovation and the Ur-Yale SchoolIntroduction

The members of “The Hermeneutical Mafia,” or Yale School of Deconstruction—Paul de Man, Harold Bloom, Geoffrey Hartman, and J. Hillis Miller—became colleagues in departments of literature at Yale University during the mid-1970s. The standard story of deconstruction is first and foremost about “a quartet of major [literary] critics” whose work became the “point of entry for Derridean deconstruction,”³⁰ and about how this Mafia “effected, as it were, an ‘American translation’ of the French methodologies and literary philosophies.”³¹ What is overlooked in such portrayals is that de Man, Bloom, Hartman, and Miller’s intellectual and personal camaraderie—sometimes friendly rivalry—actually began almost a decade earlier, in the 1960s, and largely grew out of North American intellectual, institutional, and cultural contexts. This group did not, as is largely believed, start to read one other’s work, taking cues and drawing ideas from their texts, with the writing and 1978 publication of *Deconstruction and Criticism*, a collection of deconstructive essays loosely based around the work of English Romantic poet Percy Bysshe Shelley. In fact, de Man, Bloom, Hartman, and Miller had already met and worked closely together during the 1960s at several North American institutions, and at a number of important conferences, but did so in fits and starts, more or less by accident, and

³⁰ Cusset, 114,114-118.

³¹ Hoeveler Jr., 26.

usually only two or three at a time. Thus, before sharing official affiliation with the same institution, prior to gathering together as senior faculty members at Yale's Old Campus—where the departments of Classics, English, Comparative Literature, and Philosophy were housed—de Man, Bloom, Hartman, and Miller developed a camaraderie that was advanced through correspondence, institutional support, the assimilation and transformation of ideas as well as techniques of reading, and more generally admiration for one another's work.

The following chapter examines three key junctures where this camaraderie developed and deepened: the 1965 Colloquium on Literary Criticism at Yale University, the 1966 Johns Hopkins Symposium "The Languages of Criticism and the Sciences of Man," and the 1968/69 La Jolla/Bellagio conference "Languages of the Humanistic Studies/The Use of Theory in Humanistic Studies." These conferences ranged in scope and ambition, from the cloistered environment and somewhat modest aims of the 1965 New Haven conference to the grandiose setting and objectives of the 1966 JHU Symposium and the heady transatlanticism of the 1968/1969 La Jolla/Bellagio conference. Regardless of the size or setting, however, these junctures aid the understanding of the history of deconstruction in America, as two or more future Yale School members informally assembled at each occasion and used the moment to (re)formulate essential components—key stances and styles of interpretation—of proto-deconstructive reading. Eventually, deconstructive literary criticism—or "rhetorical reading," as de Man would call such interpretive techniques during the 1970s—emerged from these exchanges between friends.

It was not simply by facilitating a sense of camaraderie between future Mafia members that made the 1965 Yale Colloquium, the 1966 Hopkins Symposium, and the 1968/69 La Jolla/Bellagio conference significant. It is important not only that these junctures illuminate

aspects of the history of deconstruction from the inside, as it were. These junctures also were shaped by and help to shed light on broader intellectual, institutional, and cultural trends in North America during the 1960s. Surely, if one were to turn at existing histories of deconstruction and theory, one could be forgiven for believing that attention should primarily be paid to the 1966 JHU conference, as it ostensibly served as a beachhead for the invasion of America by contemporary French thought. Simply put, the Hopkins Symposium is usually seen as the origin for what passed as theory during the last three decades of the North American academy as well as the beginning of deconstruction in the United States. But this emphasis on the 1966 JHU conference leads to a distortion similar to Saul Steinberg's illustration *View of the World from 9th Avenue*, which served as the cover of the March 29, 1976, edition of *The New Yorker* and represents the view from Manhattan of the world—with Manhattan as the center of the world.³² A closer examination of the 1965 Yale Colloquium, the 1966 Hopkins Symposium, and the 1968/69 La Jolla/Bellagio conference reveals that North American academic and non-academic contexts more than European ones informed these conferences and colloquiums and shaped how and why what happened there transformed the North American intellectual landscape. While these conferences were important because they facilitated Ur-Yale School members' discussions of the arcane mechanisms of prose and poetry, they were also significant because they assisted intellectual and institutional changes that, rather than coming from abroad, were more or less indigenous both in origin and their effects.

At these conferences and colloquiums, Ur-Yale School members and their colleagues often found themselves—sometimes by accident, like at the 1965 Yale Conference; sometimes rather programmatically, like at the 1966 JHU Symposium and the 1968/69 La Jolla/Bellagio conference—questioning literary formalism, above all the Anglo-American New Critical reading

³² Saul Steinberg, "View of the World from 9th Avenue," *New Yorker*, March 29, 1976.

techniques, a stance and style of interpreting prose or poetry in which the literary critic isolated the text itself to discover its organic union of opposing meanings.³³ De Man's, Hartman's, and Miller's interrogations of formalist modes of reading undoubtedly advanced their personal projects and showed their professional interest in modifying the reigning literary-critical orthodoxy. But their questioning of formalism also recorded the more general interest among literary critics about the status of the scientificity of literary study in the North American academy. What slowly emerged for Ur-Yale School members and their colleagues at these conferences and the resulting publications was the sense of and confidence in a shared mission, not only to solve the "problem" of formalism, of the scientificity of literary study, a solution ostensibly achievable by way of refining the technical rigor of reading practices. What also emerged in this shared mission was the desire to apply revised formalist methods of reading to humanist scholarship more broadly. By the early-1970s, this joint mission had helped propel the literary critic and theorist (and eventually the deconstructive critic) to the position of the most advanced of humanist scholars, as well as laid the groundwork for the scholarly persona of the critical theorist, ascendant in the late-1970s and early-1980s.

Several additional overlapping intellectual and institutional contexts shaped and were shaped by these three key conferences. Each event was held during a period of unprecedented growth in the American academy; public and private funds supported all three, and this support assisted literary scholars and humanists' effectiveness in increasing confidence in, creating excitement about, and raising the hopes for the modernization of literary studies and the humanities in the North American academy. The enthusiastic atmosphere legible at these events also goes a long way in explaining how and why departments of literature became the most

³³ For a summary of the fortunes of the New Criticism, see Gerald Graff, "From Rags to Riches to Routine," in *Professing Literature: An Institutional History* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1987), 226-243.

exciting place to practice non-analytic philosophy in the U.S. during the last three decades of the twentieth-century.

The Ur-Yale School members and their colleagues' participations at these conferences and subsequent publications show how continental philosophy, above all phenomenological modes of inquiry, became injected into and grafted onto quasi-New Critical interpretive techniques. And in the hands of the Ur-Yale School members this combination was partly responsible for creating what is today known as deconstructive literary criticism. One last overarching context of the 1965 Yale Colloquium, the 1966 Hopkins Symposium, and the 1968/69 La Jolla/Bellagio conference to appreciate is the—today glaring—fact that participants were almost exclusively white men. At the time, this group staffed the most powerful teaching and research posts in the North American academy; this group was at the confident center of the innovation and advancement of literary studies and humanities scholarship. This situation was especially the case in departments of literature—above all English Literature—at elite North American universities, long deemed repositories of high culture, founts of knowledge, arbiters of good taste. Simply put, it was men—white, usually Anglo-American men—who were tasked with protecting what English poet and cultural critic Matthew Arnold labeled “the best that has been thought and said.”³⁴ But, these three conferences also capture a moment when, though this ideological edifice was still in place, the inclusion of Jewish-American males, due to the GI Bill and the slow broadening of access to institutions of higher education, began to transform Arnold's task and challenged its presuppositions.

To not appreciate all of these contexts for the three conferences examined in this chapter, is to disregard, not simply that these events served as key junctures for the Ur-Yale School

³⁴ See Mathew Arnold, *Culture and Anarchy with Friendship's Garland and Some Literary Essays*, Volume 5 of *The Complete Works of Matthew Arnold*, ed. Robert H. Super (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1965).

members to orient themselves towards similar intellectual problems, but how these contexts helped institutionalize participants' robust confidence in the scientific and humanistic promise of literary theory and criticism. This confidence was on full display at the 1965 Yale Colloquium, the 1966 JHU Symposium, and the 1968/69 La Jolla/Bellagio conference. Nevertheless, while an atmosphere of hope and innovation generally marked this shared project among North American literary critics, theorists, and other humanists at the 1965 Yale Colloquium, the 1966 Hopkins Symposium, and the 1968/69 La Jolla/Bellagio conference, this confident mood had noticeably soured by the early 1970s, becoming an attitude of distrust toward humanistic inquiry in general, an attitude that resonated with a younger generation of students skeptical of institutions of all kinds, political, educational, or religious. It was this self-confidence in the innovation and modernization of literary criticism and humanistic endeavors during the 1960s that eventually gave way to anguish in the 1970s and aided the institutionalization of a suspicion of all knowledge claims so characteristic of the deconstructive mind and mood.

The 1965 Yale Colloquium on Literary Criticism

Some elements that came to constitute the philosophical school that was the Yale School of Deconstruction—including many of its members' sense of shared mission to modernize literary criticism and theory, and their belief that this innovation might occur by way of fusing elements of Anglo-American New Critical reading practices and contemporary European thought—are traceable to a three-day conference held in late March 1965: the Colloquium on Literary Criticism at Yale University.³⁵ Jacques Ehrmann (1931–1972), head of Yale's French

³⁵ The colloquium was originally intended to be held at Dartmouth College. See Jacques Ehrmann to J. Hillis Miller, October 29, 1964, Box 26, Folder 21 Colloquium on Literary Criticism Yale University 1964-1965, The J. Hillis Miller Papers, The Critical Theory Archive, The University of California-Irvine. Ehrmann was assisted by two Yale graduate students: Morris Dickstein and Richard Klein, both who went on to illustrious academic careers. See Hartman, *A Scholar's Tale*, 183 f. 11.

Department, organized and directed the conference in New Haven. Ehrmann was deeply invested in contemporary European thought and was the only American professor at the time to propose an introductory course on structuralism, as much a disposition as it was a mode of interpretation, which ascended during the 1960s in French departments of sociology, anthropology, and linguistics. Drawing inspiration from the structural linguistics of Ferdinand de Saussure, French structuralists “attempt[ed] to uncover the internal relationships which give different languages...their form and function,” and theorized that the foundations of society could be deciphered in terms of these linguistic links.³⁶



Figure 1.1 Jacques Ehrmann. *Yale French Studies* 58 (1979): 4. Ehrmann was central to the organization of the 1965 Yale Colloquium on Literary Criticism. This conference brought several members of what known as the Yale School of Deconstruction during the 1970s together, and, more broadly, planted the seeds of a shared intellectual project to revise North American literary studies

Ehrmann began planning for his Yale Colloquium as late as Fall 1964 and thus prior to the more celebrated four-day October 1966 Symposium at Johns Hopkins University, “The Languages of Criticism and the Sciences of Man.”³⁷ The Baltimore conference is remembered as the moment that strengthened “the ties between French and American universities” through “programs encouraging exchange students and visiting professors...not only with Johns Hopkins but also with Cornell and Yale, the future ‘golden triangle’ of American deconstruction.”³⁸ Without denying that the Hopkins Symposium consolidated connections between French and North American institutions of higher

³⁶ Ehrmann, “Introduction,” *Yale French Studies* 36/37 (1966): 5; During the 1960s, Ehrmann would also edit three special issues of *Yale French Studies*, “Literature and Revolution” in 1967, “Game, Play, and Literature” in 1968, and “Structuralism” in 1970. For a summary of François Dosse, *History of Structuralism: The Rising Sign 1945-1966*, trans. Deborah Glassman (Minnesota: The University Of Minnesota Press, 1998).

³⁷ Ehrmann to Miller, November 23, 1964, Box 26, Folder 21 Colloquium on Literary Criticism Yale University 1964-1965, The J. Hillis Miller Papers, The Critical Theory Archive, The University of California-Irvine.

³⁸ Cusset, 32.

education or discounting the effect that French philosopher Jacques Derrida's Baltimore presentation had on a certain segment of American students of literature, Ehrmann's 1965 Yale Colloquium was in fact the foundational event in the history of what became deconstructive literary criticism in America.³⁹

The Yale Colloquium, with its presentations on György Lukács (1885-1971), Erich Auerbach (1892-1957), Ernst Robert Curtius (1886-1956), as well as on structuralism, did not simply accomplish what the Baltimore conference did a year later, albeit in a less spectacular, more insulated fashion. Rather, it was at Ehrmann's 1965 Yale Colloquium that Ur-Yale School members and their colleagues, by questioning the reigning orthodoxy of Anglo-American New Critical reading practices, began to formulate proto-deconstructive techniques for the interpretation of prose and poetry. Indeed, Derrida's 1989 assertion that "[w]hat is today called 'theory' in [America] may even have an essential link with what is said to have happened there in 1966" should be rewritten: what is today called deconstruction may even have an essential link to what is said to have happened in New Haven in 1965.⁴⁰

Besides serving as a foundational event for the history of deconstruction in America, the 1965 Yale Colloquium paved the way for the spectacular success of the Hopkins Symposium—Eugenio Donato (1937–1983) and René Girard (1923-), organizers of the Baltimore conference, presented at the Yale conference and drew inspiration from Ehrmann and his desire to keep Americans' *au courant* of European intellectual trends.⁴¹ Ehrmann himself stated on March 27, 1965 during one of his Colloquium's question and answer sessions: "The problem of

³⁹ Ibid., 57-65.

⁴⁰ Jacques Derrida, "Some Statements and Truisms about Neologisms, Newisms, Postisms, Parasitisms, and other small Seismisms," trans. by Anne Tomiche, in *The States of 'Theory': History, Art, and Critical Discourse*, ed. David Carroll, (New York: Columbia University Press, 1990), 80.

⁴¹ Richard Macksey and Eugenio Donato organized the Hopkins conference precisely to make up for the lag between French and American thought. See Cusset, 29.

communication obsesses me. This colloquium attempted to bridge the gap between different cultures, different disciplines, between past and future.”⁴² But, while at first glance the 1965 Yale Colloquium seemed to have merely helped move along the displacement in the U.S. of the indigenous New Criticism by “continental” criticism, the former long-dominant in North American classes of literature from the late 1930s through the 1950s, what in fact occurred at Erhmann’s conference was something deeply embedded in North American intellectual and institutional contexts. At the 1965 Yale Colloquium, the seeds of a shared mission to modernize American literary criticism and theory were sown. And participants’ focus at Erhmann’s conference on the current state of literary criticism in the U.S., with an eye to how European developments influenced Anglo-American criticism, helped establish the literary critic and theorist—and the deconstructive literary critic and theorist in particular—as the most advanced scholar in North American Humanities departments during the last three decades of the twentieth-century.

It is nevertheless surely an irony of history that this shared project of renewal, which would come to claim “difference” as one of its mantras, began, as a glance at the list of participants at the 1965 Yale Colloquium shows, as an exclusively white male enterprise.⁴³ Not unlike the demographic of other departments and fields in the North American academy, this was a relatively homogeneous group (though several were Jewish-Americans) initiated this joint project to renovate literary studies, and they were able to do so because socio-economic factors

⁴² Erhmann, “Discussion Highlights selected from the deliberations of the Colloquium on Literary Criticism held at Yale University, March 25-27, 1965,” November 23, 1964, Box 26, Folder 21 Colloquium on Literary Criticism Yale University 1964-1965, The J. Hillis Miller Papers, The Critical Theory Archive, The University of California-Irvine, 6.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 1. These participants included: Ralph Cohen (U.C.L.A.); Paul de Man (Cornell); Eugenio Donato (Johns Hopkins); Jacques Erhmann (Yale-Director); Bernard Fleischmann (Wisconsin-Milwaukee); Alexander Gelley (C.C.N.Y.); René Girard (Johns Hopkins); Geoffrey Hartman (Iowa); J. Hillis Miller (Johns Hopkins); Lowry Nelson Jr. (Yale); Martin Price (Yale-Moderator); John K. Simon (Illinois); C. L. Williams (Michigan State); Morris Dickstein (Yale- Assistant Director); and Richard Klein (Yale-Assistent Director).

and intellectual biases effectively barred women and minorities from entering into and contributing to this enterprise.

These intellectual and institutional contexts swirled around the gathering together—for the first time in the same place—of three members of the future Hermeneutical Mafia, J. Hillis Miller, Geoffrey Hartman, and Paul de Man, at the 1965 Yale Colloquium. As such, Erhmann’s conference was a crucial moment in the intellectual history of American deconstruction. De Man and Hartman had in fact previously worked together, and already established an appreciation of each other’s work. Five years before Ehrmann’s conference in New Haven, de Man, then a Ph.D. candidate in Harvard University’s

Comparative Literature program, found himself unable to secure a position at either Harvard or another

institution as his graduation approached. Though it seemed as if de Man was out of luck,

Hartman, then professor of English literature at Cornell University and whom de Man had

impressed with a paper on English Romantic poet John Keats at the 1957 meeting of the Modern Language Association, convinced M.H. Abrams, master of literary studies in Ithaca, to offer de Man a position.⁴⁴

De Man and Hartman’s shared project at Cornell unfortunately came to a halt after only a few years. The 1965 academic year found Hartman teaching in the Comparative Literature

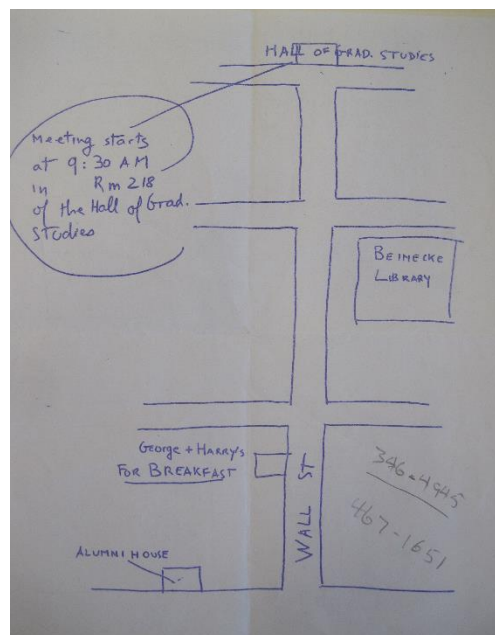


Figure 1.2 Jacques Ehrmann’s hand-drawn directions to participants is representative of the informality—and cloistered nature—of the 1965 Yale Colloquium

⁴⁴ Barish, 421; Stanley Corngold, “Remembering Paul de Man: An Epoch in the History of Comparative Literature,” in *Building a Profession: Autobiographical Perspectives on the History of Comparative Literature in the United States*, ed. Lionel Gossman and Mihai Spărosu (Albany: State University Press of New York: 1994), 178.

department at the University of Iowa, having moved from Ithaca after the fall 1964 term. But opportunities for de Man and Hartman to collaborate or at the very least share the same intellectual space continued to emerge. At the 1965 MLA panel in Chicago, for example, Hartman chaired the panel “Romanticism and Religion.” On Hartman’s panel was de Man, who in his paper “Heaven and Earth in Wordsworth and Hölderlin,” engaged in a friendly critique of his former Cornell colleague’s work. De Man “put into question” Hartman’s claims in his 1963 book *Wordsworth Poetry: 1787-1814*—which established Hartman as one of the most important postwar

interpreters and advocates of English Romanticism, of English Romantic poet William Wordsworth in particular—that the “‘connection’” in Wordsworth’s work “between ‘the waters above and waters below,

between heaven and hell’ . . . can indeed be called a ‘marriage’ and whether the mediating entity is indeed nature.”⁴⁵ Hartman—who first encountered Wordsworth’s poetry in the English countryside after escaping on a *Kindertransport* from Nazi Germany—still held out hope at the age of 36 that poetry, above all Romantic poetry such as Wordsworth’s, could unite what modernity had torn asunder, namely word and world. De Man questioned his friend’s optimism in his 1965 MLA paper.



Figure 1.3 Comparative Literature faculty, The University of Iowa, 1965. Left to right: Ralph Freedman (seated); Geoffrey Hartman, Curt Zimansky, Rosalie Colie, Frederic Will (standing). Hartman receiving the attention of his colleagues. Source: Frederick W. Kent collection of Photographs, 1966-2000, University Archives at the University of Iowa

⁴⁵ Pieter Vermeulen, *Geoffrey Hartman: Romanticism after the Holocaust* (New York: Continuum, 2010), 8; de Man, “Heaven and Earth in Wordsworth and Hölderlin,” in *Romanticism and Contemporary Criticism: The Gauss Seminar and Other Papers*, eds. E. S. Burt, Kevin Newmark, and Andrzej Warminksi (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University, 1993), 138, 207. See Hartman, *Wordsworth Poetry: 1787-1814*, particularly Hartman’s comments, quoted by de Man, on pg. 49.

De Man and Hartman had actually already discussed their difference of opinions as to whether poetry could marry word and world about nine months prior to the December 1965 MLA convention. In March 1965, Hartman made the journey from Iowa City to New Haven to participate in Jacques Ehrmann's Colloquium on Literary Criticism at Yale University—the institution from where he received his Ph.D. in Comparative Literature in 1954. At the New Haven conference, Hartman and J. Hillis Miller, specialist in Victorian literature and Professor of English at the Johns Hopkins University (more on him below), attended Paul de Man's March 25th presentation of his paper, titled "György Lukács's *Theory of the Novel*."⁴⁶ With his paper, de Man succinctly (it was a mere 7 and a half typed pages long) formulated elements of his proto-deconstructive stance and style of reading, elements that later comprised what became known as deconstructive literary criticism. De Man must also have cut quite a striking figure with his paper—Lukács had yet to become a major figure of Western Marxism to Leftist American scholars and intellectuals, and, because of this, de Man's topic, at least for attendees not in-the-know, likely seemed cutting edge.

Not only was de Man's subject on the forefront of knowledge, however, de Man's relationship to this topic was as well. Unbeknownst to his colleagues, de Man personally struggled with the very themes of his Lukács essay; like Lukács, de Man wrestled with his desire to resolve his alienation. Born in 1919 in Belgium—he was 46 at the time of Ehrmann's Yale Colloquium—de Man had authored almost 200 pro-German articles during the German Occupation of his native Belgium. One of de Man's articles, written for the Belgian daily *Le Soir*, was explicitly anti-Semitic, chillingly claiming that "the solution of the Jewish problem,"

⁴⁶ Ehrmann to Participants in the Colloquium on Literary Criticism, October 29, 1964. De Man published his 1965 Yale Colloquium paper six years later in his volume *Blindness and Insight*. De Man, "György Lukács's *Theory of the Novel*," in *Blindness and Insight: Essays in the Rhetoric of Contemporary Criticism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1971), 51-59.

which de Man suggested was “the creation of a Jewish colony isolated from Europe,” would not be detrimental to the “literary life of the West.”⁴⁷ This dissertation argues that de Man’s arrival in the U.S. in 1948, he had been covertly using his writings as tools of self-conversion to become an author who never (again) committed the errors of his youth. In his work and teaching, de Man refused to permit, as he had done as a youth in Belgium, prose or poetry to connect with social and historical reality, choosing instead to focus on the text’s inner contradictions and tensions.

The combination of de Man’s personal and professional project—that is, the mixture of his habit to employ his writing as an inward-directed tool of self-fashioning and for the outward-directed renovation of literary studies in the North American academy—is clearly legible in his 1965 paper on Lukács. In his essay, de Man explored how Lukács’s “theory of the novel emerges in a cogent and coherent way out of the dialectic between the urge for totality and man’s alienated situation.”⁴⁸ According to de Man, Lukács’s model of the novel, of fictitious prose narrative, logically emerged from the tension between the wish for wholeness and one’s alienated condition. Mirroring how he might have felt regarding his relationship to the secret past that he kept locked inside himself, de Man argued that Lukács’s theory resulted from “[t]his thematic duality, the tension between an earth-bound destiny and a consciousness that tries to exceed this condition.” And it was, according to de Man, this opposition—between a terrestrial fate of alienation and transcendence of this alienation towards a wholeness—that led “to structural discontinuities in the form of the novel.”⁴⁹ For de Man, in other words, the tension between the wish for wholeness and man’s alienated condition from this wholeness produced organizational gaps in the novel—this was Lukács’s profound insight. And, by applying his

⁴⁷ De Man, originally published in *Le Soir* (March 4, 1941), in Martin McQuillan, *Paul de Man*, Martin McQuillan, trans., (Routledge, 2001), 127–29.

⁴⁸ De Man, “György Lukács’s *Theory of the Novel*,” 55.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 56.

insight into the duality of being to the novel, de Man's Lukács discovered that "[i]rony steadily undermines [any] claim at imitation and substitutes for it a conscious, interpreted awareness of the distance that separates an actual experience from the understanding of this experience."⁵⁰ De Man's Lukács found that irony destabilized any and all assertions that the novel supplied an awareness of the gap between a tangible experience and the knowledge of this experience. Lukács's philosophical insight into the opposition between secular destiny and transcendence thus led to his awareness that irony, rather than a wholeness between actual experience and consciousness, was the guiding structural principle of the novel. At the 1965 Yale Colloquium on Literary Criticism de Man's Lukács anticipated a principle of what became known as deconstructive literary criticism: the fundamental fissure between intention and world, novel and reality, totality and alienation.

De Man's stoic fatalism in his essay struck a dramatically dissonant chord within the generally upbeat and confident atmosphere of Erhmann's conference and North American culture more generally during the mid-1960s. Nevertheless, de Man's fatalist performance was implemented with conceptual tools derived and refined from both the Continental philosophical and the Anglo-American New Critical traditions. When situated in these contexts, de Man's reversal of the New Critical penchant for finding an organic unity of opposite meanings in prose and poetry and emphasis on the ironic destabilization of a text's affirmations were as alluring as they were groundbreaking. That de Man's essay was innovative by way of creating a skeptical atmosphere and advancing distrust in any claim to have achieved unity between word and world, text and context, was hardly lost on some of his younger colleagues, especially Hartman and Miller, who, in addition to listening to de Man's Lukács paper, participated in the subsequent discussion. The discussion's transcript—as Ehrmann wrote to participants two weeks after the

⁵⁰ Ibid.

conference—reads as slightly “brutal, coarse, definitive...and vague” when measured up to “the words that [they] spoke.”⁵¹ But the fact that there even is a transcript reflects how momentous, how important, for the development of literary criticism in North America Erhmann and his colleagues felt the occasion was. The recorded discussion of de Man’s Lukács paper also provides evidence of the first time Miller met de Man, and displays Miller and de Man’s almost-immediate intellectual concord, the former deeply impressed by the latter’s presentation as well as his insights, above all de Man’s insights that Continental philosophy that informed his interpretation of Lukács.⁵²

Miller stated: “I think I understand DeMan’s [sic] distinction between polyrhythmic and linear time—a hermeneutical time as opposed to an organic time. But how does discontinuous p[o]lyrhythmic time escape from the failure of linear time in L[ukács]?”⁵³ Here, Miller referred to de Man’s aforementioned argument that Lukács’ insight is that irony’s (polyrhythmic or dialectical time) disruption of organic continuity (linear, organic, or natural time) structured the novel, that the discontinuous moment rather than the achievement of a totality or wholeness was the source of the novel. De Man explained to his younger and future Yale colleague—Miller was born in 1928 and thus 37 (one year older than Hartman and almost a decade younger than de Man) at the time of Ehrmann’s conference—that his own insight into Lukács’s insight was facilitated by the German philosopher Martin Heidegger’s work: “I try to distinguish between an

⁵¹ Erhmann to participants, April 8, 1965, Box 26, Folder 21 Colloquium on Literary Criticism Yale University 1964-1965, The J. Hillis Miller Papers, The Critical Theory Archive, The University of California-Irvine, 1.

⁵² J. Hillis Miller, “Tales out of (the Yale) School,” 117-118.

⁵³ Erhmann to participants, “Discussion Highlights selected from the deliberations of the Colloquium on Literary Criticism held at Yale University,” March 25-27, 1965, Box 26, Folder 21 Colloquium on Literary Criticism Yale University 1964-1965, The J. Hillis Miller Papers, The Critical Theory Archive, The University of California-Irvine, 5.

organic view of totality founded on Nature and a dialectical view of totality, founded on human consciousness itself—as described in Heidegger.”⁵⁴

Heidegger, whose phenomenological work supplied de Man with the conceptual tools to understand Lukács, though it was a particular segment of Heidegger’s thought. Miller replied: “You were referring then to Heidegger’s description of time in *Sein und Zeit* [1927].” De Man: “Yes[,] but certainly not to Heidegger’s actual practice in discussing poets [in a 1955 essay, de Man made the claim—later famous among his students and colleagues—that the German Romantic poet “Hölderlin says exactly the opposite of what Heidegger makes him say”⁵⁵]. I think you find such notions of time at work in Lukács, in Hegel’s *Phenomenology* and in much of the best formalist criticism written here in America.”⁵⁶ De Man claimed a solidarity with Heidegger’s early account of temporality in which Heidegger distinguishes between a “vulgar” concept of time, the idea of time as linear and where consciousness operates, where representations of reality rather than reality itself is encountered, and an “authentic” temporality, the space outside consciousness or intention, where reality or “presence” is confronted. And, notably, de Man placed American formalist criticism, of which the New Criticism was the most prominent example, on equal philosophical footing with Hegel and Lukács.

The New Critical method of reading prose and poetry was not, according to de Man, to be rejected, like some American critics, increasing in number, longed to do, but read as closely—and with more acumen—than hitherto, as it, for de Man, was structured by Heidegger’s view of time. At the discussion of his Lukács paper at the 1965 Yale Colloquium, de Man thus explicitly

⁵⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁵ De Man, “Les Exégèses de Hölderlin par Martin Heidegger, Revue of Else Buddeberg’s ‘Heidegger und die Dichtung Hölderlin, Rilke,’ *Deutsche Viertelsjahrsschrift für Literaturwissenschaft und Geistesgeschichte* (1952), 26(4): 293-330, and Beda Alleman’s *Hölderlin und Heidegger* (1954), *Critique* 100-101 (1955): 800-819.

⁵⁶ Erhmann to participants, “Discussion Highlights selected from the deliberations of the Colloquium on Literary Criticism held at Yale University.”

defended the reigning critical conventions, yet did so by calling for the advancement and refinement of these conventions' interpretive principles.

De Man's influence on Miller and the ways their growing sense of a shared mission to revise literary criticism intertwined at Ehrmann's conference went beyond what can be revealed by a cursory reading of the Colloquium's transcripts. For example, that de Man came to serve as a kind of life-long intellectual lodestar for Miller is traceable to their meeting in New Haven. After de Man's paper, Miller and de Man conducted their first private conversation. Walking down New Haven's Wall Street at lunchtime, Miller told de Man that he was "deeply interested in 'later Heidegger.' 'Oh no,' said de Man, with great urgency, 'later Heidegger is very dangerous. If you must read Heidegger, read *Sein und Zeit*.'"⁵⁷ It was only decades later, after the 1987 discovery of de Man's wartime writings, did Miller, as he recalled in 2014, understand that de Man "was warning him not only against the nationalist, Nazi-sympathizing, Germanophile tendencies of Heidegger's later essays, but also against Heidegger's misreadings, for example his erroneous interpretation of Hölderlin as an apocalyptic poet, whereas Hölderlin in fact 'precisely warns us against such an apocalyptic temptation—and the certain crypto-Nazism that comes already with it.'"⁵⁸

Miller would later see de Man's penchant for the early Heidegger as evidence of de Man's private battle against the temptation he succumbed to in his youth to place prose and poetry at the service of the politics. De Man's professed allegiance at the 1965 Yale Colloquium and to Miller during their walk down New Haven's Wall street to Heidegger's account of temporality in *Sein und Zeit* should be read crypto-autobiographically—de Man's comments not only square with his insistence in his teaching and writing, from the early 1950s until

⁵⁷ Miller, "Tales out of (the Yale) School," 118.

⁵⁸ Ibid.

approximately 1967, in the disjunction between consciousness and world, but also may have reflected his fear that he unintentionally remained attached to his true character, his “authentic” temporality.

Regardless—or perhaps because—of the likely inner drama of de Man’s relationship to Heidegger’s thought and his likely effort to keep silent about his collaborationist past, Miller took de Man’s advice, and “spent some time early every morning over the next year (on sabbatical from Johns Hopkins and on a Fellowship in London) reading a few more pages of *Being and Time*” in English because his “German was not up to it.”⁵⁹ In this way, Miller—who was trained as a literary critic and scholar at Harvard University, receiving his Ph.D. in English Literature in 1952—appropriated Heidegger’s thought, even if this Heidegger was not de Man’s “early Heidegger” (see for example Miller’s late Heideggerian apocalyptic-sounding arguments in *Poets of Reality* that “[t]he triumph of technology is the forgetting of the death of God” and, again sounding like Heidegger, that a “central tradition of modern literature has been a countercurrent against this direction of history”⁶⁰). Miller’s modification of his reading techniques and his orientation of his mood to more metaphysical—more Heideggerian, that is—concerns prepared him for his later encounters and deep friendship with French philosopher Jacques Derrida, whose project of the deconstruction of Western metaphysics partly emerged with and against Heidegger’s concept of the *Destruktion* of metaphysics.

Not only de Man, but also his former Cornell colleague and future fellow Yale School member Geoffrey Hartman presented at Ehrmann’s 1965 Yale Colloquium on Literary Criticism. Delivered on March 26th, Hartman’s paper, even more so than de Man’s, raised questions about formalism, specifically about whether formalism was a technique of reading to be overcome or if

⁵⁹ Ibid., 119.

⁶⁰ Miller, *Poets of Reality: Six Twentieth-Century Writers* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1965), 4-5.

literary scholars were essentially stuck using it for the interpretation of prose and poetry, whether they liked formalism or not. Hartman's paper in fact put this latter issue front and center—his paper's title, "Beyond Formalism," was more an implicit question mark than anything else.⁶¹ His phrase "beyond formalism" pointed to the relations between mind, time, and world, and attested to Hartman's phenomenological orientation. It also signaled that his essay would address the paradoxes that arose when a system—in this case "formalism"—was pushed to its conceptual limits.⁶² Like de Man's Lukács's treatment of irony as the guiding principle of the novel, Hartman's 1965 Yale Colloquium essay therefore advanced tactics for the interpretation of prose and poetry that subsequently comprised tactics for deconstructive reading, including fastening on the contradictions, the inner stresses and strains, of a text.

Hartman opened his paper: "Five years ago, on this campus, [English literary scholar and critic] F. W. Bateson attacked what he called 'Yale Formalism.' His main targets seem to have been Cleanth Brooks, René Wellek and W. K. Wimsatt, and he has recently added Yale's 'pseudo-gothic Harkness Tower' to this distinguished list."⁶³ Bateson's target was what he believed was a kind of dogmatic New Critical method of



Figure 1.4 Yale's Harkness Tower, cs. 1965. The tower, a five-minute walk from the Hall of Graduate Studies, was the first in English Perpendicular Gothic Style built in the modern era. F. W. Bateson mentioned the Harkness Tower in his attack on "Yale Formalism"—the edifice was seen by him and others as menacing, inhuman, precisely like the New Criticism that received his withering criticism. See Stanley T. Williams, "The Harkness Memorial Tower," *American Architect* 120 (1921): 316.

⁶¹ Hartman, "Beyond Formalism," unpublished 1-19, Box 26, Folder 21 Colloquium on Literary Criticism Yale University 1964-1965, The J. Hillis Miller Papers, The Critical Theory Archive, The University of California-Irvine; Hartman, *A Scholar's Journey*, 35.

⁶² Vermeulen, 45.

⁶³ Hartman, "Beyond Formalism," 1.

reading, a “formalism” that, by interpreting poetry as an organic union of opposite meanings free from the influence of social or cultural history, too closely isolated the “aesthetic fact from its human content,” as Hartman put it in his paper.⁶⁴

Hartman distinguished himself from Bateson and overturned Bateson’s definition, surprisingly redefining formalism as the “method” of “revealing the human content of art by a study of its formal properties.”⁶⁵ Hardly against the human substance of artworks, Hartman’s formalism was a tool that the literary critic employed to disclose one’s human substance. And, rather counter intuitively, Hartman argued that the “faults [against the human content of art] of those whom Bateson calls formalists are due not to their formalism as such but rather to their not being formalistic enough; and that, conversely, those who have tried to ignore or transcend formalism tend often to arrive at results [about the human content of art] more abstract and categorical than what they object to.”⁶⁶ Bateson’s formalists were—ironically—not sufficiently rigorous in their application of formalist reading practices, while those who claimed to triumph over formalism ended up, like de Man’s Lukács who preserved the longing for wholeness and unity in his essay despite himself, retaining the very formalism they intended to transcend.

Hartman also echoed de Man’s interest, expressed during de Man’s conversation with Miller at the 1965 Yale Colloquium, in refining New Critical methods of reading. In this regard, Hartman’s and de Man’s projects were informally aligned, as both aimed to interrogate and fine-tune the reigning literary-critical orthodoxy in the North American academy. In his paper at Erhmann’s conference, for example, Hartman argued that the literary scholar—regardless of

⁶⁴ See for example F. W. Bateson, “The Function of Criticism at the Present Time,” *Essays in Criticism* 3 (1953): 1-27, where Bateson reasoned in favor of a critical approach that combined the explicatory precision of the New Criticism with an attention to socio-cultural context.

⁶⁵ Hartman, “Beyond Formalism,” 3. See also Hartman, “Beyond Formalism,” in *Beyond Formalism: Literary Essays 1958-1970* (New Haven, Conn. And London: Yale University Press, 1980), 42-53.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 6.

their intention, regardless of their subject or context, indeed, regardless of how innovative their methods—was bound to remain a formalist to some extent, and for reasons that resonated with de Man’s Lukács, specifically regarding the irresolvable contradiction between one’s destiny to remain earthbound, fallen and alienated, and the possibility of transcendence from this terrestrial home. Hartman wrote: “[T]o go beyond formalism”—in other words to devise reading methods that escaped the limits imposed on interpretation by formalism—“is as yet too hard for us; and may be, unless we are Hegelians believing in absolute spirit, against the nature of understanding.”⁶⁷ For Hartman, unless the literary critic intended to overstep the bounds of human understanding and leap into the divine, they, in every attempt to understand prose and poetry, inevitably gave priority to that “which has procedural significance, and which engages him mediately and dialectically with the formal properties of the work of art.” In fact, Hartman did “not know whether the mind can ever free itself genuinely of these procedural restraints—whether it can get beyond formalism without going through the study of forms.”⁶⁸ Unavoidably, some type of formal constraint, according to Hartman, limited and shaped the scholar’s study of art. Or, put differently, the literary critic always preserved elements of the very formalism they struggled to surpass.

At Ehrmann’s conference, Hartman also focused on several anti-formalists to support his argument about the inevitability of formalism, suggesting that, despite being self-confessed anti-formalists, these anti-formalists actually promoted a formalist method. Hartman specifically examined “avowed anti-formalist” Belgian literary critic Georges Poulet, who was known for practicing his phenomenological brand of literary criticism, which required the reader to open his or her mind to the consciousness of the author. This opening of the reader’s mind, according to

⁶⁷ Ibid., 8.

⁶⁸ Ibid., 17.

Poulet, required the reader to concentrate on the text itself without hypotheses about ontology or epistemology. In his 1965 Yale Colloquium paper, Hartman maintained that Poulet's exploration in a 1961 essay of American-born British Henry James' private consciousness, which Poulet considered a consciousness in search of its organizing principle, its "point de départ," was in fact grounded on a presupposed form, notwithstanding Poulet's insistence on it being otherwise.⁶⁹

For Hartman, Poulet's reading of James was based on an assumed form because Poulet treated the unfolding of James's consciousness as enclosed and in part constituted by larger structures such as the consciousness of a cultural "age." Poulet, Hartman argued, "postulate[d] a period consciousness" in order to avoid the embarrassing problem that there are "as many consciousnesses or cogitos as there are individuals."⁷⁰ In other words, Hartman's Poulet gathered evidence of James' "consciousness" from diverse materials—letters, journals, unpublished manuscripts, published novels—and attempted to see only a harmonious system between these varied materials and his era. In the final analysis, Poulet's "need to periodize," according to Hartman, was a sign of "a residual formalism."⁷¹ Thus, for Hartman, periodization was a type of formalism, though this was not something that the critic should outright reject, but recognize, as it was formalism that, according to Hartman, revealed the human content of art.

Like during the question and answer session after de Man's Lukács paper, the other two Ur-Yale School members participated in the conversation following Hartman's paper. And similar to this earlier conversation on March 25th, Hartman, de Man, and Miller established an intellectual rapport, a shared vision that involved answering questions about the limits of literary formalism and which later comprised various principles of the deconstructive stance and style of reading. De Man stated: "I couldn't agree more with the general trend of your paper. I'd like to

⁶⁹ See for example Georges Poulet, *Études sur le temps humain, III: le point de depart* (Paris: Plon, 1964).

⁷⁰ Hartman, "Beyond Formalism," 13,

⁷¹ Ibid.

say a word in defense of Poulet. If you had taken Poulet on [French mathematician, physicist, and writer Blaise] Pascal, [Christian theologian and philosopher Saint] Augustine, you would have had quite a different story.”⁷² Hartman responded: “It was not an unrepresentative essay (Poulet’s on James) but something of a relevant Achilles heel. I admit there are times when he does recognize the shadow side, the anguish, but I do feel he has a general optimism about the progress of consciousness.”⁷³ Hartman’s Poulet had too much faith in not only his ability to harmonize, to find a form that unites, an author’s consciousness over the course of their life with the larger cultural context. Poulet also had too much confidence in Hegel’s claim that consciousness—in Poulet’s case James’ consciousness—rose through a historical series of levels to find coincidence and accord with itself. But Poulet’s Hegelian approach failed, from Hartman’s perspective, to account for the ways in which this historical model overlooked the “shadow side,” what presumably remained outside Hegel’s system. For de Man and Hartman, Poulet essentially applied a formalism, because his anti-formalist method required him to postulate a period consciousness that formed and contained James’ monochromatic consciousness. Similar to de Man during his Lukács paper, Hartman in his discussion with de Man at the 1965 Colloquium on Poulet produced a skeptical atmosphere by way of advancing a refined understanding of the New Critical technique of reading prose and poetry.

Despite de Man and Hartman’s general accord on Poulet, however, they disagreed with Ur-Yale School member J. Hillis Miller, who happened to be the only contemporary critic that Hartman cited in his paper.⁷⁴ Miller’s disagreement stemmed from the fact that he had personally

⁷² Discussion Highlights selected from the deliberations of the Colloquium on Literary Criticism held at Yale University, March 25-27, 1965, Box 26, Folder 21 Colloquium on Literary Criticism Yale University 1964-1965, 6. De Man was likely referencing the first chapter of Poulet’s classic work *Les métamorphoses du Cercle* (Paris: Plon, 1961).

⁷³ Discussion Highlights selected from the deliberations of the Colloquium on Literary Criticism held at Yale University, March 25-27, 1965, 7.

⁷⁴ Hartman, “Beyond Formalism,” f. 8, 9.

known Poulet since 1952, when Poulet came to Johns Hopkins for a five-year stay, and that his—that is, Miller’s—work openly tried to transfer Poulet’s methods and those of what was known as the “Geneva School of Criticism” to the study of English literature; Miller was principally known at the time for his work on Victorian literature, and thus was not, like Hartman and de Man, a Romanticist.⁷⁵ Miller combined formalist reading practices with phenomenological-existential approaches such as Poulet’s, and drew from his training at Harvard and experience as a professor at Hopkins to support his own modified criticism of consciousness.

At the 1965 Yale Colloquium, Miller attempted to negotiate de Man’s and Hartman’s more or less critical views of Poulet and Miller’s own admiration of the Geneva Critic: “I’d like to defend the essay on James, though it is a case of Poulet’s angelism. P[oulet] seems to get something I find nowhere else in James criticism. James’ form[alism] is a very personal thing and not a recipe for making fiction.”⁷⁶ Miller seemed to admit that, in his essay on James, Poulet did indeed, as Hartman suggested, place faith in a kind of Platonic ladder—an “angelism”—that the critic climbed to reach the pure intellect of an author. However, unlike de Man and Hartman, Miller did not view Poulet as an avowed anti-formalist, as seeking to transcend formalism, asking: “Do you really think Poulet is an anti-formalist? Isn’t it rather that he is going beyond a particular poem to establish the form of a writer’s whole *oeuvre*, or even a whole period.”⁷⁷ Two years earlier, in an essay on Poulet, “The Literary Criticism of Georges Poulet,” published in *Modern Language Notes*, a then-three-quarters-of-a-century-old journal that introduced contemporary continental criticism into North American literary scholarship, Miller wrote:

“Material objects, other people, God in his various models, all are present in Poulet’s criticism,

⁷⁵ Sarah Lawall, *Critics of Consciousness: The Existential Structures of Literature* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1968), 195.

⁷⁶ Discussion Highlights selected from the deliberations of the Colloquium on Literary Criticism held at Yale University, March 25-27, 1965, 7.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*

but only as they have been turned into words, that is, into a form of consciousness.”⁷⁸ Trying to correct what he considered de Man’s and Hartman’s distortions, Miller suggested that Poulet, rather than standing against formalism, was in his own way formalist, since he explicitly searched for the system of an author’s collective works and a specific “age.” Thus, for Miller, Poulet moved beyond formalism by trying to locate the form of an author’s *oeuvre* instead of a specific work, a particular text.

On March 27th, Ehrmann’s Yale Colloquium on Literary Criticism came to an end. And on its final day, participants discussed the most important themes raised by contributors, which included the limits of formalism, the significance of French structuralism for North American literary criticism, and the place of New Critical reading techniques in contemporary literary criticism. Because these topics were also elements that comprised future Hermeneutical Mafia members’ future shared intellectual project, this discussion at the 1965 Yale Colloquium in New Haven thus provides a window into the Yale School *in embryo*. And this window shows readers the emerging awareness between de Man, Hartman, and Miller of their joint mission to develop new ways of reading that emerged by interrogating and retaining the boundaries of formalism. For example, in his final comments, de Man repeated his ambition to push formalism to its limits, but with added a continentally-inspired twist: “We shouldn’t try to get beyond formalism. There are all sorts of structuralist assumptions within formalism,....”⁷⁹ Here, de Man did not simply restate his agreement with Hartman, whose approach in his paper “Beyond Formalism” stressed that the critic, despite all efforts to transcend formalism, inevitably ended up focusing on the technical restraints and formal properties of the work of art.

⁷⁸ Miller, “The Literary Criticism of Georges Poulet,” *MLN* 78: 5 (1963): 474. Emphasis added.

⁷⁹ Discussion Highlights selected from the deliberations of the Colloquium on Literary Criticism held at Yale University, March 25-27, 1965, 8.

Though de Man's accord with Hartman is itself significant for understanding the growth of their shared proto-deconstructive stances and styles of reading in the mid-1960s, it is worth noting that de Man called for participants to remain committed to the formalist project because of its "structuralist assumptions." Thus, among some of the most esteemed and forward-looking members of his profession, de Man exhorted U.S. literary critics to continue to examine the formal properties of literature—an Anglo-American New Critical approach—in order to consider literature's structuralist conventions—a European, particularly French—of the operations of meaning. De Man confidently offered an innovative path forward, but, by also conserving and at the same time questioning traditional reading practices, a revolutionary he was not.

Instead of being the revolutionary nihilist that his critical opponents would cast him as during the 1970s and 1980s, de Man boldly implored his colleagues to, not simply face the complications of the formalist stance and style of reading prose and poetry, but make this confrontation a priority above all else. De Man stated: "The confrontation of European and American criticism at this point in History is worthless. The next step must be a re-interpretation of the concept of form.... That we can again talk about the problem of art and society is a considerable progress. But we should learnt to talk about it in the proper way, with the proper terminology."⁸⁰ Doubling down on what he believed to be the importance for North American critics to work out the structuralist complexities of formalism, de Man suggested that this task—instead of Ehrmann's overarching aim for the conference to bridge the gap between different cultures and different disciplines—ought to hold literary critics' exclusive attention. Regardless of its content or origin, the next endeavor for advanced literary critic in the U.S., according to de Man, should be to cultivate formalist modes of reading that grappled with its structuralist suppositions.

⁸⁰ Ibid., 8.

The shared sense of mission among participants at the 1965 Yale Colloquium to develop a proper terminology for a model of literary criticism received the official sanctioning with the collective publication of participants' papers in the December 1966 issue of *MLN*. These papers were also published alongside an essay by Miller, who had, six months after the Colloquium, been asked by Erhmann to comment on the conference's achievements and summarize what he believed united or divided the participants' presentations.⁸¹ In his *MLN* essay, "The Antitheses of Criticism: Reflections on the Yale Colloquium," Miller's meditation on the significance of the New Haven conference projected a hopeful and confident atmosphere for the rejuvenation of North American literary criticism by orienting readers to the ways conference papers moved beyond formalism while at the same remaining within this theory of reading's limits. Miller for example framed the Yale Colloquium—a rather cloistered event—as a sign that North American literary criticism was opening itself up to developments from abroad, undergoing a profound transformation that did not have solely native roots.⁸² He argued that the Yale "[c]olloquium testifies to an important shift of focus in American literary criticism." While a "few years ago," he continued, "one would have expected an American colloquium on literary criticism to be a dialogue between our native formalism and other approaches, American scholars may come to develop new forms of criticism growing out of American culture as well as out of the encounter with European thought."⁸³ For Miller, advanced methods of North American literary criticism were not being developed via confrontations between homegrown New Critical or other methods of interpretation, but by way of encounters with European thought, "the best recent continental

⁸¹ Jacques Erhmann to J. Hillis Miller, March 20, Box 26, Folder 21 Colloquium on Literary Criticism Yale University 1964-1965, The J. Hillis Miller Papers, The Critical Theory Archive, The University of California-Irvine.

⁸² Miller, "The Antithesis of Criticism: Reflections on the Yale Colloquium," *MLN* 81:5 (1966): 557-571.

⁸³ *Ibid.*, 557.

criticism.” Innovative North American criticism—nurtured on North American soil and out of North American culture—was cultivated partly by the absorption of European thought.

But Miller did not simply emphasize that North American literary critics at Ehrmann’s conference fused American and European criticism. He also stressed that the innovative literary criticism being developed and practiced by the participants of the 1965 Yale Colloquium signaled a new vision for future American literary scholarship. Indirectly answering de Man’s appeal for his fellow literary critics to address the structuralist elements of formalist criticism, Miller observed that contributors to the New Haven conference were actually doing just that, as they were interested in “‘structure,’” which “may be used in opposition to the idea of ‘form’ to suggest a many-layered system of meanings made up of dynamic interchanges rather than being fixed in a static pattern.⁸⁴ Miller’s “structure” embodied the tension between formalism and structuralism. While the 1966 Johns Hopkins conference, remembered for the introduction of French thought, particularly structuralism, to America, had yet to occur, one should note here that not only on the “ground floor” of Yale but also in the pages of a prestigious American journal, “structure” was beginning to merge with “form” as the tool of a jointly recognized mission to interrogate the limits of formalist models of reading.

Miller’s *MLN* overview of Ehrmann’s conference also anticipated elements of what was later known as the deconstructive stance and style of reading. He for instance suggested that the “colloquium brought a number of the most important...[t]ens[i]ons between antithetical approaches” to the “critical enterprise...out into the open.”⁸⁵ From Miller’s perspective, the secluded environment of the New Haven conference exposed once-isolated literary critics to opposing methods of interpretation. These antithetical approaches included: “the nominalization

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 562.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 558.

of literature versus its periodization;...temporal form versus spatial form; hermeneutic, polyrhythmic, dialectical, or discontinuous time versus linear, organic, ‘natural,’ or continuous time; structure versus form...”⁸⁶ However, Miller’s “antitheses” were not “dialectical.” There was no way, he argued, “to proceed from their opposition to some grand synthesis transcending the problems of criticism in a comprehensive system—with all the critics clasping hands and singing a final chorus.”⁸⁷ Miller stressed that there was no method one could use to transform the aforementioned antitheses into a synthesis that that would arrive at a complete method for understanding prose and poetry—there was no approach that could reach, though Miller did not use this word, “presence,” an immediate relation to truth. Rather, for Miller, “[o]urs is a fallen world, and literary critics, like everyone else, must endure the *malconfort* of a pull between opposing tendencies of the spirit.”

Resonating with Hartman’s position throughout the 1965 Yale Colloquium that the critic cannot go “beyond formalism” unless they leap into the divine, Miller maintained in his *MLN* essay that the critic always failed to achieve presence and was thus bound to negotiate the tensions generated by antithetical approaches.⁸⁸ Ultimately, Miller’s *MLN* essay suggested that North American literary critics were on the cusp of a radical change, of developing and implementing a shared vision that emerged from interrogations of the confines of older formalist models of reading prose and poetry such as the New Critical model. At the modest and intimate 1965 Yale Colloquium on Literary Criticism, de Man, Miller, Hartman and their colleagues discussed and embraced this task of innovation and modernization.

⁸⁶ Ibid.

⁸⁷ Ibid., 559.

⁸⁸ Ibid., 568. Hartman sent Miller his “Beyond Formalism” paper in 1966. Geoffrey Hartman to J. Hillis Miller, April 16, 1965, Box 26, Folder 21 Colloquium on Literary Criticism Yale University 1964-1965, The J. Hillis Miller Papers, The Critical Theory Archive, The University of California-Irvine. In his correspondence, Hartman wrote: “I hope you weren’t too displeased with our Conference, and will be inspired to write something for the Proceedings. I quite enjoyed meeting Girard and Donato for the first time and under these circumstances. If I do not see you again, all best wishes for your European trip.”

The 1966 Johns Hopkins Symposium

In October of 1966, almost a year and a half after the March 1965 Yale Colloquium, the Johns Hopkins Symposium, “The Languages of Criticism and the Sciences of Man,” was held. The Baltimore conference was the second foundational event in the history of deconstruction in America—one inspired by Erhmann’s conference, albeit a far grander and a much better remembered affair. The two conferences differed not only in their funding—the Hopkins Symposium received the support of a major, private foundation, while the Yale Colloquium was supported internally, though Ehrmann had certainly applied for outside funding. The two conferences differed also in size—fewer than twenty participated in New Haven, while over one hundred, including mention auditors, gathered at Hopkins.⁸⁹ Despite these differences, however, the direct and indirect exchanges between Ur-Yale School members at the JHU conference also cultivated a shared vision to renovate widely-accepted formalist methods of reading and led to articulating principles that later became known as deconstructive reading techniques. Historians have mentioned these exchanges only in passing, and have overlooked how and why the JHU Symposium shaped and was shaped by various institutional and intellectual North American contexts, specifically the ways the JHU Symposium intervened into the profession of contemporary North American literary criticism, an intervention that paved the way for the success of deconstructive stances and styles of reading during the U.S. in the 1970s.⁹⁰

⁸⁹ Erhmann wrote to participants: “Unfortunately we did not succeed in getting the support of a foundation, at least for the time being.” Erhmann to participants, April 8, 1965, Box 26, Folder 21 Colloquium on Literary Criticism Yale University 1964-1965, The J. Hillis Miller Papers, The Critical Theory Archive, The University of California-Irvine 1.

⁹⁰ These oversights have occurred in recent histories of U.S. intellectual and culture of the late-twentieth century. Mark Greif has observed that Erhmann’s 1966 special double issue on structuralism in *Yale French Studies* “had its rival claim to priority...in canvassing and trying to assimilate the new thought [of French structuralism] for the American academic scene” though the publication “met with the most complete indifference” among U.S. literary scholars. See Mark Greif, *The Age of the Crisis of Man: Thought and Fiction in America, 1933-1973* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2015), 306. In his work on how so-called French Theory transformed the intellectual life of the U.S., intellectual historian François Cusset argued that “[i]t was precisely in order to make up for this lag

That the 1966 Hopkins conference should be understood as the unofficial successor to Ehrmann's 1965 Yale Colloquium can be appreciated if one observes how and why the Baltimore conference amplified the nascent sense of a joint mission among Ur-Yale School members and their colleagues. While at Erhmann's conference the project to reinterpret formalism remained within the boundaries of literary studies, the Hopkins Symposium's organizers hoped to apply literary critics' interrogations of formalism to the styles of interpretation employed by North American humanists in general. In fact, the second part of the Symposium's title—"The Languages of Criticism and the *Sciences of Man*"—reflected the Baltimore conference organizers' ambitious goal to translate innovative literary methods of reading to scholarship in U.S. humanities departments, or, the "sciences of man," as these departments were labeled in institutions of high education across the Atlantic, in France.

This grand mission was made clear in Hopkins Dean G. Heberton Evans Jr.'s October 1965 proposal, "A Structuralist Institute at The Johns Hopkins University," in which Evans pitched Richard Macksey and Eugenio Donato's conference idea to the Ford Foundation, a private institution with the express goal to advance human welfare. In his proposal, Evans suggested that one of the Hopkins conference's central aims would be to provide "American humanists" with the opportunity to recognize the "individual achievements" and the "general character of structuralist theory and practice."⁹¹ With the help of the Ford Foundation, Evans proposed, a Hopkins conference could create "a vital bridge between European and American humanists through an international symposium devoted to structuralist theory and practice, a

[between France and America] that two professors at Johns Hopkins, Richard Macksey and Eugenio Donato, had the idea of organizing a conference that would bring together some of the major French figures working at the time." See Cusset, 29. Not only was Erhmann's *YFS* double issue on structuralism published in 1966 and thus after the Yale conference, but it was precisely Ehrmann's 1965 Yale Colloquium—its planning, its execution, its development of a joint vision for literary studies—and not publications on the North American side of the North Atlantic that inspired the organizers of the JHU Symposium.

⁹¹ G. Heberton Evans Jr., "A Structural Institute at the Johns Hopkins University," Box 30, Folder 33, The J. Hillis Miller Papers, The Critical Theory Archive, The University of California-Irvine, 9.

series of continuing seminars evolving from the topics of the symposium, and the publication of the participants' papers and discussions."⁹² In accordance with how historians have remembered the Baltimore Symposium, the JHU Symposium did indeed come to serve as a conduit through which American and European—primarily French—humanists exchanged and cross-pollinated ideas, resources, and people. Though the Yale Colloquium certainly functioned as a point of entry for structuralism into the North American academy, the Baltimore conference made the importation of structuralism one of its *raison d'être*.

However, the Baltimore conference—the unofficial heir to the 1965 Yale Colloquium—had another reason for being: the further development of the Ur-Yale School and their colleagues' shared mission to interrogate and refine formalist methods of reading prose and poetry. In addition to erecting a bridge between European and American humanists, the JHU Symposium extended the type of literary scholarship discussed at Ehrmann's conference, but was also different from the Yale Colloquium in that the Hopkins conference programmatically aimed to modernize formalist reading techniques. The Baltimore conference in fact gave this goal pride of place: the first part of the JHU Symposium's title—"The Languages of Criticism"—specifically indicated the Baltimore conference organizers' aim to advance innovative literary methods (which then would be applied to humanities disciplines). And in his Ford Foundation proposal, Evans' list of the 81 members of the suggested structuralist institute at Hopkins contained an overwhelmingly disproportionate number of literary scholars—more than three quarters of the institute's members were professors of languages and literature at North American universities (and, just like at Ehrmann's conference, all were white men).

Evans even devoted a large section in his Ford proposal—titled "Hopkins and the Development of American Criticism"—to persuade readers that the JHU was uniquely situated

⁹² Ibid., 2.

to facilitate the improvement of a homegrown criticism.⁹³ He observed: “No one is more aware of the fragmentation and decadence of the New Criticism in the United States than its inheritors. Anxiously alert of new promises of salvation, they [uncritically] welcome any critical voice which promises a way through the formalist impasse.” Because “native critics” lacked the means to assess the “methodological and axiological implications of the new prophets” of literary criticism, Evans suggested, “native critics” failed to provide compelling critiques.⁹⁴ Because American critics had a dearth of critical methods, Evans claimed, they were unable to incisively critique, to properly rebel against, either the New Critics’ formalist methods or Frye’s theory of literature. Of course, if a vanguard of North American literary critics such as those that Evans spoke of in his Ford proposal existed, then they had already informally gathered at Erhmann’s 1965 conference in New Haven. De Man and Hartman (and Miller in his own Pouletian way) had already begun to look for a way through the formalist deadlock and believed, as they contended on the floor of the Hall of Graduate Studies, this way was within formalism itself. This Ur-Yale School was therefore a bit ahead of the curve, the very curve being endorsed by Evans in his proposal for a Structuralist Institute at Hopkins.

Regardless, Evans effectively portrayed North American literary critics in particular and North American humanists in general as eager to modernize their methods of interpretation, and as able to achieve this renovation by way of tools appropriated from structuralist thought. Evans’ persuasiveness helped him win Hopkins a Ford Foundation grant to the tune of \$34,000—adjusted for inflation, this amount was approximately \$255,000 today. And in October 1966,

⁹³ Ibid., 13-15.

⁹⁴ Ibid., 4. Evans provided the example of Northrop Frye, whose work, which viewed literature through the lens of a series of archetypes, was more or less considered the only viable alternative in the 1950s and early 1960s to the New Critical mode of reading prose and poetry. See Northrop Frye, *Fearful Symmetry: A Study of William Blake* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1947); Frye, *Anatomy of Criticism: Four Essays* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1957).

JHU, under the auspices of its Humanities Center, held its four-day international symposium, “The Languages of Criticism and the Sciences of Man.” It is significant for understanding the history of deconstruction in the U.S. that the Baltimore Symposium organizers’ second proposed aim—the advancement of North American literary criticism beyond the formalist impasse—has become in historical accounts of the event overshadowed by the conference organizers’ first goal—the importation of structuralism.⁹⁵ What has been left out of all of these accounts are the ways that the Hopkins Symposium cultivated the shared vision of Ur-Yale School members and their colleagues to renovate formalist stances and styles of reading. This vision had begun in 1965 at Ehrmann’s conference in New Haven and received a sort of solidification after the Baltimore conference, which helped make literary criticism into the locus for the most advanced and most confident theories of interpretation in North American Humanities departments during the last three decades of the twentieth-century.

This neglect of the JHU Symposium’s second proposed goal has—ironically enough—been facilitated by the justifiably frequent referencing of a today world famous presentation at the 1966 Baltimore conference: that of French philosopher Jacques Derrida’s. Derrida was 36 (the same age as Hartman at Ehrmann’s New Haven Colloquium) at the time of the Hopkins Symposium. Born in El Biar, a suburb of Algiers, the capital of Algeria and the city where he lived until he was nineteen, Derrida had studied philosophy at the *École Normale Supérieure*,

⁹⁵ For instance, the JHU Symposium, the historian Mark Greif wrote, “brought over critics and revisionists of the major originators of Structuralism, just at the very moment the Americans present were trying to find out just what Structuralism was an original whole.” See Greif, 307. Along similar lines, historian François Cusset has asserted that the Baltimore conference complicated the arrival of French theory in the American university, as it offered both structuralism and post-structuralism at the same time to North American academics, a double offering that confused even those most informed of recent intellectual developments on the *La Rive Gauche*. See Cusset, 29-32. Added still on top of all this reception history is the fact Richard Macksey and Eugenio Donato, the co-organizers of the Hopkins conference, themselves contributed to the elision of their second proposed aim when they added the subtitle, “The Structuralist Controversy,” to the second edition of the published conference papers, the original title having simply been that of the conference itself: “The Languages of Criticism and the Sciences of Man.” Eugenio Donato and Richard Macksey, “Preface,” in eds. Donato and Macksey, *The Structuralist Controversy: Languages of Criticism and the Sciences of Man* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University, 1970).

France's chief training ground for future philosophers. His early writings focused on the work of German philosopher Edmund Husserl (1859-1938), who established the school of phenomenology, a style of inquiry meant to be scientific and which centered on the belief that reality is comprised of objects and events—or, “phenomena”—as they are perceived or understood in human consciousness.

In his work of the 1950s and early 1960s, namely his 1954 dissertation for his *diplôme d'études supérieures*, and his 1962 Edmund Husserl's *Origin of Geometry: An Introduction*, which contained Derrida's translation of Husserl's famous essay, Derrida elaborated a technique of reading that assessed the limits of phenomenology.⁹⁶ This reading technique—as Derrida explained in a 1972 interview—showed that any limiting, such as Husserl's, of the meaning of phenomena to what is present-to-self was always predicated on “the problematic of writing.” Now, what Derrida meant by the “problematic of writing” was that the meaning of phenomena was bound, not to something like the immediacy of the voice, to what could be made present-to-self, but to “the irreducible structure of ‘deferral’ in its relationships to consciousness, presence, science, history and the history of science, the disappearance or delay of the origin, etc.”⁹⁷ Despite Husserl's valiant efforts to limit the meanings of phenomena to what was present to his consciousness, Derrida argued, these meanings were bound to and indeed constituted by what was absent. The reading technique Derrida developed by way of Husserl's work to expose such absent meanings within what is deemed present-to-consciousness—later called “deconstruction” by his friends and colleagues, his epigones and enemies, and the academic and non-academic press—echoed de Man's and Hartman's investigations in their papers at the 1965 Yale

⁹⁶ Derrida, *Edmund Husserl's Origin of Geometry: An Introduction*, trans. with Preface and Afterword John P. Leavey (Lincoln, NB: University of Nebraska Press, 1989).

⁹⁷ Derrida, “Implications,” interview by Henri Ronse,” in *Positions*, trans. Alan Bass (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982), 5.

Colloquium about how formalist interpretive methods, such as New Critic Cleanth Brooks and de Man's Lukács, when pressed to their conceptual limits, produced inescapable paradoxes.

Regardless of the similarities between the young French philosopher's work and two North American literary critics, Derrida's 1966 Hopkins paper, which he "claimed to have written in ten days," took conference-goers entirely by surprise.⁹⁸ Conference-goers' surprise was at least partly due to the fact that, as evidenced by the JHU Symposium program, Derrida was largely unknown in the U.S. and he was treated as such—Derrida presented his paper on Friday, October 21st, the last day of the conference, a day that attendees usually reserve for return travel to their respective home institutions. His paper also lacked a title; its official one merely being: "(To be announced)."⁹⁹ Who indeed could have known what to expect, especially in such a seemingly unfavorable context? And yet, though Derrida was virtually unknown, his lecture, which he eventually titled, "The Concepts of 'Structure' and 'Play' in the Discourse of the Human Sciences," and delivered in English (a language he learned during his 1956-1957 student exchange year at Harvard University, undertaken to study microfilm of Husserl's unpublished lectures), became remembered as the outstanding event of the Symposium.

Fifty years later, in 2015, Hillis Miller, Derrida's future Yale School colleague, would even go so far as to suggest that Derrida's talk had been the "inaugural 'deconstructive' lecture in the United States."¹⁰⁰ But Derrida's Hopkins paper was more than this. It established a number of interpretive techniques that became canonical for a style of interpretation—later known as deconstructive literary criticism—employed by North American literary critics eager to revise

⁹⁸ Cusset, 30.

⁹⁹ Derrida, "Les Langages Critiques et Les Sciences De L'Homme," Box 26, Folder 23, The J. Hillis Miller Papers, The Critical Theory Archive, The University of California-Irvine, 2.

¹⁰⁰ Derrida, "Les Concepts of 'Structure' and 'Play' in the Discourse of the Human Sciences," Box 49, Folder 41 Derrida 1971-2001, The J. Hillis Miller Papers, The Critical Theory Archive, The University of California-Irvine, 1; Miller, "Tales out of (the Yale) School," 10.

their quasi-New Critical reading practices. And, by doing so, Derrida's talk aligned his work, admittedly informally, with the general mission to modernize North American literary studies that was advanced at Ehrmann's 1965 Yale Colloquium. What's more, Derrida's Hopkins paper also became a focal point around which Ur-Yale School members refined their own proto-deconstructive project to interrogate formalist methods of reading prose and poetry.

There was certainly no lack of drama to Derrida's lecture on the Baltimore campus. The young philosopher seized the occasion to apply his deconstructive reading technique to the writings of French anthropologist and ethnologist Claude Lévi-Strauss, who was known, at least on the European Continent, as the King of Structuralism—Evans' Ford Foundation proposal described Lévi-Strauss as “something of a culture hero...[a]mong European intellectuals,” while the JHU Symposium's organizers proudly stated in the conference's published proceedings that Lévi-Strauss had been consulted about the conference, but in the end decided not to attend.¹⁰¹ Derrida, in other words, challenged one of the central figures in French contemporary intellectual life, while North American academics—outside of a handful in Anthropology departments—had never even heard of him. Despite the rapid recontextualization of Lévi-Strauss' structuralism in Baltimore, Derrida's performance nevertheless dazzled his audience.

In 2012, David Carroll, a graduate student in French and Italian literature who had only just started at Hopkins, reflected: “We were just discovering what structuralism was, and when he came and started to call into question what we were starting to learn, I immediately realized that it was an event.”¹⁰² If the JHU Symposium organizers yearned to (1) provide a homegrown solution to the methodological malaise felt by North American literary critics and (2) translate innovative French interpretive methods to scholarship in U.S. humanities department, then, in

¹⁰¹ Evans, 1; Macksey and Dontao, “Preface,” xi.

¹⁰² Interview with David Carroll, cited in Benoît Peeters, *Derrida: A Biography*, trans. Andrew Brown (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2013), 167.

many ways, there could have been no better paper to assist these goals than Derrida's—his Hopkins talk mapped onto the still-emerging shared project of North American literary critics to question the limits of formalist reading techniques and did so by way of elaborating the internal limitations of structuralism.

Simultaneously puzzling—Derrida's topic was obscure to his American audience—and revelatory—his deconstructive reading technique echoed the work of some of the most advanced North American literary critics, such as de Man, Hartman, and Miller, Derrida's dethronement of the absent King of Structuralism in Baltimore had two, interconnected levels. The first level posited a historical event; the second level explored how this event was legible in Lévi-Strauss' writings. Regarding the first plane of his analysis, Derrida asked his Hopkins listeners to consider that “[p]erhaps something has occurred in the history of the concept of structure that could be called an ‘event.’”¹⁰³ Derrida's event, which came “about when the structurality of structure had to begin to be thought,” was the “*rupture*” or “disruption” of the “centered structure.” Building off of his early critiques of Edmund Husserl's reduction of the meaning of phenomena to what is present-to-consciousness, Derrida argued that the rupture of the centered structure revealed “that the center could not be thought in the form of a present-being, that the center had no natural site, that it was not a fixed locus but a function, a sort of nonlocus in which an infinite number of sign-substitutions came into play.”¹⁰⁴ For Derrida, the disruption of metaphysics, of the fixed structure, led to an awareness, to an adoption and implementation of deconstructive reading practices, which revealed that a central presence had never been itself, “but always already been exiled from itself into its own substitute.”¹⁰⁵

¹⁰³ Derrida, “Structure, Sign, and Play in the Discourse of the Human Sciences,” in *Writing and Difference*, trans. Alan Bass (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1978), 278.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, 279, 280.

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*

However indirectly, Derrida's claim in Baltimore that the rupture of the centered structure was neither a local nor an abstract event must have resonated with his audience, especially when placed within the context of the evolving shared mission of North American literary critics to question the limits of formalist reading techniques. In a sense, Derrida's "French" disruption of structure was vaguely similar to "American" critiques of formalism, specifically those espoused at Erhmann's 1965 conference. Derrida for example pressed his Hopkins listeners to recognize that, whether one wanted to or not, presence—what was deemed present-to-self or present-to-consciousness—was in fact always already dislocated, and, as such, all knowledge claims rested on temporary stopgap measures. While his self-avowed precursors—Nietzsche, Freud, and Heidegger—recognized the displacement of metaphysics in their own "radical formulation[s]," Derrida urged his audience to consider that this displacement of metaphysics, of which the centered structure was but one instance, was "no doubt part of the totality of an era, our own."¹⁰⁶ The realization of the precarious situation of knowledge—according to Derrida, that is—changed everything.

Thus, in Derrida's historical schema, the formalist impasse about which so many vanguard North American literary critics contemplated was but one—native—instance of the larger disruption of presence. Or, as Derrida dramatically declared: "This was the moment when language invaded the universal problematic, the moment when, in the absence of a center or origin, everything became discourse...that is to say, a system in which the central signified, the original or transcendental signified, is never absolute present outside a system of differences."¹⁰⁷ Derrida's listeners in Baltimore, such as the aforementioned David Carroll, must have recognized Derrida's historic claims. These claims were historic in a twofold sense; in the first

¹⁰⁶ Ibid., 280.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid.

instance, they were historic because of the later influence of Derrida's lecture in the United States and elsewhere; in the second instance, they were historic because of Derrida's claim that the absence invades all attempts to reduce the meaning of phenomena to what is present-to-self.

Following his historic reflections on the event that ruptured every centered structure, Derrida transitioned to the second level of his deconstructive reading, exploring how the disruption of the fixed structure was legible in the writings of Lévi-Strauss. Derrida focused on Lévi-Strauss' musings on the opposition between nature and culture, musings, according to Derrida, "which borrows from a heritage the resources necessary for the deconstruction of that heritage itself."¹⁰⁸ For Derrida, metaphysics compelled Lévi-Strauss to accept and reject the binary between nature and culture. To demonstrate his thesis, Derrida gathered evidence from Lévi-Strauss' use of the "incest prohibition" in his first book, *The Elementary Structures of Kinship*. Though published in France in 1949, Lévi-Strauss' text was not translated into English until 1970—four years after Derrida's Baltimore paper, a fact that likely caused confusion for his listeners, because Derrida tried to prove his thesis with evidence drawn from a text, Lévi-Strauss' book, that his audience had almost certainly not read.¹⁰⁹

Lévi-Strauss, Derrida argued, freely admitted that the "incest prohibition" made a "scandal" out of this "nature/culture opposition," because it "simultaneously seems to require the predicates of nature and of culture."¹¹⁰ Lévi-Strauss revealed that the incest prohibition was universal and in this sense one could call it natural while it was at the same time also a prohibition and in this sense a "system of norms and interdicts that one could call it culture." By

¹⁰⁸ Ibid., 282.

¹⁰⁹ Claude Lévi-Strauss, *The Elementary Structures of Kinship*, trans. James Harle Bell, John Richard von Sturmer, and Rodney Needham (Boston: Beacon Press, 1969). In *The Elementary Structures of Kinship*, Derrida noted, Lévi-Strauss "begins from this axiom of definition: that which is universal and spontaneous, and not dependent on any particular culture or on any determinate norm, belongs to nature," while "that which depends upon a system of norms regulating society and therefore is capable of varying from one social structure to another, belongs to culture."

¹¹⁰ Derrida, "Structure, Sign, and Play in the Discourse of the Human Sciences," 283.

acknowledging that the incest prohibition was natural and cultural, Lévi-Strauss erased or questioned the very system of concepts that he used to sanction the difference between nature and culture. Or, put in terms familiar to contemporary North American literary critics such as de Man or Hartman, Derrida's Lévi-Strauss pushed his formalism to its conceptual limits, producing an inescapable paradox in his work, that the incest prohibition was both biological and artificial at the same time.

Derrida concluded his Baltimore paper by returning to the first level of his deconstructive reading, that is, pivoting back to his observations about the event that ruptured belief in the ability to limit the meanings of phenomena to what is present-to-self. Derrida argued that Lévi-Strauss' reconceptualization of the nature/culture opposition as a scandal "brought to light" that there were "two interpretations of interpretation, of structure, of sign, of play." The first interpretation of interpretation aimed to "decipher... a truth or an origin which escapes play and the order of the sign." This first reading technique aimed to decode an invariable nature that halted the incessant disruption of limits imposed on the meanings of phenomena. In contrast, Derrida argued, the second interpretation of interpretation—second reading technique, that is—embraced the rupture of structure, of these limits, affirming "play and [trying] to pass beyond... [the dream] of full presence, the reassuring foundation, the origin and the end of play."¹¹¹ And, according to Derrida, and once again in terms that would have seemed recognizable to North American literary critics who attempted to overcome the formalist impasse, one could not "choose" between "these two interpretations of interpretation." Rather, for Derrida, one is stuck with both interpretative techniques, the gloomy deciphering of a truth or origin and the joyful acceptance of the absence of such a truth or origin. In fact, instead of breaking free from a structure or system of meaning, Derrida argued, the more pressing issue to

¹¹¹ Ibid., 292.

consider was that, as more individuals employ these two modes of interpretation, a question was beginning to be collectively formulated. This shared question, Derrida suggested, solicited “the as yet unnamable,” a “species of the nonspecies, in the formless, mute, infant, and terrifying form of monstrosity.”¹¹²

In 2004, Professor of English Lee Morrison argued that Derrida’s Hopkins paper ought to be understood in terms of the relationship between Paris and Algeria, that the context of the Algerian Civil War of the late 1950s and early 1960 shaped Derrida’s Baltimore talk, with Algerian liberation serving as the “rupture” Derrida spoke about and the “cryptic, tentative tone of Derrida’s essay” being “symptomatic” of the tension he felt between his Parisian and Algerian homes, his French and African identities.¹¹³ Whether one accepts Morrison’s psychoanalytic reading of Derrida’s paper or not, it is perhaps more important to consider the North American intellectual and cultural context of Derrida’s Baltimore talk and the 1966 Symposium more generally, specifically the unrest of the late-1960s, which included massive demonstrations against the Viet Nam war, the growth of the counterculture, and black power and student movements. Situated on the boundary between two opposed styles of reading the meaning of phenomena, Derrida seemed to uncannily and somewhat prophetically tap into growing tensions that cut across North American society and culture as well as the coming winds of change. “There’s something happening here, But what it is ain’t exactly clear,” the American band Buffalo Springfield would sing three months after Derrida delivered his paper. At the JHU Symposium, Derrida may have not identified his “something,” but he seemed to have put his finger on something—he seemed to register the anxious mood that heralded its emergence.

¹¹² Ibid., 293.

¹¹³ Lee Morrissey, “‘Nostalgia’ and ‘Structure, Sign and Play in the Discourse of the Human Sciences,’” in *Historicizing Theory*, 100.

Though he did not give this monstrosity a name, and while he balanced on the precipice of the scandal between his two modes of reading, Derrida went about dazzling his Hopkins listeners, and he did so in a twofold sense: he talk was at once impressive and arresting. “[W]hat took place in the course of this conference,” Cusset has observed, “was not immediately clear to the auditors and the American participants.”¹¹⁴ Even if not immediately clear, as Richard Macksey, an organizer of the Hopkins Symposium, noted in his concluding remarks, “the sessions” allowed participants “to not only investigate some of the roots of the contemporary critical ‘crisis’ . . . but to consider radical reappraisals of our assumptions as that advanced by M. Derrida on this final day.”¹¹⁵ Certainly, the JHU Symposium more or less achieved organizers’ two goals. The first was to provide humanists with opportunities to fuse contemporary American and European thought, while the second was to develop and extend the type of scholarship done at Ehrmann’s 1965 Yale Colloquium. Though it might have been unclear just what had happened for American participants of the Baltimore conference, the reassessments triggered by Derrida’s critical reading of structuralism sent tremors and then aftershocks through the profession of North American literary criticism.¹¹⁶

In due time, Derrida’s paper, along with a series of translations of his texts in the 1970s, became part of a template for what became known as American deconstructive literary criticism. But, as will be explored in subsequent chapters, Derrida’s two-tiered historical argument was obscured during the reception of his work in the U.S. While accounts have noted that after Derrida’s intervention in Baltimore, U.S. academics tried to control the historical tremors and aftershocks caused by his paper by recruiting it for formalist techniques of reading, these accounts have overlooked that his argument intersected with the then still-developing shared

¹¹⁴ Cusset, 29.

¹¹⁵ Macksey, “Concluding Remarks,” in *The Structuralist Controversy*, 320.

¹¹⁶ Martin 193, xxiv.

modernizing vision—first articulated by a small cohort at Erhmann’s New Haven conference. American deconstructive reading did not become “simply another version of New Criticism’s traditional methodology of close reading,” nor it did do so overnight. Rather, American deconstructive reading emerged partly from a community of like-minded scholars working towards goals similar to Derrida’s. Though these scholars—a cohort that included de Man and Hartman—were trained as literary scholars rather than professional philosophers, their collective mission was further advanced with JHU Symposium in general, and specifically by Derrida’s talk.¹¹⁷

Take the example of J. Hillis Miller, who had just only a year earlier in the *MLN* wrote—in an excited and hopeful tone—about the slowly-solidifying joint project undertaken at the 1965 Yale Colloquium to fuse “structure” and “form” in order to renovate stale New Critical formalist techniques of reading prose and poetry. Significantly, like David Carroll, Miller would come to later view Derrida’s Hopkins talk as much a personal as an intellectual event, even though news of Derrida’s paper reached Miller second-hand. Miller, as earlier noted, was at the time Professor of English, specialist in Victorian literature at Johns Hopkins, and enthusiast of the phenomenological methods employed by Georges Poulet and those critics of “Geneva School of Criticism” to the study of prose and poetry. Though a professor at Hopkins, and a professor intensely interested in methodological developments in Europe and America to boot, Miller missed Derrida’s lecture. Miller would later explain that his absence was due to his responsibility to teach a class at the hour (10:30am Friday) when Derrida delivered his talk. But it is also possible that Miller, like his American colleagues, simply did not know Derrida or his work and thus did not expect much from attending his talk.

¹¹⁷ Jeffrey Nealon, “The Discipline of Deconstruction,” *PLMA* 107 (1992): 1266-1268.

Regardless of the reasons for Miller's absence at Derrida's lecture, Poulet, Miller's JHU colleague, met up with Miller on campus after Derrida's lecture. In 2015, Miller recalled that Poulet told him, "with great generosity, that Derrida's paper was against everything in his (Poulet's) current work (which had to do with space as against Derrida's temporality, Geneva School consciousness as against Derrida's attention to language), but that it was without doubt the most important paper in the conference."¹¹⁸ Nevertheless, what came out of Miller and Poulet's exchange was a shared sense of the important methodological implications for formalist stances and styles of reading prose and poetry coiled in Derrida's paper. What came out of Miller and Poulet's exchanges was Miller's life-long interest in adopting aspects of Derrida's deconstructive interpretive techniques for his own readings of literary texts. By the mid-1970s, Miller's interest in Derrida's project had helped develop a friendship and sense of a professional fellowship at Yale University. All of this can be traced to Miller's second-hand news of the paper presentation of French philosopher Derrida at the 1966 Hopkins Symposium, a presentation that offered some of the most advanced tools with which to update North American literary critics' reading techniques.

Miller was not the only future Yale School member who began to seriously grapple with the implications of Derrida's reading practice after the Hopkins lecture—Cornell University Professor of Comparative Literature Paul de Man did as well. However, unlike Miller, who had yet to hear of Derrida or read his writings, de Man had encountered Derrida approximately six months prior to the Baltimore event, at least *par l'intermédiaire du texte*. In the spring of 1966, de Man frequently and enthusiastically talked about Derrida's work to his graduate students and colleagues at Cornell. In 2014, Neil Hertz, one of de Man's colleagues in Ithaca recalled: "It was [while] reading current and back issues of Georges Bataille's journal *Critique* [an influential

¹¹⁸ Miller, "Tales out of (the Yale) School," 10.

publication in French intellectual life] in the spring of 1966, that I came across someone named ‘Derrida’ ostensibly reviewing a book by the Geneva critic [of consciousness] Jean Rousset. I recall stopping by de Man’s office to tell him about it and learning that he’d already seen it.”¹¹⁹ Indeed, de Man was a regular reader of Bataille’s *Critique*; it was the journal where de Man published, as a graduate student at Harvard, his first postwar essay, his 1953 “Montaigne et la transcendance.”¹²⁰

Fast forward thirteen years to the spring of 1966—de Man likely found Derrida’s 1966 Rousset essay so exciting because Derrida was, from de Man’s perspective, offering a powerful critique of the formalist assumptions of structuralism. Derrida’s reading of Rousset was thus, from de Man’s perspective, a kind of complement to the solution that de Man himself sought at Ehrmann’s 1965 New Haven conference about how to discuss the structuralist assumptions of formalism and the limits of formalist reading methods, such as the New Critical, more generally. In his Rousset review, for example, Derrida argued that structuralist literary criticism was a search for form without force, a kind of formalism without form, a formalist method that would ultimately arrest the meaning of a text and provide a pure structure or system of meaning. But, according to Derrida, structuralist literary critics’ attempts to separate form from force, method from historicity, merely performed a violence to a text. The structuralist literary critic’s aim to freeze a text’s meaning—to limit the meaning of the text to what is present-to-mind, present-to-consciousness—required the expulsion of force from the text, and, as such, required the expulsion of an integral part of the text.

¹¹⁹ Derrida, “Form and Signification,” in *Writing and Difference*, 1-26; Neil Hertz, interview by Greg Jones-Katz, June 15, 2014.

¹²⁰ De Man, “‘Montaigne and Transcendence,’ review of Hugo Friedrich’s *Montaigne*,” *Critique* 79 (1953): 1011-1022; translated by Richard Howard into English, as “Montaigne and Transcendence,” in *Critical Writings, 1953-1978* (Minneapolis: The University of Minnesota Press, 1989), 3-11, 4.

In fact, for Derrida, the structuralist literary critic, as soon as they attempted to eject force and center a structure, became captivated by a violent formalism: “Form fascinates when one no longer has the force to understand force from within itself.”¹²¹ Rather than being captivated by the illusion of having isolated a form without force, however, Derrida argued, in terms similar to what became known in the North American academy during the 1970s as his “classic” deconstructive reading technique, that the literary critic ought to “break” with “the system of metaphysical opposition” between form and force and produce “a force of dislocation that spreads itself through the entire structure, fissuring it in every direction and thoroughly delimiting it.”¹²² Derrida in other words suggested that the structuralist literary critic, instead of trying to expel force from form, should accept the constant interplay and interactions between form and force, structure and history. De Man would have agreed with the interpretive tactics and the content of Derrida’s deconstructive reading, as Derrida’s questioning of Rousset intersected with de Man’s interrogation of the limits of the formalist assumptions of structuralism.

Though de Man did not at the time of Derrida’s Rousset use the word “deconstruction” to describe his reading technique, he was, like Derrida, working on the issue of the rhetoricity, of writing. And, approximately six months after reading Derrida’s *Critique* essay, while having breakfast with Derrida at the 1966 Hopkins Symposium, de Man realized that he and Derrida were both writing about Rousseau’s “l’Essai sur l’origine des langues” (1781), which, though “a text then little read,” seemed to offer a kind of critique of the formalist assumptions of structuralism, albeit *avant la lettre*.¹²³ De Man and Derrida struck up a rapport, and after the

¹²¹ Derrida, “Force and Signification,” 4.

¹²² *Ibid.*, 19.

¹²³ Derrida, *Memoires for Paul de Man*, trans. Cecile Lindsay, Jonathan Culler, Eduardo Cadava, and Peggy Kamuf, (New York, N.Y.: Columbia University Press, 1986), 127.

October conference, de Man, as concerned with Romantic writers as with the critics who wrote about them and “anxious to define” his approach in distinction to Derrida’s, composed a reading of Derrida’s recently published reading of Rousseau’s essay—a centerpiece to the second half of his 1967 tour de force *Of Grammatology*. De Man’s interpretation of Derrida’s interpretation of Rousseau became, “The Rhetoric of Blindness: Jacques Derrida’s Reading of Rousseau,” a central chapter in his 1971 volume *Blindness and Insight: Essays in the Rhetoric of Contemporary Criticism*, a volume that would secure his tenure at Yale University and about which one critic prophetically claimed would “disturb our habits of sleepy reading and careless speaking about literature.”¹²⁴

For his part, Derrida considered de Man’s reading “a model of scrupulous generosity, unlike many of the occasionally violent critiques to which his work gave rise.”¹²⁵ More than either serving as a professional marker or a sympathetic reading of Derrida’s work, however, de Man’s essay came to occupy a crucial place in the reception history of Derrida’s work in the U.S. during the 1970s and 1980s. Looking back on de Man’s essay in 1984, a year after de Man’s death, Derrida himself recognized that “the entire...history of de Manian deconstruction passes through Rousseau.”¹²⁶ Indeed, because de Man was, for all intents and purposes, the informal leader of the Yale School of Deconstruction, de Man’s reading of Derrida’s reading of Rousseau set interpretive patterns and established interpretive principles that were central to what became known as deconstructive reading on the North American literary-critical scene.

¹²⁴ Robert Martin Adams, *The Hudson Review* 24 (1972): 687. See de Man, *Blindness and Insight: Essays in the Rhetoric of Contemporary Criticism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1971).

¹²⁵ Peeters, 557 f. 41

¹²⁶ Derrida, *Memoires*, 127. See de Man, “The Rhetoric of Blindness: Jacques Derrida’s Reading of Rousseau,” in *Blindness and Insight*, 102-141.

1968/1969 La Jolla/Bellagio Conference

The third foundational event in the history of what became deconstructive literary criticism in the United States during the last three decades of the twentieth-century was the joint La Jolla/Bellagio conference titled “Languages of the Humanistic Studies/The Use of Theory in Humanistic Studies.” This transatlantic conference—the first session held in May 1968 and attended by Hartman and Miller; the second conducted in September 1969 and attended by de Man, Derrida, Hartman, and Miller—was sponsored by *Daedalus*, the Journal of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences, and supported, like the 1966 JHU Symposium, by a grant from the Ford Foundation.¹²⁷ Significantly, the La Jolla/Bellagio conference built off of intellectual work done at the 1965 New Haven Colloquium and the 1966 Baltimore conference, continuing to nurture a shared vision to renovate still-accepted formalist methods of reading and apply literary critics’ reformulations of formalism to the types of interpretive methods employed by North American humanists more broadly. The La Jolla/Bellagio conference advanced this shared vision for literary studies and the humanities with an added twist. In their La Jolla memorandums, organizers Roy Harvey Pearce and Morton W. Bloomfield implored attendees, who would come not only from departments of language and literature, but also history, psychology, and religion, to consider “the role of theory in the method and study of humanities.”¹²⁸

Participants at the 1965 Yale Colloquium had begun to grapple with new methods of reading prose and poetry, and the birth of “theory” in the U.S. has been traced to the 1966

¹²⁷ Stephen R. Graubard to J. Hillis Miller, “Conference on the Languages of The Humanistic Studies,” May 4-7, 1968, La Jolla, California, Box 25, Folder 25, The J. Hillis Miller Papers, The Critical Theory Archive, The University of California-Irvine, 1.

¹²⁸ Morton W. Bloomfield, “Thoughts on the Topic (Languages of the Humanistic Studies), Conference on the Languages of The Humanistic Studies,” May 4-7, 1968, La Jolla, California, Box 26, Folder 24 Conference on the Languages of Humanistic Study 1968, J. Hillis Miller Papers, Irvine, California, 1.

Hopkins Symposium. However, it was in fact at the 1968/1969 La Jolla/Bellagio conference that “theory” was made the central, explicit topic of conversation. In addition, Pearce and Bloomfield proposed that attendees deliberate how “[t]he methods of the humanities are ‘languages’ insofar as they are systems of rules with their vocabularies which unite man with himself, with society and with the world just as the linguistic system united meaning and sound.”¹²⁹ La Jolla/Bellagio participants were charged with reflecting not only in the abstract on the function of “theory” in the humanities, but also on how “theory” was like a linguistic system in which mind, society, and world hung together. Elements of what came to be known as “theory” and the “linguistic turn” in the American academy are therefore traceable to the La Jolla/Bellagio conference.¹³⁰ What’s more is that the La Jolla/Bellagio conference developed the shared vision among literary critics, informally articulated at the 1965 Yale Colloquium and advanced at the 1966 JHU Symposium, to modernize formalist reading techniques. At the La Jolla/Bellagio conference, this project helped thrust the literary critic and theorist to the position of the most advanced of humanist scholars in the late twentieth-century North American academy.

Pearce and Bloomfield’s La Jolla/Bellagio conference also served as a vehicle for future Hermeneutical Mafia members to articulate and develop their stances and styles of reading prose and poetry, stances and styles that slowly converged on what later became known as deconstructive literary criticism.¹³¹ After the Hopkins Symposium, Miller increasingly modeled his interpretive technique on Derrida—he in particular appropriated Derrida’s astonishing level of reflexivity in his writings. He also wanted to proselytize Derrida’s innovative reading practices to participants. Miller for example hoped that La Jolla attendees would marry their

¹²⁹ Ibid., 1, 3.

¹³⁰ Graubard, “Preface to the Issue ‘Theory in Humanistic Studies,’” *Daedalus* 99 (1970): vii.

¹³¹ Miller, “Memorandum,” Conference on the Languages of The Humanistic Studies, May 4-7, 1968, La Jolla, California, Box 26, Folder 24, J. Hill Miller Papers, Irvine, California, 1.

“discussion and clarification of [a] theory” for the humanities with certain “issues raised by...putting in question...the subjectivism of the Geneva critics,” the subject of de Man, Hartman’s, and Miller’s attention at Ehrmann’s 1965 Colloquium on Literary Criticism.¹³² As earlier explored, Miller had a rather personal interest in questioning his commitment to Poulet and the Geneva Critics.

After the JHU Symposium, Miller began to undergo an intellectual conversion of sorts, moving from his allegiance to Poulet to Derrida, the former having, as noted, enthusiastically and generously introduced the work of the latter to Miller. By the spring of 1968, one year before the La Jolla conference, Derrida, as part of the Ford Foundation’s grant for the Structuralist Institute, began giving seminars at Hopkins, which Miller eagerly and attentively attended. Derrida’s first seminar merely amplified the one Derrida gave in 1968 at the *École normale supérieure* on “Plato’s pharmacy”—Derrida’s first lecture remained within the scope of the discipline of philosophy.¹³³ But in later Hopkins seminars, Derrida struck out in new directions, mixing genres, fields of inquiry, and disciplines. In his lectures, for example, Derrida performed readings of French poet Charles Baudelaire (1821-1867), French poet, essayist, dramatist, and actor Antonin Artaud (1896-1948), German philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche (1844-1900), and especially, French symbolist poet Stéphane Mallarmé (1842-1898), eventually sketching out what later became “The double session,” which juxtaposed Mallarmé’s prose poem, “Mimique,” and Plato’s “Phaedrus,” under the rubric of double mimesis. Though only approximately twenty auditors attended—while Derrida gave his Hopkins paper in English, he taught his seminars in French due to his lack of fluency—those who did were “bowled over.”¹³⁴ In 2012, Miller recalled: “When I turned up at the first session, I was afraid my French might not be good

¹³² *Ibid.*, 4.

¹³³ Peeters, 201.

¹³⁴ *Ibid.*

enough for me to follow. But I was straightaway fascinated by the power of Derrida's discourse. It was extraordinary, I'd never heard anything like it. Very quickly, we became friends, and got into the habit of having lunch together once a week. To begin with, each of us spoke his own language, then he started to talk to me in English."¹³⁵

Though having spent the last decade of his career proselytizing the Geneva School to North American literary scholars or appropriating their reaching techniques for his own work, Miller found himself, rather clearly, at a crossroads between Pouletian criticism and Derridean deconstruction. Miller also viewed the La Jolla conference as an opportunity to advance the shared project, begun two years earlier in New Haven, to interrogate and refine formalist reading techniques. He for example called on his fellow La Jolla participants to adopt Derrida's advanced reading procedures to question "certain oppositions" in "the statement by the directors of the conference."¹³⁶ Pearce and Bloomfield, Miller wrote, wanted "to make interpretation an objective discipline, a 'science of man,'" yet at the same time acknowledged that "this [goal] may be incompatible with the fact that the quality of subjective life is a main subject matter of the arts."¹³⁷ La Jolla participants, Miller suggested, should not accept Pearce and Bloomfield's oppositions. They should "deconstruct" them, and reveal the stresses and strains at work in such opposite goals. Miller even offered his own work as an example of this opposition, specifically the opposition between "the 'subjectivism' of the so-called Geneva school...and the 'objectivism' of Parisian structuralism."¹³⁸ Miller's personal impasse overlapped with what he saw as the opportunity for La Jolla participants to question the oppositions implicit in Pearce and Bloomfield's memorandum. For Miller, the La Jolla conference was an opportunity for him and

¹³⁵ Quoted in Peeters, 201; see also Jones-Katz, "Constantly Contingent," *Derrida Today* 8 (2015): 45.

¹³⁶ Miller, "Memorandum," 1.

¹³⁷ *Ibid.*, 1.

¹³⁸ *Ibid.*, 4.

participants, by “deconstructing” the oppositions in Pearce and Bloomfield’s proposal, to modernize literary criticism.

But for Miller, the La Jolla conference was even more momentous, as it was coming at a key moment, not simply in the profession of North American literary criticism, but, more broadly, in the history of interpretation. And Miller all but labeled this shift a deconstructive turn. For example, Miller suggested that the La Jolla participants should face this “turning in the tradition of interpretation” because the problems they encounter while taking this turn “might become central to a discussion of theory in the humanistic studies.”¹³⁹ And, Miller wrote, La Jolla attendees could best embrace this shift in the tradition of interpretation if they embraced deconstructive reading techniques. Rather programmatically, Miller then listed in his memorandum the principles of such reading practices, each a conditional statement, each, if incorporated into one’s stance and style of interpretation, helped one take the deconstructive. Miller wrote:

(1) If consciousness *is* language, or has the structure of language..., then the study of literature cannot be the search for the mind behind the language, but must be an interpretation of mind and words in their coincidence; (2) If language (and therefore literature) is fundamentally temporal rather than spatial,...then a necessity in the establishment of sound theoretical foundations of humanistic studies is the working out of languages of interpretation which will do justice to the temporality of literature; (3) If human history, including the history of art and literature, is falsified by the linear, spatialized models of historical development which almost irresistibly contaminate our thinking, then it is necessary to develop theoretical models of history which will catch its authentic temporality; (4) Finally, perhaps Jacques Derrida is right in “La structure, le signe et le jeu dans le discours des sciences humaines”...to see as one characteristic of the current situation in the humanities the rejection of older models of structure. In place of the notion of a society or a poem as a system based on a transcendent center or source of order, Derrida would put the image of a structure which is self-generating and therefore centerless. If this new image of structure is accepted, one task in the

¹³⁹ Ibid.

establishment of sound theory is the replacement of our heritage of Platonism or metaphysical thinking by new ways of thinking in terms of immanence.¹⁴⁰

For Miller, La Jolla conference participants should adopt and adapt their interpretive models for the reading of prose and poetry to these four principles. If this transformation in reading techniques occurred, according to Miller, then La Jolla participants would be able to reimagine the theoretical grounds of humanistic studies, a goal that Pearce and Bloomfield expressly charged conference-goers with achieving. Though at the time of his La Jolla memorandum still in the middle of his conversion, Miller himself would shortly come to fully embrace these deconstructive principles, keeping them “at hand” during the 1970s and beyond.

It is also significant to observe that Miller—contrary to his (and his future Yale colleagues’) reputation in the 1970s and 1980s—never divorced his and others’ consideration of deconstructive principles from contemporary events in the U.S. Though, as historian François Cusset notes, it would take a “second chance,” one taken after “the massive upheavals that rocked the American university” of the late-1960s, for many attendees of the 1966 Baltimore conference to recognize the political and social ramifications of deconstruction, Miller explicitly drew parallels between what he saw as a watershed moment in the tradition of interpretation—and thus the history humanistic study more generally—and what he called the “unprecedented crisis within American society today.”¹⁴¹ He followed his list in his memorandum of deconstructive principles with a reflection on his context: “I am writing this memorandum on the morning after the first serious episode of civil disorder in Baltimore during the fifteen years I

¹⁴⁰ Ibid., 5, 6, 7.

¹⁴¹ Cusset, 32; Miller, “Memorandum,” 8.

have lived here, with riot, murder, arson, looting on a large scale and the city at this moment under a kind of martial law.”¹⁴²

Miller composed his La Jolla memorandum after the start of the Baltimore riots of 1968, which began the day after Martin Luther King Jr.’s murder on April 4 and lasted until April 14 that same year. Miller argued in his memorandum that the study of the humanities ought to be relevant to this “experience,” though “neither by setting up humanistic study on the model of research in the sciences nor by assuming that the arts are the repository of ‘humanistic values.’” In other words, Miller’s humanistic study should be connected to this Baltimore and American experience, but not by conforming to Pearce and Bloomfield’s recommendations.

Instead, Miller suggested that humanistic study could be relevant to this experience by using deconstructive reading practices to understand not just the latent meanings of prose and poetry, but the very savagery and irrationality that rested within us all. “[T]he relevance of the humanities,” Miller writes, “will be discovered only by ways of interpretation which will get us back inside what the great works have always been saying.” Miller specifically pointed to how “[l]iterature from Homer through Shakespeare to Yeats, Virginia Woolf, and William Golding has...confronted the violence and irrationality within human nature.”¹⁴³ Miller’s masterpieces of the Western canon squarely face humanity’s viciousness and absurdity. “Confronting them, [literature] has given man the power to see that the violence is within us and not outside, not somewhere else in someone else. One thinks today...of [Irish poet W.B.] Yeats’ brilliant dramatization, in ‘Nineteen Hundred and Nineteen,’ of the gradual internalization of violence until: We who seven years ago/Talked of honour and of truth,/Shriek with pleasure if we show/The weasel’s twist, the weasel’s tooth.” Yeats’ 1921 poem, which contemplated the failure

¹⁴² Miller, “Memorandum,” 7-8.

¹⁴³ *Ibid.*, 8.

of public life in all its variations during the Irish Civil War, vividly expressed how violence can, as Miller implied it had in North America, be consolidated and embedded in one's own beliefs, attitudes, and values.

For Miller in his La Jolla memorandum, deconstructive reading techniques, particularly when applied to prose and poetry, could expose repressed meanings, thereby denaturalizing the internalization of violence. For Miller, if humanistic study involved the meditation on deconstructive principles, then it would be again pertinent to Americans' current experiences. Thus, there was, from the perspective of Miller, who became a central figure of the Yale School and in the history of deconstruction in the United States, a clear connection between the political and social unrest and the seemingly abstract theoretical formulations occurring among the most innovative literary critics and scholars in the humanities.

Unlike Miller, Hartman's 1968 La Jolla memorandum, in keeping with the Wordsworthian hope that literature could unite what modernity had torn asunder, namely word and world, expressed his hope that La Jolla participants could answer organizers' appeal to consider the role of theory in the methods and study of humanities in a positive, constructive fashion.¹⁴⁴ Despite this difference between Hartman and Miller, however, Hartman, like Miller, considered the La Jolla conference to come at an opportune historical moment. According to Hartman, Pearce and Bloomfield's request was in fact a sign of the times, "[t]he main question of recent years." The La Jolla conference, Hartman continued, "by a kind of repetition-compulsion, raised [the question] again...to what extent humanistic studies can consider themselves a science—a social science or a 'science humaine.'"¹⁴⁵ For Hartman, the La Jolla conference thus

¹⁴⁴ Hartman, "Memorandum," Conference on the Languages of The Humanistic Studies, May 4-7, 1968, La Jolla, California, Box 26, Folder 24 Conference on the Languages of Humanistic Study 1968, J. Hillis Miller Papers, Irvine, California, 1.

¹⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 1.

extended the shared vision, first developed at the 1965 Yale Colloquium, to interrogate the limits of formalism, the status of the scientificity of literary study, and to apply these revised formalist methods of reading to humanist scholarship more broadly. Though, while in New Haven, Hartman's thoughts had yet to be solidified into a program, in his La Jolla memorandum, he seemed to have worked out precisely why he believed the issue as to what degree the humanistic studies could deem themselves science had become so recently so pressing for humanists. Unlike the "economists, chemists and even philosophers," Hartman argued, humanists "do not seem to have found an authentic way of 'reasoning together.'" Though the "'absence of sound and developed theoretical foundations'," as Pearce and Bloomfield put it, was not necessarily problematic, Hartman claimed that this lack of foundation could be disastrous, because it led to "partisanship and cultural in-fighting."¹⁴⁶ Hartman's humanists—in distinction to Miller's—should face La Jolla organizers' appeal by confronting how they could "reason together."¹⁴⁷

But Hartman did not simply propose that La Jolla participants consider Pearce and Bloomfield's request in general humanistic terms. The conference organizers' appeal for a comprehensive consideration of theory and method, Hartman suggested, was especially relevant to the study of literature. Not only, Hartman argued, do "we...lack sustained thought about the humanities as such, but our theory of literature...remains underdeveloped."¹⁴⁸ "Despite all the advanced work in literary criticism done over the past two decades," Hartman claimed, "many of us"—many North American literary scholars, that is—"feel that the limits of practical criticism have been reached."¹⁴⁹ However, Hartman argued, literary scholars believed that the frontiers have been reached only because they have overlooked the "one 'science' that binds together not

¹⁴⁶ Ibid., 2.

¹⁴⁷ Ibid.

¹⁴⁸ Ibid., 3.

¹⁴⁹ Ibid., 2.

just the humanities but all intellectual activity: the science of interpretation.” For Hartman, vanguard literary critics in the U.S., though they felt that the limits of applied criticism had been reached, for example in the formalism that Hartman discussed three years prior to the La Jolla conference at Erhmann’s New Haven conference, must confront “theory” in order to move beyond the stale frontiers of literary criticism.

This confrontation of “theory,” according to Hartman, could lead North American literary critics to formulate a “science of interpretation” that was applicable not only to reading of prose and poetry but more broadly to the study of humanities. In this way, Hartman believed his fellow La Jolla participants, if they faced the challenge of “theory,” would be able reason together. Rather surprisingly, though admittedly informally, Hartman thus seemed to view the joint mission instigated in New Haven and taken up at Hopkins (though he was not there) as potentially culminating at La Jolla.¹⁵⁰

And yet, despite his hope that La Jolla participants—particularly literary critics—would answer Pearce and Bloomfield’s call, Hartman expressed misgivings about this possibility. He concluded his memorandum with remarks on the unwillingness of Anglo-American literary critics to move from applied criticism to the articulation of a “science of interpretation.” Hartman argued that the “present reluctance for sustained theoretical speculation” of “Anglo-American criticism” was because the discipline “does not like to think of itself as having a conscious policy vis-à-vis literature or spiritual affairs. It even refuses to think of itself as unified: and where there is no common policy there can be hardly be a conscious policy.”¹⁵¹ For Hartman, Anglo-American critics considered themselves too disorganized, too heterogeneous, to have a common

¹⁵⁰ Ibid., 3.

¹⁵¹ Ibid., 5.

program. And without a common program, Hartman's critics claimed, there could barely be a common understanding of and community based around the interpretation of prose and poetry.

Nevertheless, Hartman, ever the Wordsworthian, remained hopeful, suggesting that Anglo-American critics' unwillingness to theorize and insistence on the practical results of their methods of interpretation was at best "a form of 'organized innocence'" analogous to the insistence on a "free market"—like "Marxists" routinely point out, "no such thing exists."¹⁵² At worst, the unselfconsciousness of Anglo-American critics produced a "fostered illusion," one that overlooked that there is indeed an "Idea of Criticism in America, as there is (more consciously) in France, and as there was in England when Mathew Arnold became aware of all the political and practical pressures on the modern mind, yet insisted on the disinterestedness of the highest art and of minds genuinely in contact with it."¹⁵³ Thus, Hartman thought Anglo-America literary critics ought to seize the opportunity presented by the La Jolla conference to recognize the implicit program that governed their techniques of reading and renovate this policy into a more rigorous "science of interpretation." While Hartman remained rather parochial at the 1965 Yale Colloquium in that he cared most about advancing the interpretive techniques of North American literary criticism, in April 1968 he was more broad-minded at La Jolla as he recognized the opportunity the conference offered for not only literary critics but humanists as well. Hartman's notion of a "science of interpretation" was to be an overarching interpretive method applicable to the reading of literature, history, and other humanities disciplines. Like Miller in his La Jolla memorandum, Hartman therefore hoped he and his conference participants would provide a blueprint that extended from stanzas of poetry to the interpretation of world history. Nevertheless, what precisely the Anglo-American "Idea of Criticism" was or how it

¹⁵² Ibid.

¹⁵³ Ibid., 5-6.

should be practiced—not to mention what a “science of interpretation” would be—remained unanswered questions.

Though the 1968 La Jolla conference saw the participation of two future Yale School members—Miller and Hartman—the 1969 Bellagio meeting doubled this number—not only Miller and Hartman, but also de Man and Derrida attended. And they each used the conference as an occasion to solidify their sense of a shared mission, a strengthening that occurred through informal and formal institutional affiliations. De Man, Miller, and Derrida for instance had grown closer since their first exchanges in Baltimore. As explored above, Miller was thunderstruck by Derrida’s Hopkins 1968 seminars. Miller not only went to Derrida’s Baltimore seminars, but de Man’s as well, as de Man had moved from Cornell University to Hopkins in 1967 (at this point Hartman was at Yale; Miller and de Man were at Hopkins).

Having already been impressed and influenced by de Man at Erhmann’s 1965 Yale Colloquium, Miller was once again captivated, this time by de Man’s 1969 lecture “The Rhetoric of Temporality.”¹⁵⁴ De Man’s presentation was part of a yearlong (1968-1969) lecture series sponsored by the Humanities Center at the JHU. However, the 1968-1969 lecture sequence differed from previous years’ in that it was dedicated to a topic—“Interpretation”—rather than a single historical period, such as history, art, or literature.¹⁵⁵ De Man was one of seven “theorist-practitioners” who presented papers over the course of the year; the majority—four of the seven—were literary critics. This overrepresentation at the Hopkins Humanities Center indicates, over the course of a half-decade, beginning at the 1965 Yale Colloquium and continuing at the 1966 Hopkins Symposium, the 1968 La Jolla conference, and at JHU, the shift in North American humanities departments to an emphasis on literary theory and method, to the problem

¹⁵⁴ De Man, “The Rhetoric of Temporality,” in *Blindness and Insight*, 187-228.

¹⁵⁵ Charles S. Singleton, “Preface,” in *Interpretation: Theory and Practice* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins Press, 1969), v.

of language as mediation. This emphasis helped to elevate the literary critic to the position of the most innovative of humanities scholars.

Miller likely found de Man's 1969 Hopkins lecture, "The Rhetoric of Temporality," so enthralling because it dealt with methodological issues that Miller had begun to tackle at the 1968 La Jolla conference. Consuming two sessions, "The Rhetoric of Temporality," beyond being influential on Miller's developing deconstructive reading techniques, also became "one of [de Man's] most highly regarded essays."¹⁵⁶ De Man devoted the first session of his Baltimore lecture to a historicization of allegory, recounting how European Romanticism's construction of a symbolist aesthetic—an aesthetic that wished to transcend the material world of the visible and the logical in order to reach the world of pure thought—paralleled the development of a new rhetorical mode that de Man, following German philosopher and cultural critic Walter Benjamin, labeled "allegory." De Man devoted the second session of "The Rhetoric of Temporality"—not to the further historical exploration of allegory—but to the issue of irony, arguing that during the nineteenth-century, a period, as he explored in his first Baltimore session, in which many valorized a subjectivist, symbolist aesthetic, led to the forgetting of the fundamental irony of allegory. In his lecture, de Man attempted to recover a lost rhetorical form—a technique of reading, that is—in which temporality (irony) continuously dislocated spatialization (allegory). Or, put differently, de Man excavated the irony of allegory. Taken together, de Man's two sessions, which later formed the two sections of his published essay—later included in his 1971 volume *Blindness and Insight* contradicted each other. The first session was a preliminary historicizing of allegory that de Man subsequently put into contact with a theoretical writing that

¹⁵⁶ Paul A. Bové, "Paul de Man. Some Notes on the Critic's Search for Authority against Consensus," *Criticism* Spring 32 (1990): 149. Miller, "Preface," in *Theory Now and Then* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1991), ix.

subverted the first part's very historicism.¹⁵⁷ When situated in the context of de Man's lifelong project to use his writing as an inward-directed instrument of self-transformation, it would seem as though de Man used his Baltimore lecture to self-deconstruct.

De Man's heady theorization—or ironization—of the rhetorical figure of allegory occurred slightly before he and Miller began to organize their 1969 Bellagio meeting. Though Ur-Yale School members had met unsystematically over the past several years, Miller and de Man orchestrated this future juncture, and did so with the explicit aim to solidify professional relations and establish camaraderie. Their efforts resulted in yet another gathering, one that advanced their informal shared mission to develop stances and styles of deconstructive reading that came to characterize those of the Yale School during the mid-1970s. In a June 2, 1969 letter to Derrida, Miller thanked him for “agree[ing] to come to the Daedalus [sponsored] conference.”¹⁵⁸ Teasingly referencing Derrida's deconstructive principle that the meaning of phenomena cannot be reduced to what is present-to-self but always already disseminates and never returns to an origin or beginning, Miller then expressed his “hope that the conference will not be so much a ‘dispersion’ for you as an occasion for a gathering of forces.”¹⁵⁹ Miller hoped that the Bellagio conference would increase the importance of the conference for each and every attendee. “[Y]our presence,” Miller wrote to Derrida, “will make it more likely to be valuable, but the chance to talk to you and Paul, and to give others there a chance to meet you will be a thing of great personal value to me.”¹⁶⁰

Along similar lines, Miller, in a letter to de Man that Miller also wrote on June 2, explained that Derrida's attendance “will contribute greatly to the affair, and [that] I am most

¹⁵⁷ Bové, 150.

¹⁵⁸ Peeters, 202; Miller to Derrida, June 2, 1969, Box 3, Folder 42 Derrida 1971-2001, The J. Hillis Miller Papers, The Critical Theory Archive, The University of California-Irvine, 1.

¹⁵⁹ Ibid.

¹⁶⁰ Ibid., 1.

anxious to see him again and to have a chance to introduce him to some others who will there (our friend Geoffrey, for example!).¹⁶¹ This gathering of forces at Bellagio did not of course come out of nowhere but reinforced a previous sense of solidarity between Ur-Yale School members. An index of the regard that Miller, de Man, and Derrida had for one another was Miller's claim in his June 2 letter to de Man that Miller wanted de Man to know that "[o]ne of the things that he [Miller, that is] held out as a temptation to Jacques was the fact that you [de Man, that is] would be at the conference." That de Man would join Miller and Hartman at the Bellagio meeting was enough of a lure for Derrida to seriously consider going. Miller even fretted that if de Man did not attend the conference then Derrida might get the wrong idea about Miller. After a discussion of potential complications in de Man's itinerary, Miller wrote: "I'd be much disappointed if after all you will miss the conference, or at any rate should be let to know so he [Derrida] won't think I've got him there on false pretenses. (He mentions in his letter how he looks forward to seeing you there.)"¹⁶² Approximately a year later, de Man, reflecting on his reading of Derrida's reading of Rousseau in "The Rhetoric of Blindness: Jacques Derrida's Reading of Rousseau," wrote to Derrida that "[t]here is no disagreement between us about the basis of your thinking but a certain divergence in a way of nuancing and situating Rousseau."¹⁶³ Clearly, the 1969 Bellagio meeting contributed to de Man and Derrida's camaraderie, and, from de Man's perspective—at least his perspective in the late 1960s—de Man and Derrida's styles of reading were closely aligned.

The second aspect of Miller, de Man, and Derrida's spring 1969 correspondence revolved around the explicit ways that Miller had abandoned his attachment to Pouletian criticism in order

¹⁶¹ Miller to de Man, June 2, 1969, Box 3, Folder 42 Derrida 1971-2001, The J. Hillis Miller Papers, The Critical Theory Archive, The University of California-Irvine, 1.

¹⁶² *Ibid.*, 1.

¹⁶³ Quoted in Derrida, *Memoires for Paul de Man*, 130.

to adapted his reading practice to de Manian and Derridean principles of interpretation. In his June 2 letter to Derrida, Miller reported that he “finished...the draft of [his] additional essay on Poulet.” Here, Miller referenced what became his 1970 piece “Geneva or Paris: The Recent Work of Georges Poulet”—Miller wrote the first half of this essay in 1963 while still under the influence of Poulet; he completed the second half after the 1969 Bellagio conference.¹⁶⁴ Over the six years of writing his article, Miller moved from the phenomenological criticism of Poulet to the critique of phenomenological criticism offered by Derrida. Miller’s June 2 letter to de Man recounted Miller’s current aim to accede to deconstructive principles not only under Derrida’s, but also de Man’s guidance. Miller explained to de Man that his new essay—the second half of “Geneva or Paris”—drew inspiration from not only Derrida’s work, but also de Man’s “splendid essay on GP [Georges Poulet].”¹⁶⁵ De Man’s essay, Miller clarified, “led [him] to set the Derrida kind of thing overtly against Poulet.”

Miller continued: “Having suggested that Derrida and his ilk put in question all those forms of presence which are fundamental in Poulet’s work and in the literary tradition he relives in his essays (presence of consciousness to itself in the Cogito, presence of one consciousness to another in his ‘critique d’identification,’ presence as the fundamental category of a spatial version of time).”¹⁶⁶ Inspired by de Man as much as Derrida, Miller thus explicitly pitted Derrida against Poulet, using Derrida’s deconstructive reading technique to show where and when “deconstruction” happened in Poulet’s essays. In his letter to Derrida, Miller wrote that Poulet, “without at all having intended the ‘deconstruction of metaphysics,’...encountered the same problematic which motivates your thinking, the impossibility, for example, of finding a solid

¹⁶⁴ Miller, “Geneva or Paris: The Recent Work of Georges Poulet,” *University of Toronto Quarterly* 39 (1970): 212-228.

¹⁶⁵ Miller to de Man, June 2, 1.

¹⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 1.

base, or beginning, or origin (in spite of Poulet's search for a 'point de départ')."¹⁶⁷ And, thinking ahead to Derrida's reception in the U.S., Miller hoped that his essay, which was "a juxtaposition of [Derrida's] position and Poulet's," would "at least...call the attention of some American readers to your work."¹⁶⁸ Not only did the Ur-Yale School therefore use the Bellagio conference as an occasion to orient their work towards one another, but some of its members—Miller, in this case—also slowly developed ambitious plans for the dissemination of deconstructive reading practices in the North American Academy.

What began at the 1965 Yale Colloquium as an informal shared mission among future Hermeneutical Mafia and their colleagues to interrogate the limits of formalism had, by the late 1960s, become an increasingly clear and solid program. And yet, it is important to recognize that the core group that advanced this now almost half-decade old joint vision had nested within themselves another faction: three Ur-Yale School members. Though Miller—primarily because he fretted over Derrida's opinion—was concerned whether de Man would make it to Bellagio, de Man did indeed attend the conference, as did Hartman. Like at Ehrmann's conference, like at the Hopkins Symposium, the Ur-Yale School members and approximately twenty other scholars comprised the vanguard of the literary studies and the humanities more generally in the North American academy. They were also all white men (with, again, the exception of Jewish-Americans, a group that included Cornell University Professor of English Literature M.H. Abrams and Yale University Professor of English and Comparative Literature Geoffrey Hartman), and in this regard reflected the barriers that minorities and women faced when trying to enter elite graduate programs and then of course the difficulties they encountered when searching for an academic position in a market that had little place for women or minority

¹⁶⁷ Miller to Jacques Derrida, June 2, 1969, 1.

¹⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 1.

literary scholars. These barriers and this attitude would begin to come down during the 1970s. But at this point, in the late 1960s, if one wanted to identify the most advanced and influential critics in the U.S., then one would likely come to identify the above-pictured group, which gathered from September 4-7 1969 at the Grand Hotel Villa Serbelloni—one of the oldest and most elegant hotels on Lake Como in Italy, a popular retreat for aristocrats and wealthy individuals since Roman times.

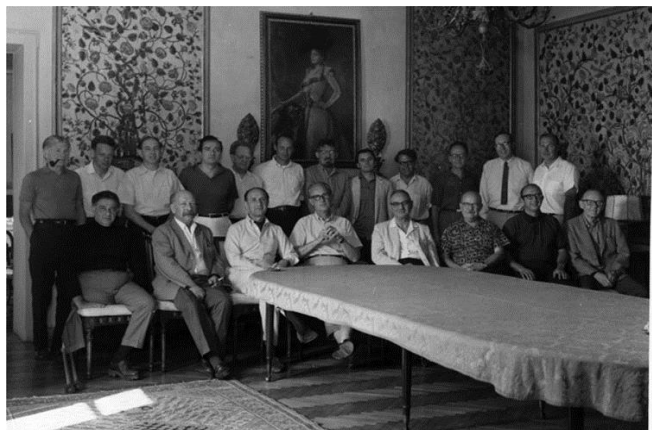


Figure 1.5 This photo was taken at the September 1969 conference in the Villa Serbelloni at Bellagio, Italy. Standing, left to right, is the core group of luminaries—all white men—who comprised the most advanced literary critics and humanists in the North American academy in the late-1960s and early-1970s: M. H. Abrams, Paul de Man, Geoffrey Hartman, Eugene Genovese, Northrop Frye, E.D. Hirsch, Clifford Geertz, Richard Hoggart, Asa Briggs, Walter J. Ong, J. Hillis Miller, and Nils Enkvist. Seated, left to right: Frank Manuel, Eric Weil, Stephen Graubard, Roy Harvey Pearce, Morton W. Bloomfield, Talcott Parson, Geno Ballotti, and Henry Nash Smith. Source: Victoria University Library, Toronto.

The three-day meeting—the second session of the *Daedalus* sponsored and Ford Foundation supported La Jolla/Bellagio conference—was similar to the 1965 Yale Colloquium because it occurred in a cloistered setting. But rather than being held in a University’s Hall of Graduate Studies such as the one at the end of Wall Street in New Haven, the meeting occurred in the plush conference rooms of the Grand Hotel Villa Serbelloni—with each of the hotel’s

chambers overlooking the blue waters and green mountains that soar above Lake Como. It was an elegant setting; stepping outside the conference, one encountered the luxurious Mediterranean and subtropical plants of the hotel’s Italian-style gardens.

Another difference from Ehrmann’s conference, and a difference that reflected the growing sense of shared mission to transform formalist reading practices and apply these innovative interpretive techniques to humanistic inquiries, the papers delivered at the Bellagio

conference, some of which emerged from the 1968 La Jolla session memoranda, focused on a larger theme: “The Use of Theory in Humanistic Studies.” And, though developing out of Pearce and Bloomfield’s memoranda, Bellagio participants’ papers registered the social, cultural, and intellectual upheavals in the North American academy during the late 1960s. Stephen R. Graubard—editor of the 1970 *Daedalus* volume that published Bellagio attendees’ papers—reflected that participants addressed “the intellectual fissures that have become apparent in our time” and explored what defined and will define “the boundaries *and* the possibilities of study in the humanities.”¹⁶⁹ However, despite this broad theme, Graubard also recognized that attendees’ presentations often “concentrate[d] on one kind of document—the literary text,” even if these investigations of the literary text “lead us into more general inquiry into the nature of art and the role of the artist.”¹⁷⁰

While Pearce and Bloomfield hoped La Jolla/Bellagio participants would consider “the role of theory in the method and study of humanities,” which Bellagio participants did, attendees focused, likely because the majority of them were literary scholars and worked in departments of literature and language, on “the literary text” so as to arrive at a definition of art and the responsibility of the artist.¹⁷¹ Once again, a gathering of North American literary scholars and critics—as was the case at the 1965 Yale Colloquium, the 1966 Hopkins Structuralist Symposium, and the 1968 La Jolla meeting—became the locus of a shared vision to develop advanced modes of reading that were applicable to North American Humanities departments. And, in terms of the history of deconstruction in America, that Miller introduced Derrida to Hartman and Derrida to a virtual who’s who of the North American literary-critical scene at

¹⁶⁹ Graubard, “Preface to the Issue ‘Theory in Humanistic Studies,’” v.

¹⁷⁰ Graubard, vi.

¹⁷¹ Bloomfield, 1.

Bellagio was in itself significant because it helps situate Derrida's deconstructive techniques of reading patterns among the most esteemed literary scholars in the U.S.

A full examination of Miller's, Hartman's, and de Man's Bellagio papers cannot be undertaken here, though it suffices to note that the 1969 Bellagio conference served as a stage upon which Hartman, de Man, and Miller articulated principles for reading prose and poetry that became identified with "classic" deconstructive reading practices of the 1970s. For example, it is clear from the paper that Hartman delivered at the Grand Hotel Villa Serbelloni—titled "Toward Literary History"—that he spent the past year contemplating his response to Pearce and Bloomfield's 1968 La Jolla memorandum. Like he implored Anglo-American literary scholars in his own memorandum, Hartman confronted "theory" and formulated a "science of interpretation," albeit a science specifically applicable to the study of literature. Hartman's Bellagio essay thus capped a half-decade of attempts to grapple with the issue of literary formalism—like in his 1965 "Beyond Formalism" conference paper, where he contemplated the structuralist assumptions of formalism—and literary history—like his 1966 "Structuralism: The Anglo-American Adventure" essay, where he explored a modified structuralism that included rather than expelled temporality.

Developing these earlier insights, Hartman's Bellagio "science of interpretation" combined knowledge of the form of art and the form of art's historical consciousness. "My argument," Hartman stated, "will be that literary history is necessary less for the sake of intellect than for the sake of literature—it is our historical duty because it alone can provide today a sorely needed defense of art."¹⁷² However, Hartman also insisted, the use of literary history, if it "is to provide a new defense of art," "must now defend the artist against himself as well as against his other detractors. It must help to restore faith in two things: in form, and in his

¹⁷² Hartman, "Toward Literary History," *Daedalus* 99 (1970): 356.

historical vocation.”¹⁷³ With these positions, Hartman, in his 1969 Bellagio paper, distinctly moved in the direction of a theory of reading that was a formalism that incorporated rather expelled the temporality of form or structure. And, by doing, Hartman, however indirectly, aligned his work with Derrida’s deconstructions of the metaphysics of presence, above all Derrida’s work after his 1966 Hopkins paper.

Critics often pointed to de Man’s 1969 essay “Literary History and Literary Modernity”—originally de Man’s contribution to the Bellagio conference—as a summation of his anti-historical, anti-empirical reading method that upheld literature as the ultimate arbiter of knowledge about literature.¹⁷⁴ Yet, if read in the context of a self-authenticating project, de Man’s essay, like all his public writings, was an inner-directed exercising of his self, a spiritual practice that, in this example, and likely because of its subject, catalogued the pain that de Man’s unrepresented past exerted on his conversion efforts. In “Literary Modernity,” de Man argued that the writer of literature “is...the historian *and* the agent of his own language.”¹⁷⁵ Nonetheless, de Man claimed, the writer’s identity as historian and instrument of his own, innovative language produces a contradiction, and one neither “serene” nor “detached.” Unlike de Man’s historian, who calmly uses his pen to realize his modernity because his “language and the events that the language denotes are clearly distinct entities,” de Man’s writer understood that “[m]odernity turn[ed] out to be...a source of torment.”¹⁷⁶ For de Man, the writer’s modernity is torturous because a writer’s gestures of originality always unintentionally preserve the past. De Man offered a series of examples, such as the work of French writer Antonin Artaud, as Artaud’s texts showed that “[t]he more radical the rejection of anything that came before, the greater the

¹⁷³ Ibid., 357. Emphasis added.

¹⁷⁴ De Man, “Literary History and Literary Modernity,” in *Blindness and Insight*, 142-165.

¹⁷⁵ Ibid., 152; Emphasis added.

¹⁷⁶ Ibid., 161.

dependence on the past.”¹⁷⁷ Regardless—indeed because—of acts of originality, de Man’s modern writers’ identity depended on history. Unable to convert to the exclusively modern, de Man’s writer instead suffered from endlessly encountering contradictions between bearing the weight of the past and being an instrument of change. And as a result of these contradictions, “The distinctive character of literature thus becomes manifest as an inability to escape from a condition that is felt to be unbearable.”¹⁷⁸

Many readers—particularly after the 1987 discovery of his wartime articles—interpreted de Man’s essay as an attack on literary history, because he seemed to suggest that literature, regardless of context, simply repeated the same predicament between modernity and history. His essay’s conclusion received much scrutiny. There, de Man suggested that “good literary historians” focus on the contradictions between modernity and history in literature because “the bases for historical knowledge are not empirical facts but written texts, even if these texts masquerade in the guise of wars or revolutions.”¹⁷⁹ For critics, de Man transformed historical knowledge into “literature,” into a contradiction—and many saw such an argument as an attempt to absolve himself of his wartime collaboration. In 1988, Professor of English and American literature David Hirsch claimed that de Man attacked “the concept of ‘the past’” and expressed a “will to obliterate the past.”¹⁸⁰ But such an interpretation disregarded that de Man’s essay, far from rejecting the past, addressed writers’ painful confrontations of the paradox between modernity and history in their writings. Notably, early in his essay, de Man observed that, for “writers,” their struggle with these contradictions “hides behind rhetorical devices of language

¹⁷⁷ Ibid.

¹⁷⁸ Ibid., 162.

¹⁷⁹ Ibid., 165.

¹⁸⁰ David Hirsch, “Paul de Man and the Politics of Deconstruction,” *Sewanee Review* 96 (1988): 330-338.

that disguise and distort what the writer is actually saying.”¹⁸¹ With his own acts of writing that aimed to transform his self to his “real” self, a self who never (again) committed the errors of his youth, de Man continually—and agonizingly—discovered his gestures of self-innovation as illusory.

Conclusion

In these ways, the 1969 Bellagio conference capped a half-decade of the development of a shared mission among Ur-Yale School members and their colleagues to interrogate the limits of formalism and move towards the possibility of applying these new reading techniques to humanistic study more broadly. This shared mission, which began in the cloistered Hall of Graduate Studies at the end of Wall Street in New Haven, had grown in specificity and complexity. Often, it focused on the status of the scientificity of literary methods. However, as the forgoing chapter has shown, this project was embedded in various North American intellectual, institutional, and cultural events and liaisons. These happenings and relationships funneled into the larger history of deconstruction in the United States.

¹⁸¹ De Man, “Literary History,” 152.

Literature X and The Literature Major: An Institutional Crucible of Proto-Deconstruction in America

Introduction

Political radicalism burst open the doors of Yale University at the end of the late sixties.¹⁸² This radicalism was accompanied by and helped usher in significant changes to the student body as well as the curriculum. In early 1969, the decision came down to admit women to its undergraduate ranks.¹⁸³ In May of the same year, Yale's R.O.T.C. program came under fire, as antiwar sentiment reached a fever pitch. In June, an actual fire, likely set by students, extensively damaged the Art and Architecture building, with its "harsh cement slabs with broken corrugations" and "bleak expanses of glass."¹⁸⁴ Following the Kent State shootings in May 1970, Yale seniors organized a "'counter-commencement,' planning to... donate their \$8 cap-and-gown fees to a fund for the benefit of antiwar candidates."¹⁸⁵ And then the New Haven Black Panther trials brought crowds of demonstrators to the green, from disaffected students to "dangerous foreigners" like Jean Genet, France's "Black Prince of Letters." The National Guard was called in and Yale University President Kingman Brewster expressed doubts to faculty that a black revolutionary group could get a fair trial anywhere in the United States.¹⁸⁶ "'[T]he forces beyond our gates,'" Brewster declared, "'could destroy the internationally significant, free, private university in its present form."¹⁸⁷ Meanwhile, academics who hoped to keep, in the words of

¹⁸² For a historical overview of the links between the counterculture, feminism, and the centrality of political action, see Rebecca Klatch, *A Generation Divided: The New Left, the New Right, and the 1960s* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999).

¹⁸³ "Georges May, 82, Yale Scholar and Provost," *New York Times*, March 9, 2003, New York edition.

¹⁸⁴ Alvin B. Kernan, *In Plato's Cave* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1999), 162; Herbert Muschamp, "Paul Rudolph Is Dead at 78; Modernist Architect of the 60's," *New York Times*, August 9, 1997, New York edition.

¹⁸⁵ *Time*, "The War Against the War," May 18, 1970.

¹⁸⁶ Joseph B. Treaster, "Brewster Doubts Fair Black Trials," *New York Times*, April 25, 1970, New York edition.

¹⁸⁷ Kingman Brewster, "Yearly Report to Alumni," *Yale Daily News*, October 17, 1970.

Yale Professor of English Harold Bloom, the “tides of aggressive ignorance, or the counter-culture” at bay, had their worst fears realized: the citadel had been breached.¹⁸⁸

The old guard of Yale’s literature departments grew anxious, and not only about the threats to the sovereignty of the Old Campus. They also worried about “the absurd hopes that the young and their middle-aged followers” placed in the revolutionary potential of literature.¹⁸⁹ As students across the country embraced a Dionysian fury of chaotic creativity, “disrupt[ing] classes, wreck[ing] laboratories, burn[ing] libraries, and destroy[ing] scholars’ manuscripts,” the unimpeachable guardians of civilization—that is, professors of literature at Yale—sought to maintain order.¹⁹⁰ But imposing Apollonian order on prose and poetry seemed hopeless, a dream from a previous era. Romanticism—with its emphases on imagination, emotion, and freedom—had scaled the barricades of the Ivory Tower, arriving at the heart of “Western Civilization.”¹⁹¹

The New Haven wing of the New Criticism fretted that the literary work was in danger of losing its autonomy, literary criticism losing its objective status. Though never completely setting the curricula or research programs of Yale’s literature departments, the New Critics attracted the best students to New Haven. They also dominated American literary criticism in the middle decades of the twentieth-century.¹⁹² The New Critical technique of close reading, according to its proponents, protected prose and poetry from history and, above all, political interference. Yale Professor of English W. K. Wimsatt Jr., the most famous theorist of the New

¹⁸⁸ Harold Bloom, *Figures of Capable Imagination* (New York: Seabury Press, 1976), xii.

¹⁸⁹ Ibid. Norman O. Brown’s *Life Against Death: The Psychoanalytical Meaning of History* (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 1959) as well as Herbert Marcuse’s *One-dimensional Man: Studies in Ideology of Advanced Industrial Society* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1991) were enormously popular with students in the 1960s.

¹⁹⁰ J. Mitchell Morse, “The Leopard and the Priest,” *College English* 33, no. 8 (1972): 884.

¹⁹¹ For European Romanticism, see M.H. Abrams, *The Mirror and the Lamp*; Isaiah Berlin, *The Roots of Romanticism* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2001). Key texts for the American Renaissance include: F.O. Matthiessen, *American Renaissance: Art and Expression in the Age of Emerson and Whitman* (London: Oxford University Press, 1941); Leon Chai, *The Romantic Foundation of the American Renaissance* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1987).

¹⁹² Jonathan Culler, “The Return to Philology,” *Journal of Aesthetic Education* 36, no. 3 (2004): 13. See also Lentricchia, *After the New Criticism*, xii-xiii; Cusset, 48-50.

Criticism and “philosopher-elect of the movement,” argued that authorial intent—and with it history—was “neither available nor desirable as a standard for judging the success of a work of literary art.”¹⁹³ Nothing but literature itself, according to the New Critical method of interpretation, was worthy of making sense of literature.

To the New Critics, the extra-literary spilling into the academy—and up from the written word—was as surprising as it was dangerous. And in the face of this apparently Romantic-inspired apocalypse, many New Critics circled the wagons.¹⁹⁴ Launching a rearguard defense of New Critical precepts, Wimsatt reasserted that a literary work remains independent of the social world and thus political engagement: “When institutions are crumbling, when chaos surges at the gates, art can only record the event it has perhaps helped to bring on—sometimes with an accent of guileless impotence, sometimes pathetically, wringing its hands. Art has no remedies.”¹⁹⁵ But ignoring the links between literature, history, and politics was no longer a viable option to many. The Romanticisms of the street were affecting the interpretive methods of literary scholars, New Critical and otherwise—whether they wanted it to or not. After the summer of 1968 riots, even Columbia University literary critic Lionel Trilling—known for staidness in both his personal demeanor as well as his scholarship—acknowledged the appeal of political radicalism: “[F]or young people now, being political serves much the same purpose as being literary has long done—it expresses and validates the personality.”¹⁹⁶ And in the spring of 1969 at Cornell University, shortly following the 36-hour student takeover of a student union building, Professor

¹⁹³ Christopher Norris, *Deconstruction: Theory and Practice*, 8; William K. Wimsatt and Monroe C. Beardsley, “The Intentional Fallacy,” *Sewanee Review* 54, no. 3 (1946): 468-488.

¹⁹⁴ Michael Holquist, “Literature X,” *Yale Alumni Magazine*, March 15, 11. Thomas M. Greene, “Versions of a Discipline,” in *Building a Profession: Autobiographical Perspectives on the Beginnings of Comparative Literature in the United States*, 38.

¹⁹⁵ Wimsatt, *Days of the Leopards: Essays In Defense Of Poems* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1976), xii.

¹⁹⁶ Lionel Trilling, quoted in Alexander Bloom, *Prodigal Sons: The New York Intellectuals and Their World* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986), 352.

Harold Bloom confronted an activist who interrupted his talk and called for the burning down of the library and the liberation of knowledge from the shackles of the patriarchy. For Bloom, this was a symbolic moment of crisis.¹⁹⁷

The New Critics in New Haven considered the literary-critical fashions drifting across the Atlantic as likely sources (or at least symptoms) of this intellectual and institutional crisis.¹⁹⁸ Above all was structuralism, heir apparent to existentialism in French intellectual life, which proposed that all elements of human culture, including literature are parts of a system of signs. But even as some literary scholars touted structuralism as offering an interpretive method that could succeed the moribund New Criticism, it was quickly splintering into heresies that would by the early-1970s come to be collectively labeled post-structuralist.¹⁹⁹ With the dissolution of the New Critical style of reading and the advent of structuralism and its attendant heretical interpretive approaches, literary studies in the United States seemed to be hurtling toward catastrophe. And while academic literary criticism had once been considered by its practitioners as one of the last refuges of calm, by 1971, “literary theory” was not only in the air but a gathering storm that older and established literary scholars looked on with horror as it battered the literary object.²⁰⁰ With attacks on the sanctity of prose and poetry increasing in intensity and frequency, many scholars feared that their ivory tower was quickly becoming a tower of Babel.

This volatile context—in which students and faculty increasingly grew either more skeptical or protective of the purpose and limits of literary study—informed institutional and intellectual innovation at Yale University. Central innovations were the experimental course

¹⁹⁷ Harold Bloom, interview by Gregory Jones-Katz, June 24, 2013.

¹⁹⁸ Cusset, 50; Gerald Graff, 188.

¹⁹⁹ Michael Holquist, “Literature After ‘X’,” *The New Journal*, December 1985, 4; J. Hillis Miller, correspondence with Gregory Jones-Katz, December 2013.

²⁰⁰ Wimsatt, “Battering the Object,” in *Contemporary Criticism*, Malcolm Bradbury and David Palmer eds. (London: Arnold, 1970), 75-76; Hoeveler Jr., *The Postmodernist Turn*, 15. For a summary of New Critics’ lamenting the routinization of New Critical method, see Graff, 226-227.

Literature X, introduced to curriculum in 1970, and the Literature Major, an undergraduate program inspired by Lit X and which first ran in 1973. This new curriculum in New Haven aimed to address the perceived crisis of literary studies by introducing undergraduates to skeptical stances and styles of reading prose and poetry, which, though partly derived from components of structuralist thought from the European continent, were indigenously fashioned and proto-deconstructive in method and mood. Put differently, the curriculum and classroom experiences of Lit X and the Lit Major were directly informed by contexts in New Haven and the North American political and cultural landscape and instilled students with techniques of reading that interrogated and broke down the divisions between high and low, literary and non-literary, canonical and non-canonical, Western and non-Western. Intellectual and Cultural Historian Louis Menand observed in 2010 that, “[a]fter the 1960s, . . . a relatively boundary-respecting conception of scholarly inquiry gave way to a relatively boundary-suspicious conception.”²⁰¹ In this regard, Menand could have pointed to the cases of Lit X and the Lit Major at Yale, which, by dismantling conventional models of literary study and traditional views of the definition and limits of literature, played a significant role in the change in literary studies to a boundary-suspicious conception. This aspect of the story of Lit X and the Lit Major reinforces historians’ view that the last quarter of the twentieth-century was, like Daniel Rodgers writes, an age of fracture.²⁰²

But a closer examination of the history of Lit X and the Lit Major reveals an important twist on this narrative of fracture. The curriculum and classroom experiences of undergraduates and teachers in Lit X and the Lit Major did not simply disintegrate boundaries between high and low, literary and non-literary, and so on. Rather, by institutionalizing a hermeneutic of suspicious

²⁰¹ Louis Menand, *The Marketplace of Ideas: Reform and Resistance in the American University* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2010), 117.

²⁰² Rodgers, *Age of Fracture*, 2-3, 5.

reading and a mood of distrust towards accepted boundaries, Lit X and the Lit Major also encouraged students and scholars to transcend these divisions, to extend the categories of literature and literary study—text, reading, form, narrative, tropes, and the like—to all knowledge and ways of being. By doing so, this curriculum built a new home in literature departments at Yale in which the New Critical technique of reader literature, which offered no political, social, or historical solutions, was turned on its head. In the abode of Lit X and the Lit Major more generally, prose and poetry offered all possible remedies because the suspicious techniques of reading of Lit X and other courses in the Lit Major stretched the categories of literature to include all cultural artifacts as well as modes of existence. Lit X and the Lit Major, in other words, confronted the crisis of literary studies with a proto-deconstructive intellectual and pedagogical program, converting—creatively destroying—conventional approaches to literary study and established understandings of literature so as to reveal literature’s universal power, its proximity and immediacy, to students. The accepted narrative that the 1970s were a time of disaggregation and disintegration therefore disregards that Lit X and the Lit Major built a home of fusion as well as fracture, of presence as well as absence.

Historians have either mischaracterized or, more often, overlooked Lit X and the Lit Major. Intellectual and cultural historian François Cusset for example has described the Lit Major as a program “designed for graduate students,” a top-down institutionalization of French theory in America.²⁰³ Not only was the Lit Major designed for undergraduates, but the curriculum included thinkers and texts far beyond those included in the canon of French theory.²⁰⁴ Historians have also left unexplained how American literature departments came to be

²⁰³ Cusset, 114.

²⁰⁴ Hoeveller, 15.

“doing the most significant philosophy outside philosophy departments” in the 1980s.²⁰⁵ Lit X and the Lit Major played an important role in this shift, as the proto-deconstructive techniques of reading taught to and appropriated by students were intensively self-reflective and self-reflexive, and, as such, should rightly be understood as “philosophical.” Furthermore, deconstructive literary criticism has often and repeatedly been portrayed as a European import, as triumphantly arriving on American shores at the 1966 Johns Hopkins conference, specifically with French philosopher Jacques Derrida overturning the principles of structuralism in his deconstruction of French anthropologist Claude Lévi-Strauss’ work.²⁰⁶ But this history of deconstruction fails to consider that a significant—indeed, a constitutive—part of this story occurred on the “ground floor” of American institutions.²⁰⁷ The history of Lit X and the Lit Major shows that events at Yale and the national context provided a homegrown impetus behind proto-deconstructive reading techniques. And the intellectual culture as well as institutional framework for what became known as deconstructive literary criticism was forged largely in the U.S. Thus, contrary to its popular image as “some sort of intellectual ‘computer virus’” from the Sorbonne that “destroyed academic programs, disciplinary specializations, institutional structures, indeed the university and perhaps reason itself,” deconstruction, specifically its intellectual and institutional foundations as taught and explicated in Lit X and the Lit Major at Yale, as David Hollinger might put it, was as American as Apple Pie.²⁰⁸

²⁰⁵ Bruce Kuklick, *A History of Philosophy in America, 1720-2000* (London: Oxford University Press, 2001), 268. See also Kuklick, “American Philosophy and Its Lost Public,” in *Pragmatism: From Progressivism to Postmodernism* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 1999), 149-150.

²⁰⁶ Cusset, 17, 18, 31.

²⁰⁷ See Jonathan Arac, *Critical Genealogies* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1987) and Kerwin Lee Klein, *From History to Theory* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2011). Both Arac and Klein remain on the level of textual analysis.

²⁰⁸ Elisabeth Weber ed., *Points...Interviews, 1974-94* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1995). See also Amy Gutmann, “Relativism, Deconstruction, and the Curriculum,” in John Arthur, Amy Shapiro, eds., *Campus Wars: Multiculturalism and the Politics of Difference* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1995), 57. David Hollinger, “Thinking Is As American as Apple Pie,” *Historically Speaking* 10, no. 4 (2009): 17-18.

Literature X: A Homegrown Deconstruction of Literary Studies

In the late-1960s, a sense of crisis—political, cultural, and intellectual—cast a pall over American departments of literature, throwing into question the efficacy as well as the worth and value of literary study. In response, in the spring of 1969, a number of Yale faculty members from the various departments of language and literature, mostly young turks, but also a few older scholars, met as an informal committee to rethink literary studies at Yale College.²⁰⁹ This group included: Peter Brooks in French and Comparative Literature, who “had run through the streets of Paris in the rebellion of 1968 when it looked for a time as if students could bring down a government”; Michael Holquist from Russian Literature, “a student of Dostoyevsky and well suited to understand not only the dark turns and twists of Raskolnikov but [also] the warmth and generosity of Prince Mishkin;” the tory-radical and former Yale provost Alvin Kernan from English Literature, who made his academic name with scholarship on Shakespeare and the Renaissance and who hoped “to preserve the old values [of studying literature] by finding a new way to demonstrate their continuing power and importance”; and Adam Parry, Chair of Classics, who played an important role in discussions before his 1971 death in a motorcycle accident in Germany.²¹⁰ These Yale professors, each having different yet overlapping motivations and intellectual itineraries, keenly felt that the study of literature in the U.S. had entered a period of crisis which it was their duty to confront.²¹¹

Brooks’ thoughts about how to face the crisis in literary study came to a head at a 1969 colloquium held at the prestigious Centre Culturel International de Cerisy-la-Salle, an influential

²⁰⁹ Alvin B. Kernan to Horace D. Taft, letter, January 5, 1972, Box 30, Folder 42, Yale College Records of the Dean 1969-1973, Yale Archives, New Haven, Conn.; Howard Felperin, *In Another Life: The Decline and Fall of the Humanities through the Eyes of an Ivy-League Jew* (AuthorhouseUK, 2014), 39.

²¹⁰ Kernan, *In Plato’s Cave*, 190-191. Michael Holquist, interview with Gregory Jones-Katz, August 24, 2014.

²¹¹ The sense of crisis in literary studies was not unique to the American critical community. For the situation in West Germany, see Robert C. Holub, *Crossing Borders: Reception Theory, Poststructuralism, Deconstruction* (Wisconsin: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1992).

reference in the history of French intellectual life. The “Colloques de Cerisy” that Brooks attended was devoted to the teaching of literature, a rather apropos subject, considering Brooks’ worries about literary studies back in the U.S., particularly at Yale.²¹² At the conference, Brooks has recalled struggling to formulate a thorough response to the argument that French structuralist Jean Cohen (author of *La Structure du langage poétique*) made in one panel that “only ‘science’ could be taught; that logic, grammar, rhetoric, poetics could no doubt be taught, but that ‘literature,’ possessing none of the characteristics of a scientifically organized body of knowledge was a false subject.” The premium that Cohen put on science and his assertion that literature could not be considered a true subject—all advanced with the tone and in the manner of a good structuralist—vexed Brooks, who replied that, while Cohen may be correct that “literature... was a false subject,” in that it did not have the features of a scientifically structured body of knowledge, “we could teach the *reading* of literature.”²¹³ For Brooks, even if literature disintegrated when filtered through the structuralist criteria of scientificity, the teacher could still educate students with scientific reading techniques. Brooks was satisfied at the time with his quasi-New Critical response, a response that hewed close to many New Critics’ insistence that the interpretation of a text itself should receive sole attention. After the conference, however, Brooks reflected that his answer did not in fact address what precisely the teacher was supposed to teach students to direct their attention toward. While students could be taught to perform scientific acts of reading, what were students reading exactly? For Brooks, the question of what constituted literature remained unanswered.

Unlike Brooks, Alvin Kernan was not really interested in determining the substance of literature, nor was he interested in making methodical breakthroughs in the teaching of prose and

²¹² See Serge Boubrovsky et Tzvetan Todorov, eds., *L’Enseignement de la littérature* (Paris: Plon, 1971), 590-591.

²¹³ Peter Brooks, “Man and His Fictions: One Approach to the Teaching of Literature,” *College English* 35, no. 1 (1973): 42. Emphasis in original.

poetry. Instead, Kernan was concerned with what he and others saw as literature's growing irrelevance, to his students and to American society more generally.²¹⁴ For Kernan, literature had become in "many ways a museum, filled with great works, but removed from its human contact to a world of hushed reverence, separate from normal human activity." Literature's bonds to familiar life had been cut. And if literature "was to be saved from oblivion," Kernan believed, then it had to be taught and studied in "a more open, less idealized context." Literary studies had to situate canonical works "in the middle not of a perfect art but of a continuing, ever present human activity of making up stories that give meaning to events and sort out the perplexities of human life."²¹⁵ By putting literature in contact with the everyday—with, say, popular films or maybe even rock music—Kernan believed that teachers could once again show students its unremarkable remarkability, its mundane profundity. Literature could be shown to be very much alive, immediate, and proximate to undergraduates' existence.

Kernan acutely sensed—and grew increasingly concerned about—the crisis of literary studies in America in other ways. Much in demand on the national lecture circuit in the late-1960s, Kernan learned, from talking to college instructors across the U.S., that there was widespread dissatisfaction with the atomization of the study of literature into French, German, Chinese, and other departments.²¹⁶ Literature, college teachers felt, suffered rather than benefitted at the hands of such departmental divisions. The departmentalization of literature, however, was a deep tradition in American colleges and universities.²¹⁷ Customarily, each department dealt with the language and literature of a single nation or, at the largest, a single

²¹⁴ Brooks thought that his and others' interest in repairing literature's severed connections to human concerns and activities and desire to problematize literature was not born of an obsession with "relevance." See Brooks, "Man and His Fictions," 41.

²¹⁵ Kernan, *In Plato's Cave*, 190.

²¹⁶ Holquist, "Literature after 'X,'" 5.

²¹⁷ For more on this tradition, see Graff, 123-151.

culture or area: Greek and Latin, French, Russian, Chinese and Japanese, Spanish, German, Italian, English. But though, as Kernan learned from his colleagues across the U.S., the atomization of the study of prose and poetry into department divisions was seen as generally damaging to literature itself, it was at Yale where faculty in particular increasingly expressed their dissatisfaction with the atomized approach to literature, focusing on what they believed were some of this approach's shaky assumptions. These assumptions included "the project of a particular national state and the genius and language of its people; that intense specialization within this national literature was the only way to study literature; and that the teaching of language and the teaching of literature were inseparable."²¹⁸ The establishment of departments of Comparative Literature after World War II had forced scholars (and administrators and students) to question some of these conventions, but at Yale (though, notably, not at Harvard) the study of Comparative Literature remained confined to the graduate level where it was limited to extending the traditional methods of literary study from one to two or three literatures.²¹⁹

As a professor at Yale, Michael Holquist, close friends with Peter Brooks, felt the departmentalization of the study of literature with particular pathos. His department, Slavic literature, adhered closely to the German philological model in which one focused—he believed excessively—on language rather than literature (members of the department had to know Old Church Slavonic in addition to Greek or Latin, plus have at least two years of study in all three of the major Slavic language areas).²²⁰ Holquist recalled: "The different national adjectives were in danger of absorbing the substantive they sought to modify."²²¹ In other words, Russian literature—however one defined it—threatened to consume whatever it was that made prose and

²¹⁸ "Proposed Program in Literature for Yale College," report, March 1, 1971, Box 30, Folder 42, Yale College Records of the Dean 1969-1973, Yale Archives, New Haven, Conn.

²¹⁹ Ibid. See Gayatri Spivak, *Death of Discipline* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2003).

²²⁰ Holquist, interview by Gregory Jones-Katz, August 24, 2014.

²²¹ Holquist, "Literature After 'X,'" 4.

poetry unique. Such excessive scholarly specialization led Holquist to the view that literature, however one defined it, risked being drowned in a sea of field-specific concerns. Not only Holquist, young and untenured, but also other literary scholars, eminent and established, yearned for the institutional and intellectual support to address literature and only literature: “Long ago,” a distinguished senior professor at Yale told Holquist, “I said I would like to be called professor of literature, just as there are professors of history and philosophy.”²²² The yearning to rise above (or fall below) each department’s national culture toward “Literature” stretched across generations.

For these reasons, some linked to the professionalization of academic literary criticism, others related to anxiety regarding the relevance of literature to undergraduates, all occurring in an increasingly skeptical political atmosphere, Brooks, Kernan, and Holquist considered the study of literature in America, above all at Yale, to have entered dangerous waters. Despite their different takes on the causes of and possible solutions to this problem, they found themselves at the aforementioned faculty meeting in the spring of 1969 united by a desire to address the crisis of literary studies and teach literature as “a form of learning, without reducing it either to information (which it isn’t), or to the contemplation of perfection (which is futile), or...displacing the object of our study to the sciences which speak of it.”²²³ The supreme power of literature—irreducible to bits of information or mathematical equations; resolutely anti-Platonic and thus of *this* world; always breaking out of scientific models. They agreed on these points, but they debated about how to specifically fashion and then implement a curriculum in New Haven that taught students to interpret literature without disintegrating or burying its presence under the weight of theoretical models or departmental divisions.

²²² Holquist, “Literature X,” 11.

²²³ *Ibid.*, 12; Brooks, “Man and His Fictions,” 41.

The most direct and practical result of Brooks, Kernan, and Holquist's efforts was an experimental course: Literature X.²²⁴ First offered to undergraduates in the fall of 1970, Lit X was a homegrown, proto-deconstructive response to the crisis of literary studies—by breaking down traditional approaches to literary study and conventional views of literature, the course's curriculum and classroom experiences inculcated students with a sensitivity to literature's universal presence. Lit X was not associated with any specific department, but treated as the shared venture of all the language and literature departments as well as Comparative Literature.²²⁵ And with five language and literature departments providing the necessary teachers for the course, Lit X was therefore an institutionally-supported bridge between departments of literature. Administratively, Lit X transcended departmental divisions.

More broadly, Lit X was shaped by and bore the traces of the widespread anxiety, which cut across demographic groups in America as well as Europe, that political and social crises might soon give way to catastrophe. In 2014, Holquist recalled that the "late 1960s and early 1970s were strange years for the whole country, but one felt this with special force in New Haven, as undergraduates struggled with political and social issues, such as war in Viet Nam, and embraced a new sense of exploration of sex, drugs, and personal behavior."²²⁶ Even once staid cultural institutions at Yale had become potentially mind-altering. A student, for instance, could go to the Yale's Symphony Orchestra's performance of Alexander Scriabin's "Poem of Ecstasy," complete with a burning organ that bathed the hall in shifting colored strobes and jets of smoke.²²⁷ With stability giving way to rapid intellectual and institutional change, undergraduates found the present and the future as thrilling as they were threatening and

²²⁴ Brooks, "Man and His Fictions," 42.

²²⁵ Jeffrey E. Young, Timothy J. Sehr eds., *Yale Course Critique 1971* (Yale University, Yale Daily News), 133.

²²⁶ Holquist, interview with Gregory Jones-Katz, September 7, 2014.

²²⁷ See Lincoln M. Ballard, "A Russian Mystic in the Age of Aquarius: The U.S. Revival of Alexander Scriabin in the 1960s," *American Music* 30 (2012): 194-227.

puzzling, drawing inspiration from a variety of American and European sources, including French existentialists.²²⁸

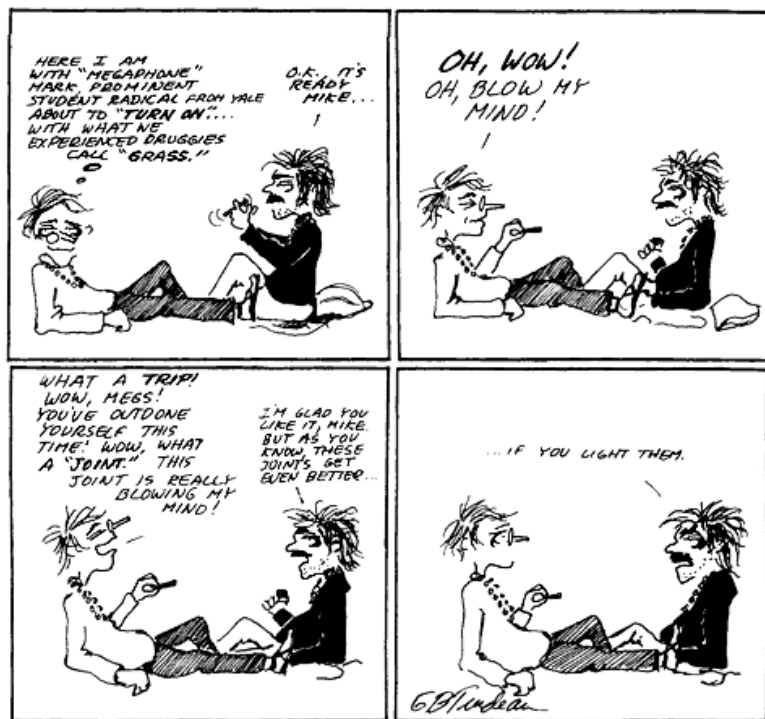


Figure 2.1 Gary Trudeau, “Yale Strip #56,” in *Doonsbury: The Original Yale Cartoons* (Andrews McMeel, Publishing, Original edition, 1979), 61. Undergraduate Gary Trudeau (Yale ’70) regularly contributed editorial cartoons to the *Yale Daily News*. These cartoons were thinly-veiled references to local campus events or issues at Yale, including the Vietnam War, national politics, the counterculture, women students, and drug use.

Rather than withdraw from this crisis, Lit X responded to it with a proto-deconstructive curriculum. Unique in critical perspective—Brooks, Kernan, and Holquist did not look to precedents—the course trained students to dismantle the opposition between literary study and philosophical inquiry by placing existential questions at the center of the course.²²⁹ In order to achieve this goal, the course’s curriculum

jettisoned established definitions of not only literature and philosophy, but also of a general education class. Lit X was a “survey course without a theme,” existing solely to raise questions, Holquist wrote, “so naïve, so radical, that they had been mainly excluded from, or forgotten, in the study of literature: questions such as ‘Why do we have literature?,’ ‘Why do we need it?,’

²²⁸ Alvin Toffler used the term “future shock” to describe this awareness of “too much change in too little time.” See Alvin Toffler, *Future Shock* (New York: Random House, 1970). Albert Camus, Jean-Paul Sartre, and Simone de Beauvoir developed connections to the 1960s social movements, including the New Left, the Civil Rights Movement, and Feminism. George Cotkin, *Existential America* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2003), 154, 226.

²²⁹ Holquist, interview by Gregory Jones-Katz, August 24, 2014.

‘Where is it?’ and What is it?’.”²³⁰ The Lit X skeptical method of reading prose and poetry questioned the function and nature, the existence, of literature itself. Brooks for instance suggested that Lit X “interrogated literature in its own interrogation of the world” and “confront[ed] the text in its confrontations of what is not itself.”²³¹ Similar to Yale’s undergraduates, Lit X struggled under the burden of an intense (or hyper) self-consciousness, bearing, in the words of undergraduate Laura Cohen, “the ambitious, presumptuous, and terribly unconventional weight of trying to define itself.”²³² The course, in other words, was a staging ground for exploring not only questions about literature, but also sweeping philosophical questions raised by literature. Self-reflexivity—not definitive answers—was on the agenda for Xers. One could even say that the skeptical atmosphere and suspicious techniques of interpreting prose and poetry of Lit X was existential in that, like Jean-Paul Sartre’s proposition that existence precedes essence, the substance of the course was its very execution, and this execution was to raise questions rather than provide definitive answers.²³³

Without a department, without a theme, without a central critical perspective, Lit X at first glance seemed solely to dismantle literature and traditions of literary study. Lit X in a certain sense did not even really exist, at least to those who conceived of the course. Kernan and Holquist playfully declared in the 1970 *Yale Daily News* article “Literature X—World Premiere” that Lit X was “not a passive admiration of great fiction but an institutional fiction in itself.”²³⁴ For Kernan and Holquist, Lit X was a self-aware novel, a piece of ironic literature, in that Lit X bent back on, referred to, and affected Lit X. Lit X was fictional (literary) in other ways as well. The course lacked a specific content. Brooks wrote that he, Kernan, and Holquist were “painfully

²³⁰ Holquist, “Literature X,” 12.

²³¹ Brooks, “Man and His Fictions,” 42.

²³² Laura E. Cohen, “Literature X—World Premiere,” *Yale Daily News*, February 22, 1970, 5.

²³³ Jean-Paul Sartre, *Existentialism Is a Humanism* (Yale University Press: New Haven, 2007).

²³⁴ Quoted in Cohen, 5.

aware...that any suggestion of a ‘canon’ of Literature X texts and categories [was] contradictory to the whole enterprise.”²³⁵ Rather than having a core content, then, “the course...wander[ed] beyond the traditional boundaries..., beyond the boundaries of the written word itself to all man’s fiction.” X abandoned the convention that the study of literature meant adherence to a set of writings. Instead of existing as other classes, with a fixed course material that professors professed to undergraduates, Lit X ““was contrived to a degree for the sake of raising issues.””²³⁶ These issues included literature professors’ dissatisfaction “with the way the study of literature was atomized into French, German, Chinese and other departments,” with how “the central fact of *literature* was being dissipated in a too narrowly conceived study of Russian texts, for example, or Italian texts.”²³⁷ Lit X was also intended to respond to what Kernan described as “the students’ need to escape ‘literary analysis,’” as students understood that “before an Othello or Doctor Faustus may be excavated or even appreciated, more basic questions must be considered concerning the ‘existence of imaginative lies amidst the truths of a technological society’ or ‘creativity per se as a vital, human drive.’”²³⁸ Overspecialization thus haunted and hounded students as much as it worried and wore down the faculty in New Haven. Lit X, however, intended to break through ossified theories or ideas about literature and literary study so as to show students the essential force and central role—the closeness and immediacy—of prose and poetry.

Though unabashedly lacking a set content, Lit X’s curriculum and classroom experiences, by training students with proto-deconstructive techniques of reading that revealed literature’s vital presence to undergraduates, was ultimately constructive. The course for example

²³⁵ Brooks, “Man and His Fictions,” 43 f. 4.

²³⁶ Quoted in Cohen, 31.

²³⁷ Holquist, “Literature X,” 10-11. Emphasis in original.

²³⁸ Ibid.

aimed to expose pupils to the vitality of literature by exploring the variety and range of fiction-making. In undergraduates' words, Lit X "investigated the purposes and uses of fiction, its forms and methods, and its relationship to 'reality.'"²³⁹ Lit X accomplished this goal by moving the study of literature away from studying the relation of literature to a particular context in which it is written (i.e. history), towards a general poetics, specifically a conception of literature as but a single aspect of a more universal human activity: the making of fictions.²⁴⁰ Through flouting tradition in order to show the universality of fiction, Lit X placed it in relation to readers'—to students'—context. And by inculcating students with the sensitivity to situate prose and poetry in the context of students' personal dilemmas rather than defer this literature to an authority removed from readers' concerns and experiences, the course hoped to train undergraduates to accept that fiction was already present, already central to and for their everyday lives. Or, to put it differently, the overarching goal of the curriculum of Lit X was to instill students with the understanding that literature directly affected students—they just did not realize it (yet).

Teachers of Lit X encouraged pupils to achieve this goal by asking existential questions about fiction such as: "how is fiction-making distinguishable from other human activities? For what purposes are fictions designed? What constants are there in man's fictions? What variations? By what criteria may their greater or lesser success be judged?"²⁴¹ By asking—and answering—these questions, students scrutinized the divisions between the literary and the non-literary, high and low. And pupils' skepticism toward and examinations of these divisions, in turn, schooled them in ways to transcend those divides and move toward an appreciation of the universal presence of fiction. In the above-mentioned *Yale Daily News* article, for example, Holquist explained how Lit Xers adoption of skeptical techniques of reading in the classroom led

²³⁹ Jack H. Morgan ed., *Yale Course Critique 1973* (Yale University, Yale Daily News), 98.

²⁴⁰ Holquist, "Literature X," 12. According to Holquist, this shift was "the philosopher's stone."

²⁴¹ "Proposed Program for Literature at Yale College."

them to formulate specific and expanded definitions of literature and what it meant for prose and poetry to be literary: “[C]anonical literature is only seen through habituation,” Holquist stated, and “where plot and eloquence are often lacking though characters ‘seem to touch a nerve of perception in the imagination, . . . students are compelled to seek more precise definition of ‘what is well-written’ and ultimately ‘what is literary.’”²⁴² Literature and thus literary devices, teachers of Lit X led students to discover, were everywhere and at all times, as creative energies and the ability to harness them are in and available to any author or reader. As Kernan put it in an early proposal for the course:

[J]ust as all men dream, so all societies pay a good deal of attention to making up and telling stories; and they seem to tell something like the same stories, though in a variety of ways. Furthermore, these stories tend to be organized in the same (plot), and to use the same linguistic devices: metaphor, imagery, symbol, rhyme, rhythm, puns. etc. Conceived of as one aspect of man’s fiction-making powers, literature loses some of its “splendid isolation,” and connections begin to appear not only with other humanities—art and religious studies, for example—but with those social sciences which are engaged in the study of other kinds of human fictions. Man’s fiction-making faculties are not, after all, limited to story telling and the production of poems and plays, but are employed also in the construction of the kinship patterns studied by the anthropologist, the language structures dealt with in linguistics, even the dreams explored by the psychologist.²⁴³

Lit X’s course materials were essential to Brooks, Kernan, and Holquist’s proto-deconstructive program, which instilled students with interpretive techniques that dismantled traditions of literary study and exposed literature’s universal presence. Because the very nature of literature was open to question, the course covered a then unconventional range of works, works not only from different national literatures, but also works that would conventionally be considered anything but literature per se. The syllabus for the fall of 1970 included British author

²⁴² Quoted in Cohen, 31.

²⁴³ “The Major in Literature,” report, March 1, 1971, Box 30, Folder 42, Yale College Records of the Dean 1969-1973, Yale Archives, New Haven, Conn.

Arthur Conan Doyle's Sherlock Holmes stories, Russian-American Vladimir Nabokov's *Lolita* (1955), Lewis Carroll's *Through the Looking Glass, and What Alice Found There* (1871), Owen Johnson's *Stover at Yale* (1912), and the erotic classic by French author Anne Desclos *The Story of O* (1954). Films such as the 1910 *Frankenstein* and *Buck Rogers* were shown. And Lit Xers studied these books and movies in juxtaposition to such perennials as the ancient Greek Homer's epic poem *The Odyssey*, the ancient Athenian playwright Euripides tragedy *The Bacchae*, English playwright William Shakespeare's *The Tempest* (1610–11), English poet John Milton's *Samson Agonistes* (1671), and Charles Dickens' *Great Expectations* (1860-1861).²⁴⁴ This comingling of high and low, texts and films, blurred the differences between the two categories. This blurring not only demonstrated to Lit Xers the similarities between seemingly disparate kinds of fiction. This blurring also overturned and reinscribed hierarchies that privileged “masterpieces” over everyday works. These hierarchies, X's engineers believed, kept what traditionalists considered literature inside and popular culture outside the academy. Put differently, these hierarchies supported intellectual conventions, traditional reading practices—such as the New Criticism—that trained students to ignore their intimacy with literature. In contrast, Lit X, with its positive, its proto-deconstructive techniques of reading prose and poetry, demolished these traditions (and implicitly the entire New Critical intellectual edifice) and, from the remains, offered literature itself in its varied splendors.

Like Lit X's course materials, the classroom experiences of Lit X also build a home where pupils productively shattered pedagogical conventions. For example, students were not inculcated with a correct way to interpret literature, let alone what literature was. Instead, professors applied as well as asked students to think about employing a variety of methods to read primary works. No particular approach was privileged over any other, as every week

²⁴⁴ Holquist, “Literature X,” 12.

students heard lectures by professors representing different departments and different attitudes. “Someone from French,” Holquist has explained, “might take a ‘Structuralist’ approach to the material; the next week a teacher from German might demonstrate the strengths of philology, and the week after an instructor from the English department might use Northrop Frye’s categories in his exegesis.”²⁴⁵ In class as well as discussion sections, the latter run by graduate students, Lit Xers focused on questions raised by each approach as well as by each text.²⁴⁶ By varying professors and changing critical methods every week, Lit X subverted the belief that professors possessed authority over the meaning of the material. “Far from sharing any ‘credo’ or ‘philosophy’ of literature,” Brooks and Holquist wrote in a 1972 letter to colleagues meant to quell concerns about the radicalness of their class, “[t]he course is staffed by teachers...united simply by the desire to...make the study of literature an exciting and pertinent experience for students.”²⁴⁷ Lit X architects hoped to help pupils unseat professors’ power, and place it in students’ hands. Brooks, Holquist, and Kernan hoped that such an overturning of the opposition between students and professors would demonstrate to undergraduates that the study of literature had a certain urgency, an undeniable vitality, about it, because students (now that they had the control over interpretation and the classroom) would come to recognize that they were already in touch with literature and literature was already in touch with them.

Though Holquist suggested publicly that the “syllabus [of Lit X] reveal[ed] no logic,” each text of the course was in fact chosen to interrogate a particular problem. And each interrogated problem was meant to “suggest” to students that, underneath the detritus of

²⁴⁵ Ibid., 13.

²⁴⁶ Ibid. Miller, message to Gregory Jones-Katz, June 20, 2014.

²⁴⁷ Peter Brooks and Michael Holquist to Robert L. Jackson and Victor Erlich, letter, March 13, 1972, Box 30, Folder 43, Yale College Records of the Dean 1969-1973, Yale Archives, New Haven, Conn.

traditions and interpretations, laid a “broad,” “deep,” “urgent...human need for fictions.”²⁴⁸ Each piece of literature that Xers examined disclosed the foundational desire humans have for constructing fictions. The course for instance began with a reflection on a series of stories, each of which problematized or thematized storytelling. These narratives about narrativization included Middle Eastern and Indian stories selected from *The Arabian Nights: Tales from a Thousand and One Nights* and Argentine writer and poet Jorge Luis Borges’ *Ficciones*, stories that self-reflexively call attention to their fictional nature. Lit X then explored the techniques used in the construction of any narrative, such as the meaning of metaphor’s absence in the *Nouveau Roman* (a kind of anti-novel in which plot and character serve the details of the world rather than the other way around) of French writer and filmmaker Alain Robbe-Grillet and the significance of its plenitude in metaphysical poets including English poets John Donne and George Herbert.

Later in the semester, Lit X covered the many different organizations of stories, such as the detective story, as Holquist

“wanted to indicate the pervasiveness of its basic plot, the best paradigm of aimed linearity.”

Examples of the detective story studied in Lit X ranged from the “crime to solution” of

American-Canadian Ross Macdonald’s *The Zebra Striped Hearse* (1962) to the “crime and

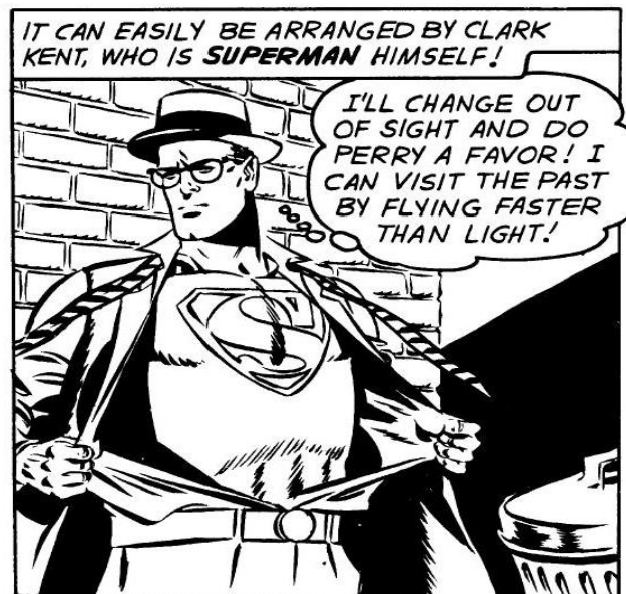


Figure 2.2 “In ‘Lit X,’” a course description read: “the mythical hero does not exist only in Greek and Norse epics. Superman also qualifies.” In *Man*, students read: “In Superman,...we have a realization of some of the most fundamental human desires and fantasies...Superman show[s]...our continuing attempt to individualize ourselves and establish, by means of a fiction once again, our identity as unique persons.” *Man*, 436

²⁴⁸ Cohen, 31; Holquist, “Literature X,” 12.

solution” in ancient Athenian Sophocles’ *Oedipus Rex*.²⁴⁹ Finally, Lit X trained pupils to realize the ubiquitousness of certain types of mythical heroes. To do so, students examined American cultural icon Superman (not Joan of Arc or St. George) as well as Norse and Greek examples. Ultimately, each text, which spanned the millennia and European and North American contexts, worked in conjunction with every other text, encouraging students to conjure up connections regardless of how fantastic these connections initially seemed. The overall purpose, though, was to inculcate students with the skills to dissolve literary convention and traditional understandings of literature, a dissolving that did not aim to be destructive but to release literature’s universal insights and energy, insights and energy present, Lit X instructors emphasized, regardless of the type of fiction or how this fiction was used.

In spring 1972, Brooks, Holquist, and Kernan designed a textbook to supply a set of readings for Lit X, *Man and His Fictions: An Introduction to Fiction-Making, Its Forms and Uses*.²⁵⁰ In *Man*, the X engineers’ objective to design a proto-deconstructive course, a course that interrogated and broke down boundaries as well as offered a constructive understanding of literature and literary characteristics, was on full display. The clearest expression of Brooks, Holquist, and Kernan’s aim is found in *Man*’s “theory of fiction,” which emerged from Brooks et al.’s several years of experience teaching Lit X rather than specific philosophies of literature. Though Holquist was taken with the work of Soviet folklorist Vladimir Propp, specifically Propp’s identification of the basic plot components of Russian folk tales, and Brooks was deeply influenced by French literary theorist and critic Roland Barthes as well as Franco-Bulgarian

²⁴⁹ Holquist, “Literature X,” 12.

²⁵⁰ The book did not sell well—their royalties were wiped out by the permission fees they had to pay. Holquist, interview by Gregory Jones-Katz, August 24, 2014. Miller emphasizes: “Man (!!!) and His Fictions.” Miller, e-mail to Gregory Jones-Katz, June 24, 2014.

Tzvetan Todorov, *Man* neither cited these theorists nor their work.²⁵¹ Instead, *Man*'s—implied—theory of fiction was a kind of formalism, in that it focused on the underlying purposes of a particular work, but, unlike many formalisms, did not section off the work from historical context or restrict it to a specific tradition. In this regard, *Man*'s theory of fiction was different from French structuralist enterprises and the Anglo-American New Criticism, both of which partitioned prose and poetry (here, loosely defined) from social and political contexts. For instance, Kernan's introduction to *Man* reads: "Fictions are...direct attempts to grapple with and transform an alien, or at least a highly problematical, world. Fiction-making is thus an active force, constantly locked in struggle with the opacity and density of things, the endlessness of time, and the undifferentiated continuum of being."²⁵² For *Man*, fiction-making was a vital power as well as the act to grasp, map, and alter what is unknown, strange. Acts of fiction thus produced not only "the written word and the printed book." Rather, *Man* proposed something radical for its undergraduate readers—that, because fiction-making was a power found in any person, culture, or context, fiction-making was also

that strange but not unfamiliar activity...of employing a variety of media, clay colors, metals, sounds, and movements, as well as words...[Fiction included] everything that man makes, to tools, machinery, buildings, legal systems, and daydreams, as well as to stories, poems, and plays....[T]he elaboration of a systematic philosophy, the design of an automobile, and the telling of a story are different manifestations of the same instinct to construct fictions.²⁵³

²⁵¹ Holquist also taught a course on utopias with Todorov in the 1967. See Vladimir Propp, *Morphology of the Folktale* (Texas: University of Texas Press, 1968); Tzvetan Todorov, *Poetics of Prose* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1977); the essays of *Poetics* were composed between 1964 and 1969; Miller states that "Lit X was a more or less structuralist course on fictions, using Propp's *Morphology of the Folktale*, Barthes' *S/Z*, etc. as part of the readings." Brooks, "Constructing Narrative: An Interview with Peter Brooks," in *Psychoanalysis and Storytelling* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1994), 104-105.

²⁵² Peter Brooks, *Man and His Fictions*, eds. Michael Holquist, and Alvin B. Kernan (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1972), 10.

²⁵³ *Ibid.*

Man's conception of fiction—itself a function of a skeptical attitude and approach to boundaries between high and low, literary and non-literary—burst apart restrictions—whether philosophical, literary, or scientific—on what constituted fiction-making and what fiction-making constituted. Though this idea “may be a bit startling,” Kernan wrote in *Man*, if undergraduates saw fiction-making as an activity basic to all humans, they would be able to identify and understand “a power so pervasive..., so functional in our lives, and so filled with potential for perverting or furthering life.”²⁵⁴ To recognize fiction-making as a universal activity permitted undergraduates to intervene into and take control of their existence as well as understand others' actions.

In one fell swoop, Brooks, Holquist, and Kernan cast fiction—not philosophy, not science, not mathematics—as the foundational way of ordering and comprehending the world. Formulated at a time in America when everything seemed up for grabs, *Man* radically claimed that everything being grabbed was in fact fictional. *Man* therefore responded to the fracturing occurring all around, in and out of New Haven, in that *Man* upended traditional ideas of what fiction was and what fiction could do while at the same time offered an affirmative program. *Man* even startlingly suggested that “[l]iterature” was “simply the most intriguing of fictions,” “the most insightful,” “the most powerful [of] fictions,” as literary works “question their own value even as they demonstrate it, and in this way they become simultaneously fiction and critical theory.”²⁵⁵ Literature was not, as traditionalists maintained, a timeless work free of the vicissitudes of daily life but (like Lit X) simply an, albeit exceptional, instance of fiction-making, in that literature was aware of and reflecting on, its significance.

Man's theory of fiction also inspired its selections. Kernan reflected in 1999 that the textbook “mixed Tarzan of the Apes with Conrad's Mr. Kurtz; Superman with Achilles;

²⁵⁴ Ibid., 10.

²⁵⁵ Ibid., 4.

advertisements with sonnets; *The Thousand and One Nights* with TV soap operas; all in the interest of showing the range of fiction making or storytelling, exploring its importance to individual and social life, trying to define its working principles and locate its purposes high and low.”²⁵⁶ For example, Tarzan and Rousseau were “deliberately picked not only to ‘enhance the study of natural man’ but accentuate for the students, with their similar contents, the differences which historically have deemed one work literary and another ‘trash’.”²⁵⁷ Still, the writings included in the textbook remained within the Western tradition. Lit Xers did not read, for instance, Chinese poetry, which would have been, an undergraduate commented, “a refreshing change.”²⁵⁸ *Man* was also, Kernan reflected, “[i]nauspiciously named,” as feminism became a greater presence on campus. The undergraduate class of 1973 was the first class to have women starting from freshman year. Kernan recalled: “The indignant letters poured in: ‘Where do you hegemonic males get off trying to claim fiction for the phallocracy?’ ‘Why are there so few women writers in this dreadful book?’”²⁵⁹ These students had a good point. *Man* included only one text by a woman: Sylvia Plath’s *Lady Lazarus*.²⁶⁰ Though the X architects intended to universalize fiction-making, to extend the canon to include previously marginalized texts and interests, and decentralize the institutional and intellectual power of professors, Lit X very much remained the product of American literary tradition. And these conventions upheld prejudiced views of women and minority groups. Despite lacking a core and stable content, in other words, Lit X was bound to tradition, remaining within the orbit of that from which it strained to break

²⁵⁶ Kernan, *In Plato’s Cave*, 191.

²⁵⁷ Cohen, 31; *Yale Course Critique 1973*, 114.

²⁵⁸ *Yale Course Critique 1973*, 114.

²⁵⁹ Kernan, *In Plato’s Cave*, 191.

²⁶⁰ *Man*, 520-522. Brooks, Holquist, and Kernan also choose Pop artist Marisol’s *The Cocktail Party* for the cover of their textbook.

free. X engineers' upending of literary tradition remained uncritically burdened by the weight of history.

Though linked to and reinforcing the phallocracy, Lit X did well in 1971, its second year, productively tapping into the skeptical mood at Yale and across America. The course became known among Yale undergraduates as an avant-garde endeavor, its intellectual program, particularly its skeptical techniques of reading prose and poetry, resonating with students. In issues of the *Yale Course Critique*, an annual guide for undergraduates to class selection, undergraduates expressed their views that Lit X to be “stimulating,” a “refreshing change of pace” from the “conventional literature course,” “anything but...mindless,” a clear “alternative to the traditional approach of the Yale English class.”²⁶¹ Lit X, one student reflected,

demonstrated that there was “more to the appreciation and understanding of literature than writing formula papers with beginnings, middles, ends, appropriately witty comments, indented quotations and meaningless concluding paragraphs—the familiar self-indulgent horseshit which is the lifeblood of the Yale English major.”²⁶² To this student, Lit X exploded the

traditional literary devices that guarantee clear and concise communication between author and

reader. And it was exciting. Lit X, another student wrote, ignored “the cobwebs of literary tradition [read: history]” and provided “the freedom to explore new ideas.” The course endorsed “creativity.” Its reading list was as “enormous” as it was “superb and unconventional.” For a

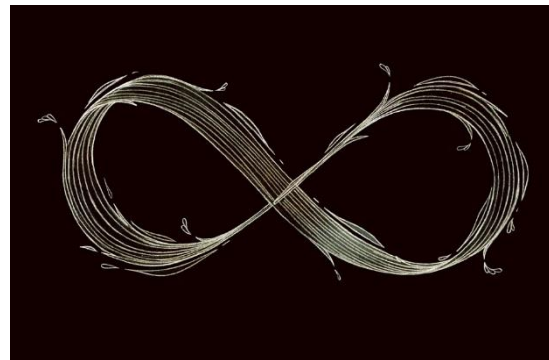


Figure 2.3 In *Man*, students were asked to cut out, along a perforated line, a narrow band of paper to construct a Möbius strip. The Möbius strip drove home the proto-deconstructive point that the inner and outer, the beginning and the end, of fictions (and thus all activities) are a matter of perspective. *Man*, 475.

²⁶¹ *Yale Course Critique* 1972. 45.

²⁶² *Yale Course Critique* 1971, 34. This comment is surely in reference to the third section of the textbook *Man and His Fictions* titled “Beginnings, Middles, and Ends: Putting Things Together.” See *Man*, 307-400.

third undergraduate, Lit X raised issues about literature and the universal role of fiction so profound that they “raised questions about me as well as books.” The student continued: “I hope when I’m 50 years old I will still be able to ask the questions ‘X’ raised for me as a Junior.”²⁶³ Lit X’s proto-deconstructive response to (the) crisis (in literary studies) elicited existential questions from undergraduates. X’s use of skeptical reading practices to productively dismantle institutional and intellectual habits were so penetrating that it resonated long after the bell rang.²⁶⁴

The Lit X classroom experience was a central arena for students’ adoption and adaptation of the courses suspicious techniques for the interpretation of prose and poetry. Undergraduates considered the weekly lectures, “staffed by some of the most brilliant members of Yale’s strongest departments,” as inspiring entertainment.²⁶⁵ Kernan recalled that students “took to the very idea [of X], and it was all very lively, with [Professor of English] Howard Felperin acting out the great apes’ ‘dance of the dum-dum’ from Tarzan; furious discussions of whether *The Story of O* was pornography and if explicit sexual descriptions had a legitimate place in human fictions; whether there was a distinction between outright lies and fiction.”²⁶⁶ Xers’ implementation of skeptical reading practices not only performed the very proto-deconstructive principles of Lit X, but also resonated with the creative destruction occurring in and between town and gown. The X classroom for example echoed revolutionary-inspired and inspiring cultural events in New Haven, including Joseph Heller’s anti-war *We Bombed in New Haven* and *Hair: The American Tribal Love-Rock Musical. Bombed*, a play that had actors pretending to be actors pretending to be airmen, figuratively bombed its fall 1968 premiere at the Yale Drama

²⁶³ Quoted in Holquist, “Literature X,” 14.

²⁶⁴ Despite the many glowing reviews, some students did criticize Lit X. A common criticism was the course’s analysis of literature outside its historical context. Cohen, 31.

²⁶⁵ *Yale Course Critique 1972*, 78.

²⁶⁶ Kernan, *In Plato’s Cave*, 191.

School, while Yale's Shubert Theater showed a pre-Broadway presentation of *Hair*, a play in which politically active, long-haired hippies resist the draft and embrace the sexual revolution.²⁶⁷ While the consideration of pornography and puritan classics side by side with detective stories and commercial advertisements was exciting to students in and by themselves, it was the synergy between the classroom setting, lecturers, the course materials, and undergraduates that permitted Lit X to effectively apply its skeptical—its proto-deconstructive—modes of reading.

In the spring of 1972, Brooks, Holquist and Kernan took an additional step to constructively respond to the crisis of literary studies at Yale, and more broadly in America. A year after the debut of Lit X, they introduced a follow-up course: Literature Y: Introduction to the Theory of Literature. Sponsored and paid for by the German department, the course was presided over by Professor of German and Comparative Literature Peter Demetz, who found it to be “an exhilarating experience (at least for the instructor).”²⁶⁸ Students who were led in Lit X “into a speculative approach to fiction-making in Lit Y were given the elements of a more methodical critical thinking about the ontology of art and the nature of the critical language exercised upon it.”²⁶⁹ Like Lit X, Lit Y was proto-deconstructive in its approach, in that the class trained students to interrogate the definition and boundaries literature and literary study. Unlike Lit X, however, Lit Y focused on methods for the interpretation of literary works and art more generally. Lit Y examined concepts and assumptions present in traditional and contemporary views of literature as a distinctive value in human life. Even more broadly than Lit X, then, Lit Y explored a range of texts customarily overlooked or disregarded in literary study. These ideas and beliefs included:

²⁶⁷ Clive Barnes, “Heller’s ‘We Bombed in New Haven’ Opens,” *New York Times*, October 17, 1968, 51. Holquist, “Literature After ‘X’,” 4.

²⁶⁸ Peter Demetz to Horace D. Taft, letter, May 26 1972, Box 30, Folder 43, Yale College Records of the Dean 1969-1973, Yale Archives, New Haven, Conn.

²⁶⁹ Brooks, “Man and His Fictions,” 47.

Literature, oral tradition, and the media; theories of meaning and interpretation (hermeneutics); questions of genre, with discussion of representative examples, the mixture of forms, and the fusions of various arts. The structure and range of literary value judgments, and a critical analysis of Marxist, psychoanalytic, formalist, and structuralist approaches to literature.²⁷⁰

Lit Y was similar to X in that there were also occasional guest speakers from other departments, including philosophy, linguistics, and religious studies. Despite its achievement, however, Lit Y was a course, like Lit X, without an institutional home, somewhat of an orphan among the language and literature departments. Demetz and others, nevertheless, were “eager to see the program developed to its full and inclusive capabilities.”²⁷¹ They in fact did not have to wait long—the development of an entire undergraduate major based on the proto-deconstructive aim of Lit X was in the works.

Building an X-ey World: Toward the Literature Major

Fresh off of their success with Lit X and Lit Y, Brooks, Holquist, and Kernan decided to meet the challenges posed by the crisis in literary studies in a more programmatic—and university-wide—fashion.²⁷² While Lit X and Lit Y were certainly triumphs—the courses clearly struck a favorable chord with students—Brooks, Holquist, and Kernan felt that the courses remained merely pilots.²⁷³ In order to meet their larger goal to question traditional approaches to literary study and conventional views of literature, X architects went about drafting a proposal for a new undergraduate program—the Literature Major. Throughout 1972, they disseminated a plan of study and set up a governing board, which included: Thomas Fauss Gould (Classics),

²⁷⁰ Peter Demetz to Horace D. Taft.

²⁷¹ Ibid. In a 1969 letter to Kernan, Professor Adam Parry, Chair of Classics, wrote that a “number of our younger men clearly would have liked to be in at the actual formation of [a new literature major].” Adam Parry to Alvin Kernan, letter, December 1, 1969, Box 30, Folder 42, Yale College Records of the Dean 1969-1973, Yale Archives, New Haven, Conn.

²⁷² Holquist, “Literature After ‘X,’” 14.

²⁷³ Kernan to Horace D. Taft, letter, March 10, 1972, Box 30, Folder 43, Yale College Records of the Dean 1969-1973, Yale Archives, New Haven, Conn.

Holquist (Slavics), Brooks (French), Demetz (German), Emir Rodríguez Monegal (Spanish), John Freccero (Italian), and Marie Borroff and Walter Reed (English).²⁷⁴ Though having diverse backgrounds and training, despite hoping to advance different approaches or texts, the central interest in the “making of literature as one of man’s most important and far-reaching efforts to interpret experience, and make the world in which he lives his own” united the governing board.²⁷⁵

The Lit Major—directly inspired by Lit X—helped build an intellectual and institutional home at Yale for the teaching of various proto-deconstructive reading practices. Contrary to the established narrative that the 1970s was a period of fracture, the environment of the Lit Major was as constructive as it was destructive. The program was nevertheless not without its opponents, several of whom occupied powerful positions at the university. While supporters of the Lit Major embraced its interrogation of conventional approaches to literary study and established understandings of literature, these opponents viewed the program as simply destructive, as containing the seeds of a fatal threat that in no way aided undergraduates to recognize the universal presence of literature but exacerbated the very problems Brooks, Holquist, and Kernan aimed to solve. These conservative opponents, in some cases resisting in other cases overlooking the Lit Major’s extension of the categories of literature to all knowledge and modes of existence, hoped to preserve traditional ways of literary study and definitions of literature.

While an anxious mood cast its pall over Lit X, a more generally hopeful atmosphere shaped the development and implementation of the Lit Major, as it was part of a series of

²⁷⁴ Walter L. Reed (English) would eventually serve as the Director of Undergraduate Studies in 1973. See Walter L. Reed to Horace D. Taft, letter, May 22, 1972, Box 30, Folder 43, Yale College Records of the Dean 1969-1973, Yale Archives, New Haven, Conn.

²⁷⁵ “Proposed Program in Literature for Yale College.”

educational reform initiatives in American colleges and universities during the 1960s and early 1970s that aimed to be more inclusive.²⁷⁶ Instead of looking at these other models, however, Brooks, Holquist, and Kernan placed the suspicious mood of Lit X at the heart of the Lit Major. In their proposal, for example, the Lit Major architects explained that the new program, like Lit X, was to be a shared venture of several departments of language and literature. And this shared venture would establish an intellectual and institutional space that transcended the compartmentalization of literature and broke down assumptions about the nature and role of literature.²⁷⁷ The Lit X engineers for instance claimed the Lit Major would satisfy the “keen though vaguely defined desire of our students for a more universal view of their subject matter [literature] and their sense that men everywhere are the same in their basic ways of thinking and doing.”²⁷⁸ While in Lit X course descriptions and its textbook, *Man and His Fictions*, Brooks, Holquist, and Kernan stressed that departmental divisions had obscured literature’s vital, everyday presence, in the circulated Lit Major proposal they claimed that *students* yearned for a universal perspective on literature. The Lit Major architects implied therefore that their curriculum lagged behind and had to catch up to pupils who had already embraced skeptical modes of reading prose and poetry that extended the definition and categories of literature to any and every context. And the Lit Major aimed to satisfy undergraduates’ hunger, once again like Lit X, by disassembling literary study and literature. In place of the traditional kind of coverage found in departments of literature in “which one masters all of the major works or poets which fall within a certain period, or mastery of a historical tradition,” the Lit Major classes would train

²⁷⁶ Gerald Grant and David Riesman, *The Perpetual Dream: Reform and Experiment in the American College* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1978); Joy Rosenzweig Kliewer, *The Innovative Campus: Nurturing the Distinctive Learning Environment* (Phoenix, AZ: Oryx Press, 1999); Katherine Trow, *Habits of Mind: The Experimental College Program at Berkeley* (Berkeley, CA: Institute of Governmental Studies Press, University of California, Berkeley, 1998).

²⁷⁷ Holquist. “Literature X,” 10.

²⁷⁸ “Proposed Program in Literature for Yale College.”

pupils to work toward “defining the outlines of the subject [literature as such],” acquiring a “glimpse of its contents, and understanding major theoretical questions.”²⁷⁹ The Major in Literature, in other words, would school undergraduates’ attend to the universal fact of literature rather than on the particular language in which it is written or the national culture of which it is a part. Similar to Lit X, the Lit Major’s skeptical techniques of reading prose and poetry (as broadly defined as possible of course) and conventional ideas of literature took precedence over historical understanding.

And yet, as with Lit X, a tension existed at the center of the Lit Major. This tension was between the destructive and constructive—the proto-deconstructive—goals of the program. Brooks, Holquist, and Kernan claimed that the new program would not “reduce the value of the canonical works of literature, only...put them in a more lively and advantageous context.”²⁸⁰ Pupils in Lit Major courses would be instilled with respect toward classic literary works but at the same time would universalize literature, discovering it and its central role not merely in, say, Spain or England or Russia or ancient Greece, but in everyday life and at all times everywhere. Put differently: Brooks, Holquist, and Kernan hoped the courses of the Lit Major would collectively “convey [to students] the importance of literature as a life experience”—showing literature as not simply a part of but essential to and as existence itself—and communicate to students that literature is “a source of information and skills nowhere else available”—caring for literature as unique and separate from other areas of knowledge.²⁸¹ The curriculum taught in the Lit Major was to dismantle traditional boundaries separating literature from what was non-

²⁷⁹ “The Major in Literature.”

²⁸⁰ Alexander M. Schenker to Dean Taft, letter, Box 30, Folder 42, Yale College Records of the Dean 1969-1973, Yale Archives, New Haven, Conn.; Kernan, *In Plato’s Cave*, 190; “Detailed Transactions for July, 1972,” memorandum, Box 30, Folder 43, Yale College Records of the Dean 1969-1973, Yale Archives, New Haven, Conn. See Holquist, “Literature X,” Yale Alumni Bulletin

²⁸¹ Holquist, interview by Gregory Jones-Katz, September 7, 2014.

literary, high and low, fiction and non-fiction, but also continued to uphold convention, unwilling to entirely jettison previous definitions of the category of literature. The Lit Major walked a tightrope between revolution and conservatism.

Despite all the upheaval going on in and outside of the Old Campus in the late 1960s and early 1970s, however, the changes in literature departments were not representative of institution-wide reform. For example, Yale's Department of Philosophy in comparison did not attempt much in the way of innovation. And, because the department failed to embrace innovation, it failed to galvanize faculty and undergraduates or create a sense of experiment, the latter something that students, as their responses to Lit X showed, particularly clamored for.²⁸² Instead, the Yale philosophy department was in somewhat disarray throughout the 1970s, the battleground of a decades-long turf war that reflected the larger landscape of American philosophy departments: "humanists" and "metaphysicians" vs. "positivists," "empiricists," and "analytics."²⁸³ This struggle not only created long-term problems for policy in the department, but also prevented any innovation on the scale of the Lit Major.

The crippling department-wide battles in Yale's philosophy department stood in contrast to the grassroots interest in the Lit Major's interrogation of literary studies received in 1972, with a number of professors in various literature departments expressing their support for the circulated proposal.²⁸⁴ The proposal even received official blessing from newly appointed Dean of Yale College Horace Taft, who wrote to Kernan in January about his "enthusiasm and support for the Literature Major" and wagered that "this is the way that most Literature will be taught [in

²⁸² *Yale Course Critique 1971*, 133.

²⁸³ Bruce Kuklick, "Philosophy at Yale in the Century after Darwin," *History of Philosophy Quarterly*, 21 (2004): 336.

²⁸⁴ Jerome J. Pollitt to Horace Taft, letter, Box 29, Folder 12, Yale College Records of the Dean 1969-1973, Yale Archives, New Haven, Conn..

the future].”²⁸⁵ In response, an energized Kernan sent Taft copies of letters from the chairs of the involved literature departments to show the “extensive...backing of the proposed program.”²⁸⁶ There was certainly a feeling among supporters that the Lit Major heralded a much-needed shift in the teaching and study of literature. The proposed Lit Major, for instance, questioned the Western literary tradition, opening it up to non-Western literature. The major’s courses—most drawn from existing classes in departments of literature—were divided into the “History and Development of Western Literature” and “Non-Western Literatures” (the latter group acknowledged as “unfortunately limited”).²⁸⁷ Non-Western Literature courses included: “Chinese Literature in Translation,” “Japanese Literature in Translation,” “The Afro-American Literary Tradition,” and “Anthropological Approaches to Folklore.” By placing Western and Non-Western Literatures under the overarching rubric of Literature, the Lit Major thus expanded the traditional category of literature.

Similar to how Lit X remained reinforced the phallocracy, however, the Lit Major favored a specific definition of what constituted Western literature. For example, the placement of the Afro-American Literary tradition into Non-Western Literature contradicted Brooks, Holquist, and Kernan’s intention to universalize literature. Western Literature seemed to possess a history, while Non-Western Literature and implicitly Afro-America Literary tradition did not. Even to have only two groupings—Western and Non-Western Literature—highlights the Eurocentrism of Yale’s curriculum, because these groupings obscured the differences within each category. Like the tension in the proposed Lit Major between caring for literature as universal as well as unique, a tension existed between the major’s consideration of literature as

²⁸⁵ Horace D. Taft to Alvin B. Kernan, letter, January 14, 1973, Box 30, Folder 43, Yale College Records of the Dean 1969-1973, Yale Archives, New Haven, Conn.; Holquist, “Literature X,” 13.

²⁸⁶ Alvin Kernan to Horace Taft, letter, January 21, 1972, Box 30, Folder 43, Yale College Records of the Dean 1969-1973, Yale Archives, New Haven, Conn.

²⁸⁷ “Proposed Program in Literature for Yale College.”

found in all places and all times and the institutional and intellectual resources for reaching this goal. In other words, the program overturned some aspects of Western literary convention but did not completely destroy it, retaining elements of the biased tradition against Non-Western languages and literatures. This biased tradition was not solely an issue of individuals' prejudice, but structural, part of Yale's almost three hundred year history.

Yale professors of Non-Western literatures nevertheless sensed the potential of the Lit Major and threw their support behind the proposed program. In a letter to Kernan dated April 14, 1972, Professor of Egyptology William K. Simpson expressed that the Lit Major was an "excellent idea." Simpson touted that enrollment in his undergraduate course, "History and Archaeology of Ancient Egypt," had grown in recent years and that he looked forward to including it in future Lit Major course offerings.²⁸⁸ Scholars of East Asian language and literatures also backed the new program. In a letter to Kernan dated March 6, 1972, Professor John Whitney Hall, considered one the twentieth-century's finest scholars of the history of Japan and whose work "opened up the first thousand years of Japanese history to the English-speaking world," expressed that he and other East Asian scholars felt "their researches len[t] considerable support" to the goals of the proposed Lit Major.²⁸⁹ Hall reflected that it "very good news indeed that Yale" was offering a new program in which the East Asian literatures could be "studied as examples of the universal fact of literature" rather than as "isolated phenomena approachable only by the specialist."²⁹⁰ Ever the "de-exoticize[r] of the study of Japan," Hall viewed the Lit Major as a promising avenue through which to popularize East Asian literature.²⁹¹ Hall also

²⁸⁸ William K. Simpson to Alvin Kernan, letter, April 19, 1972, Box 30, Folder 43, Yale College Records of the Dean 1969-1973, Yale Archives, New Haven, Conn.

²⁸⁹ Janny Scott, "John W. Hall, Historian of Japan, Dies at 81," *New York Times*, October 27, 1997.

²⁹⁰ John W. Hall Alvin B Kernan. March 6, 1972, Box 30, Folder 42, Yale College Records of the Dean 1969-1973, Yale Archives, New Haven, Conn.

²⁹¹ Scott.

shared with Kernan the encouraging news that, starting in fall 1973, several new courses, including “The Chinese Novel,” “Classical Chinese Poetry,” and “Critical Approaches to Chinese Literature,” would be open to students with no knowledge of Chinese or Japanese. Departments of East Asian Languages and Literatures thus looked forward to the opportunity to take part in an endeavor that might, they hoped, one day lead to no longer being marginalized. These scholars embraced the Lit Major’s intense interrogation of literary traditions, even if the program did not go as far as they likely hoped.

But making the Lit Major an institutional reality was going to be difficult. Though Brooks, Holquist, and Kernan’s proposal received support in 1972, 1973 marked the beginning of the end of the post-World War II period of growth. OPEC (Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries) began to make large cuts in production, tripling the price of crude and sinking the world into years of recession and double-digit inflation.²⁹² This sudden economic contraction added anxiety to an already uneasy mood in the American academy. Universities soon found themselves hard pressed for funds, and for the first time in decades faced large budget shortfalls. And Yale was no exception—its legendary endowment that seemed to make all things possible no longer up to the mark. New appointments were put on hold and vacancies left unfilled. With continuing hostile town-gown relations added to the mix, Yale’s problems seemed insurmountable, especially to those professors and administrators accustomed to the stability and relative peace of campus life before the late 1960s.²⁹³

The university was in the midst of its economic austerity moves when Brooks and Holquist raised the issue of final approval of the literature major at a Yale College faculty

²⁹² See Jefferson R. Cowie, *Stayin’ Alive: The 1970s and the Last Days of the Working Class* (New Press, 2010).

²⁹³ Kernan, *Plato’s Cave*, 190.

meeting in the spring of 1973.²⁹⁴ Despite having obtained a three-year grant from the Mellon Foundation to fund the large-scale experiment, it was by no means a foregone conclusion that approval would be forthcoming. There was in fact a very real danger that the Lit Major's proto-deconstructive response to the crisis of literary studies might be scuttled. The intellectual and institutional sanctioning of innovative approaches to prose and poetry was being denied in other—more high profile—cases. For example, in 1972, Yale Professor of Classics Erich Segal, who helped script the Beatles' *Yellow Submarine* (1968) as well as authored the best seller *Love Story* (1970) and the seminal academic study *Roman Laughter* (1968), was denied tenure.²⁹⁵ The statement of "his Yale chairman explaining why" questioned "neither his teaching prowess nor the quality of his publications."²⁹⁶ Rather, the powers that be frowned on Segal's courting of both high and low culture. "Mr. Segal does other things besides teach classical literature," Yale Professor of the History of Art Jerome Pollitt told *The New York Times*.²⁹⁷ The implication of course was that one does not mix academic and non-academic pursuits—the boundaries were to be strictly policed. "It wasn't fair," recalled *Doonesbury* cartoonist Garry Trudeau '70, "but you can't dress up in tight leather pants [as Segal] to chat with starlets on Johnny Carson Friday night and expect to be taken seriously in a classroom Monday morning."²⁹⁸ The case of Segal realized the Old Guard's fears that the extra-literary was polluting the sanctity of Yale's hollowed and cultured halls of literature. And the Lit Major's creative destruction of literature and literary studies, such as interrogating the boundary between the inside and outside of the university,

²⁹⁴ Kernan left for Princeton to become their Dean of the Graduate School in the summer of 1972 following a mental breakdown unrelated to his work with the Lit Major.

²⁹⁵ Mark Blankenship, "Erich Segal's Yale Story," March 1 2010, *Yale Alumni Magazine*.

²⁹⁶ Christopher H. Foreman, "Erich Segal: Does He Have a Choice?," *The Harvard Crimson*, May 9, 1972.

²⁹⁷ Quoted in Foreman.

²⁹⁸ Quoted in Blankenship.

between popular and academic texts, must have seemed part of the same damaging trends to the life of the mind.

There had in fact been more than a little disquiet about the proposed Lit Major. Kernan anticipated resistance four years earlier, in 1969: “[T]rials [are] on the way,” he wrote. “It has been a long road to this, but it *is*, I believe, the right road.”²⁹⁹ By spring 1973, a road was built by Lit X, which, after three years of trial and experimentation, had garnered a reputation, and not only among undergraduates.³⁰⁰ In the words of Holquist, Lit X was “a frequent topic over the macaroni and cheese in college dining halls as well as over the sherry at faculty cocktail parties.”

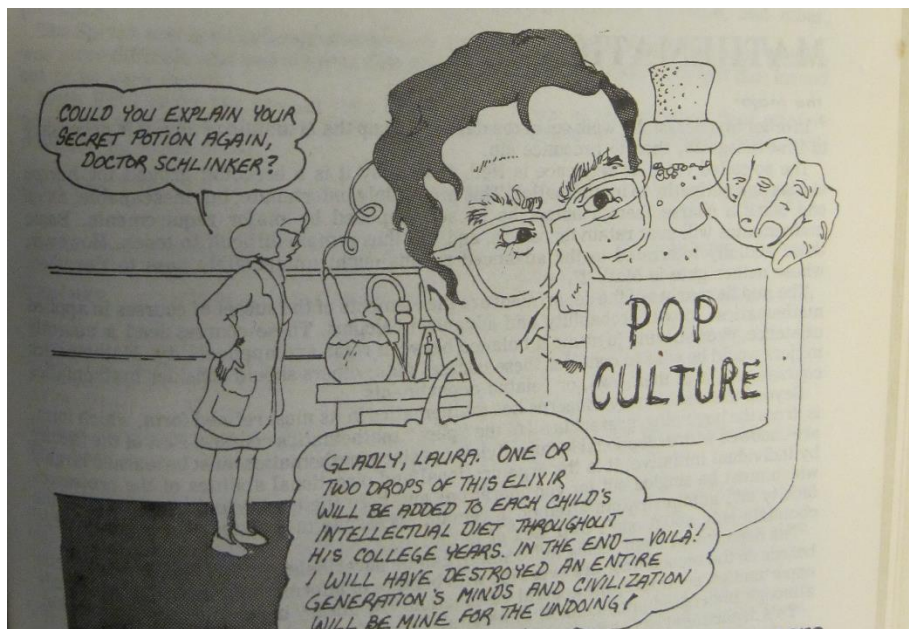


Figure 2.4 A tongue-in-cheek cartoon written and published by undergraduates about the source of Lit X’s power. *Yale Course Critique* 1973, 87.

The “X” in Lit X became a descriptor, a word applied to any lecture or seminar thought to be weird or bizarre at Yale College. Holquist recounts: “Campus language was

briefly enriched in the 1970s by a new adjective: if a course in any subject seemed slightly unusual or modish, it was said not to be ‘too sexy,’ but ‘too X-ey.’³⁰¹ This campus-wide notoriety of Lit X’s reached beyond language and literature departments, shaping the Yale community’s perceptions.

²⁹⁹ Alvin Kernan to Horace D. Taft, letter, May 12, 1969, Box 30, Folder 43, Yale College Records of the Dean 1969-1973, Yale Archives, New Haven, Conn. Emphasis in original.

³⁰⁰ Adam Parry to Alvin Kernan, letter.

³⁰¹ Holquist, “Literature After X,” 5.

For faculty unacquainted with the actual workings of Lit X, however, its reputation as “X-ey” simply fed their presuppositions and suspicions that the course led (and thus the major it inspired would lead) to interpretive excesses, excesses that would ultimately destroy the traditional meaning of literature and prohibit its formal study and teaching. Indeed, when Brooks and Holquist broached the topic of approval of the Lit Major at the spring 1973 faculty meeting, professors came out of the woodwork to charge Lit X with stretching the sense of what is called literature to such a degree that literature was effectively dissolved. Other professors questioned “whether in the long run...Literature will [actually] be taught,” because the word “literature” was in quotation marks throughout the proposal put forward for approval.³⁰² Still other professors criticized Lit X for emphasizing “fashionable and recondite new critical schools...to the detriment of the ‘primary texts’ themselves.” For these critics, Lit X buried (and thus the Lit Major would bury) literature under interpretative models and technical jargon. Related accusations were made that the Lit Major would be coldly scientific, “an attack on the idea of the humanities mounted from within”—a statement in the Lit Major’s proposal that “men everywhere tell the same stories” lent credence to this charge.³⁰³ Several outspoken professors felt that there was not enough emphasis on feelings or ethics, that Lit X reduced literature to a kind of structural anthropology.³⁰⁴ With this last charge, critics probably had in mind the critical fashions drifting over the Atlantic, such as structuralism and its attendant offspring. After all, an essay in the 1966 issue of *Yale French Studies*, the oldest and most prestigious English-language journal in the U.S. devoted to French and Francophone literature and culture, predicted that structuralism was “about to form a dangerous alliance with literary criticism.”³⁰⁵ It was only a

³⁰² Holquist, “Literature X,” 14

³⁰³ Ibid., 10. “Proposed Program in Literature for Yale College.”

³⁰⁴ Brooks, 48.

³⁰⁵ Hartman, “Structuralism: The Anglo-American Adventure,” *Yale French Studies* 36/37 (1966): 148.

matter of time and this time had come. It had come to Yale in the form of Lit X, and now in the shape of the Lit Major.³⁰⁶ Many who had not objected to Lit X felt they had to resist the Lit Major because the new major showed that Lit X was—as its enemies said—“spawning.”³⁰⁷ Lit X’s opponents seemed to sense that it was not simply an undergraduate course but offered a new vision of literary studies that resonated with the turmoil and upheaval inside and outside of the Old Campus. And lurking in the background throughout was a filiation between academic and world politics—a number of Lit X’s opponents were refugees from countries then ruled by Communist governments. They were hawks on issues relating to Viet Nam because of a Cold War hatred of Communism. Many on the other side, those who supported the Lit Major, were in favor of academic change, and were Liberals or mild Leftists of one sort or another.³⁰⁸

But even before the contentious 1973 meeting, senior faculty members voiced disapproval. This disapproval included the relatively mild official response issued from the English department—“The response of the English department to the projected Literature Major is difficult to summarize”—to less restrained petitions circulated by individual faculty.³⁰⁹ The fiercest resistance came from the Old Guard, who, overlooking the constructive aspect of Lit X and the Lit Major, focused on the traditions and institutions they ostensibly destroyed. One of the most vocal opponents was René Wellek, regarded as the founder of Comparative Literature in the United States.³¹⁰ In 1946, Wellek also established as well as chaired Yale’s department of Comparative Literature and then “[f]or a decade and a half directed *all* comparative dissertations

³⁰⁶ Holquist for example contributed an article to 1967 *Yale French Studies* special issue on Literature and Revolution (titled to pay homage to Trotsky’s famous work). Holquist, “The Mayakovsky Problem,” *Yale French Studies* 39 (1967): 126-136.

³⁰⁷ Holquist, “Literature After ‘X,’” 5.

³⁰⁸ Holquist, interview by Gregory Jones-Katz, September 7, 2014.

³⁰⁹ Robert Guinn to Alvin Kernan, letter, March 12, 1972, Box 30, Folder 43, Yale College Records of the Dean 1969-1973, Yale Archives, New Haven, Conn.

³¹⁰ Robert McG. Thomas Jr., “René Wellek, 92, a Professor of Comparative Literature, Dies,” *New York Times*, November 16, 1995.

at Yale, regardless of their subject and field.”³¹¹ Wellek’s intellectual and institutional stature in Yale’s departments of literature was in many ways unmatched. His *Theory of Literature* (1947), a comprehensive analysis of New Critical techniques of reading, “was of inestimable consequence,” a deep influence “upon teachers and students.”³¹² Nevertheless, Wellek was hardly a New Critic, even if he shared affinities with their work. For Wellek, the literary critic must “isolate...the literary work of art,” and “evaluate it by criteria derived from, verified by, buttressed by, as wide a knowledge, as close an observation, as keen a sensibility, as honest a judgment as we can command.”³¹³ For Wellek, however, the study of prose and poetry does not necessitate jettisoning the author’s history and the social context out of which their work is produced. Instead, Wellek argued, the critic “must deploy all of literary theory, criticism, and history to bear upon the evaluation of a work.”³¹⁴

Though catholic in method, Wellek remained a traditional critic in terms of taste and respect for conventions. He vigorously guarded the idea of the literary canon, claiming in 1993 that he “always...analyzed and appreciated the great writers of the past.”³¹⁵ And when Wellek caught wind of Xers’ plans to break down conventional approaches to literary study, he stood up to defend tradition. In a letter to Professor Robert L. Jackson in *Slavic Literature* dated March 14, 1972, Wellek stated that he “support[ed] the general idea of a literature major,...but believe[d] that the course Literature X as now devised has no coherent rationale, as it includes day-dreaming and kinship relations under literature and teaches complete trash such as Tarzan, James Bond and the ‘The Story of O’ to undergraduates who should spend their time reading the

³¹¹ Greene, 40. Emphasis in original.

³¹² Ibid. Wellek co-authored *Theory* with Austin Warren.

³¹³ René Wellek, “Literary Theory, Criticism, and History,” in *English Studies Today* ed. G. A. Bonnard (Bern, Francke Verlag, 1961), 53-65.

³¹⁴ Ibid., 20.

³¹⁵ Wellek, “Memories of the Profession,” in *Building a Profession*, 10.

great works of literature.”³¹⁶ For Wellek, the Lit Major was not objectionable in and of itself, and even noted his support of the goal to transcend national literatures. However, he found Lit X’s overturning of the boundaries between high and low culture, its expansion (at least hypothetically) of literature to include all cultural artifacts, unsound. Wellek wanted to keep popular culture over *there*—outside Yale—and intellectual pursuits *here*—within the ivory walls. The Romantic spirit of the 60s, one might say, did not move Wellek. And according to Wellek, Lit X was not only a waste of time, as it provided a thinned out version of literature, but a failure: “It seems to me a pedagogical sin.”³¹⁷ Wellek’s morally laden objections were certainly part and parcel of his “elitist” vision of literary studies, views that he let widely known in conversation. J. Hillis Miller has recalled that, for Wellek, “Yale undergraduates were not up to doing serious theoretical reflection about literature,” that is, the kind of theoretical reflection and adoption of skeptical reading techniques that students were asked to do in Lit X.³¹⁸ And in contrast to, say, the Professors of Non-Western literatures, Wellek opposed the Lit Major’s emphasis on literature in translation because, from his perspective, translation distorted the text. Fortunate for Brooks, Holquist, and Kernan, Wellek retired in 1972 and was thus absent from the 1973 faculty meeting, turning over literary studies at Yale to a younger generation.³¹⁹

There was also intradepartmental resistance to the Lit Major prior to the contentious 1973 Yale College meeting. This resistance reflected opponents’ disregard of Brooks, Holquist, and Kernan’s aim to creatively destroy literary convention with proto-deconstructive interpretive practices. In a letter to Dean Taft dated February 28, 1972, Professor of Slavic Literature

³¹⁶ Wellek to Professor Robert Jackson, letter March 14, 1972, Box 30, Folder 42, Yale College Records of the Dean 1969-1973, Yale Archives, New Haven, Conn.

³¹⁷ Ibid. Wellek’s opposition to Lit X was apparently long running. Wellek wrote: “I long ago wrote a strong letter to Kernan with the same purport, and I have again reasserted my point of view in a letter to Mr. Peter Brooks.” These letters are not in the Yale archive.

³¹⁸ Miller, correspondence with Gregory Jones-Katz, August 2014.

³¹⁹ Holquist, interview by Gregory Jones-Katz, August 24, 2014. Holquist studied with Wellek and “loved him,” but considered him “an utter elitist, especially when it came to languages.”

Alexander M. Schenker expressed “the view of all of us [in his department] that both Literature X and Literature Y represent stimulating contributions to the general curriculum of the study of literature.”³²⁰ One week later, however, Professors Robert L. Jackson, a “big voice in Slavic,” and Victor Erlich, departmental chair, drafted a letter to Taft. Jackson and Ehrlich declared their objections to “the credo or philosophy of the new program[,]” which “seemed geared almost entirely to ‘Man and his Fictions’.”³²¹ For Jackson and Ehrlich, the Lit Major proposal suggested that fiction—not literature—was the program’s focus.³²² And if this was to be the case, Jackson and Erlich pointed out, then the rationale for affixing the word “Literature” to “Major” was flawed.

Jackson and Erlich also worried that the proposed program excessively concentrated on reading techniques imported from outside literature departments, and, by doing so, polluted the purity of literary studies. These “anthropological and extraliterary interests”—as they put it in their letter to Taft—must have particularly rubbed Erlich, author of the pioneering study *Russian Formalism* (1955), the wrong way.³²³ Though no historical link between Russian Formalism and the New Criticism existed, there were parallels—both examined literature on its own terms rather than the work’s relationship to political, cultural or historical externalities.³²⁴ In their letter to Taft, Jackson and Erlich charged the non-literary ways of reading of Lit X—the inspiration and heart of the Lit Major—with damaging students’ ability to identify and appreciate literature. Jackson and Ehrlich wrote: “What is literature?,” a recent student of Literature X was asked.

³²⁰ Alexander M. Schenker to Horace D. Taft, letter February 28, 1972, Box 30, Folder 43, Yale College Records of the Dean 1969-1973, Yale Archives, New Haven, Conn.

³²¹ Robert L. Jackson and Victor Erlich to Horace D. Taft, letter, March 6, 1972, Box 30, Folder 43, Yale College Records of the Dean 1969-1973, Yale Archives, New Haven, Conn. These views were originally expressed in a letter to Kernan in 1969. This letter however was not in the Yale archive. And Wellek’s letter was, in addition to a platform, also an expression of solidarity with Professor Jackson.

³²² Ibid.

³²³ Ibid.

³²⁴ For a history of Russian Formalism, see Victor Erlich, “Russian Formalism,” *Journal of the History of Ideas* 34 (1973): 627-638.

‘Literature,’ he responded immediately and comfortably, ‘is but an island in a sea of fictions.’ “Literature,” remarked another student of X, ‘is marginal.’”³²⁵ Taking these students’ responses at face value, Jackson and Erlich did not simply overlook Brooks, Holquist, and Kernan’s definition of fiction and literature (as a self-aware fiction). Jackson and Erlich disregarded the constructive aspect of interrogating literature, of positioning prose and poetry as but an example of fiction-making. Jackson and Erlich instead interpreted students’ responses as evidence that the Lit Major would “compound” rather than resolves “the very crisis” that it feel “called upon to resolve.”³²⁶ The Lit Major, in other words, added destruction to already deteriorating intellectual and institutional situation. “[I]t was by no means certain,” Jackson and Erlich wrote, “that the “‘universal’ concerns and theoretical interests of the architects of Literature X respond to the problem.”³²⁷ And, lastly, Jackson and Erlich accused Lit X’s placement of literature within quotation marks, with being overly scientific: “Disturbing... is the arid scientism and quest for the absolute that imbues the concerns of those who would [seek to] isolate the central fact of ‘literature’.”³²⁸ For Jackson and Erlich, the Lit Major, above all Lit X, had to be seriously overhauled before being seriously considered as an addition to Yale College curriculum.

Seeing that some of the big voices brought out the big guns to derail their program, Brooks and Holquist penned an anxious letter on March 15, 1972 to Jackson and Erlich that clarified some of their positions and even invited them to a lecture and discussion section of Lit X. The letter had special importance to Holquist—Erlich was not only his Chair, but also the person who advised his dissertation and the very reason he came back to teach at Yale.³²⁹ But to

³²⁵ Quoted in Jackson and Ehrlich.

³²⁶ *Ibid.*, 3.

³²⁷ *Ibid.*, 2.

³²⁸ Quoted in Holquist, “Literature X,” 15.

³²⁹ Brooks and Holquist to Jackson and Erlich, letter, March 15, 1972, Box 30, Folder 43, Yale College Records of the Dean 1969-1973, Yale Archives, New Haven, Conn.

no avail; Brooks and Holquist were unable to persuade Jackson and Erlich of Lit X's constructive program. Though the records of who said what are lost, one can be fairly certain that it was Wellek, Jackson, and Erlich who laid the groundwork for the criticisms lodged against Lit X and the Lit Major during that Yale College faculty meeting in the spring of 1973. At the meeting, Brooks and Holquist worked to dispel hostility toward and allay suspicions of their program by "acquainting critics with the actual workings of Lit X as a course. It was pointed out that the rumors were exaggerated—X, after all, was the creation of their own colleagues, the men who also taught, say, French 54a, English 33, or Russian 45."³³⁰ The ensuing debate between supporters (who were many) and detractors (who were vocal) even caused professors in the hard sciences, especially the physicists and economists, to "shake their heads" over the overblown antics of their colleagues in the humanities about the new major.³³¹ After this last-minute push against the X engineers and their Lit Major, the Yale College debate ended—and the proposed program passing by a large margin.

Living in an X-ey World: The Legacy of the Literature Major

In 1970, the *Yale Daily News* prophesied: "if Kernan's and Holquist's fictional major [then only a pipe dream] becomes actuality, it will definitely reach beyond itself to other departments and disciplines."³³² By the mid 1970s, the Literature Major had done just that. It was not only being talked about at other universities in the U.S.—the crisis of literary studies that gave birth to the program at Yale was not confined to New Haven. After a piece in *The New York Times* and an article by Brooks in *College English* about the major, requests for information on what was happening at Yale poured in. Programs modeled on the Literature Major soon poured

³³⁰ Holquist, "Literature X," 14.

³³¹ *Ibid.*, 14; "Literature After 'X'," 5.

³³² Cohen, 31.

in. After Claudio Guillen and Dorrit Cohn served on a visiting committee to Yale, and decided the Lit Major was the most interesting thing they found there, their home institution—Harvard—decided to create a Literature Concentration (Guillen and Cohn then tried to persuade Brooks to come to Boston to be part of it—he declined). Though the structure of the Harvard program was different—Harvard used tutorials to cover some of the material—the inspiration and purposes were largely the same.³³³ The Lit Major inspired other universities in not only North America, but across the world as well. When lecturing at the Australian National University in Canberra in the mid 1970s, for example, Holquist stumbled upon a Lit Major modeled on Yale’s at Murdoch University in Perth, Western Australia.³³⁴ Holquist recalled how “exotic a find” the program at Murdoch was—it was the ‘new’ university” and “about as isolated as could be, even in Australia.” During his stint, he even bought a second hand copy, “much marked up,” of *Man and His Fictions*.³³⁵

While the ripple effect of the Lit Major spread outward from New Haven, its proto-deconstructive program quickly attracted large numbers of students. In its third year of existence, the 1975-76 academic year, the program’s 65 majors constituted one of the larger humanities majors in Yale College. And yet, though the major’s popularity stemmed partly from notoriety, which, in any case, was soon toned down, the major’s reputation also resulted from new required courses, soon recognized as among the best and most rigorous in the College. As will be explored in later chapters, there was, beginning in 1976, Literature Z, an undergraduate course designed by Professor of French and Comparative Literature Paul de Man and Professor English and Comparative Literature Geoffrey Hartman that trained students in the new rhetorical

³³³ Brooks, interview by Gregory Jones-Katz, September 7, 2014.

³³⁴ Holquist, “Literature X,” 45.

³³⁵ Holquist, interview by Gregory Jones-Katz, September 7, 2014.

strategies of deconstructive reading.³³⁶ Another factor in the toning down of the major was that the group that administered the program shifted from young maverick professors—Brooks, Holquist, and Demetz—to some of the most respected scholars and teachers of literature at Yale. These literature professors included not only de Man and Hartman, but also John Freccero (Italian), Hillis Miller (English), Emir Rodriguez-Monegal (Latin American), Marie Borroff (English), and George May (French).

And as the Lit Major institutionalized its response to the crisis of literary studies at Yale, the program offered increasingly diverse seminars. These seminars provided a home for courses that young—usually untenured—instructors wanted to teach, but which department heads often felt were too broad or experimental for their official sponsorship. A seminar on the pun, for instance, drew on material from widely different fields (psychology and anthropology) and languages (German for Freud and French for Levi-Strauss). While attractive to the ambitious graduate student, such a curriculum would have had difficulty fitting into the existing departmental programs for undergraduates, as these programs remained focused on historical periods, the author of a series of texts, or a national tradition. In the Lit Major's seminars, however, temporal and spatial mixing became common. A 1975 seminar on "Confession" included a centuries-spanning sequence of works, such as *The Confessions of St. Augustine's*, *Rousseau*. The major thus provided a curriculum proving ground, an experimental space for faculty as well as students. This wind tunnel, however, would have never been able to let courses through if not for the ground broken by Lit X and, of course, the establishment of the Lit Major itself.

By the mid-1970s, the Literature Major also saw its famous letters translated into more administratively acceptable course numbers. Lit X became Lit 120; Lit Y became Lit 300; Lit Z

³³⁶ Culler, 13.

became Lit 130. This transition coincided with the founders of Lit X turning from institutional innovation to other pursuits. Brooks began work on his narratology project, which directly grew out of Lit X. Brooks credited Lit X with “groping towards a course that would talk about narrative as a large literary kind in a...context was very important to my own thinking.”³³⁷ Holquist ended up leaving Yale in 1975, becoming chair of the Slavic departments at the University of Texas and Indiana University; he returned to Yale in 1986, and once again taught in the major that he helped found. In contrast to Brooks and Holquist, who always looked back fondly as being Xers, Kernan later lamented his role in establishing Lit X and the Lit Major. Looking back on these achievements, Kernan considered them to have opened intellectual and institutional doors that should have remained shut.³³⁸ Kernan felt, for example, that Lit X may have shown literature’s relevance to students but also diluted and undermined undergraduates’ sense of what constituted “great literature.” Kernan, in other words, came around to Welles’ position.

The growing respectability of the Lit Major in New Haven also coincided with the increasing influence of Jacques Derrida, who began teaching at Yale in 1975, de Man, Bloom, Hartman, and Miller. Each of these scholars had, as an individual scholar, already played an important role in shaping the new direction literary studies was taking. But, as explored in subsequent dissertation chapters, they became during the 1970s collectively known as the Yale School of Deconstruction, branded, in both the academic and public minds, with the increasing tendency among humanities scholars to use deconstructive reading techniques that not only transgressed boundaries between literature, criticism, and philosophy, but shape a new kind of study. While the phenomenon of the Lit Major coincided with the growing influence of the Yale

³³⁷ Brooks, “Constructing Narrative,” 104.

³³⁸ Kernan, 157.

School, this growing influence also came to mask the important proto-deconstructive groundwork laid by Lit X and the Lit Major during the early- and mid-1970s for the history of deconstruction in the United States. As this history of the establishment of Lit X and the Lit Major reveals, American deconstruction was—or rather, deconstructive reading practices were—not imported from Europe nor not magically spring up via textual dissemination. Rather, the intellectual and institutional home in the Lit Major helped American deconstruction germinate organically out of X-ey Yale soil.

3

A Schwerpunkt in New Haven: The Yale School of DeconstructionIntroduction

Though the camaraderie between members of what became known as “The Hermeneutical Mafia,” or Yale School of Deconstruction—Paul de Man, Harold Bloom, Geoffrey Hartman, J. Hillis Miller, and Jacques Derrida—began at different events and for different occasions during the 1960s, it was not until the early-1970s that these friends began to share the same institutional affiliation—and that institution was of course: Yale University. There—at Yale—the so-called Mafia members, particularly de Man, Hartman, and Miller, extended their earlier-established shared mission to revise formalist stances and style of reading. These hermeneuts of textual suspicion’s innovative methods of reading became what was known in the 1970s as deconstructive literary criticism—those interpretive techniques that focused on the irresolutions, contradictions, and dualities of prose and poetry.

Now, portrayals of the Yale School have repeated a common refrain: the Yale School members—despite being united by their a-historical variations of Derridean deconstruction, despite sharing “a bedrock agreement on the status of literature” as “a privileged mode of discourse,” despite their mutual investments in linguistics and philosophy, despite being central to the revival of the study of European Romanticism in North American departments of literature—despite all this and more, de Man, Bloom, Hartman, and Miller, we have been told, were too different to gather under the same name, riven as they were by philosophical, even temperamental and aesthetic, differences. Seen thusly, the Yale School was chiefly a “phantom formation,” and the notion that there was something called “deconstruction” a logocentric or

metaphysical simplification—ultimately a distortion—of the highly complex constellation of reading practices that went under that name.³³⁹

In contrast to such sketches, this chapter argues that the Yale School was indeed a philosophical school, and a philosophical school in the ancient Greek sense, as the Hermeneutical Mafia used their deconstructive techniques of reading to orient their teaching, writings, and intellectual relationships. To support this claim, this chapter investigates the Yale School members' uses of literature as a *schwerpunkt*, their point of entry or center of gravity, into a number of intellectual and institutional fronts. In addition to Yale's Old Campus, these fronts included: newly-founded North American journals where editors encouraged and authors promoted cutting-edge interpretive techniques, such as *Diacritics* and *Critical Inquiry*; joint publication efforts, either essays, reviews, or books that—rather calculatedly—engaged one another's writings or simply promoted the idea of a “Yale School”—the best example of this front was the Yale School's non-manifesto (and Bloom-orchestrated) 1978 *Deconstruction and Criticism*; and, lastly, undergraduate curriculum at Yale, including de Man's, Hartman's, and Miller's mid- to late-1970s takeover of core courses of the Literature Major, especially de Man and Hartman's development and teaching of Literature Z, a course that provided the most rigorous deconstructive training for undergraduates at Yale and, indeed, the entire world.

This chapter additionally explores how and why Bloom's, de Man's, Hartman's, and Miller's (and to a lesser degree Jacques Derrida's) deconstructive forays were hardly divorced from life or history as is routinely suggested, but always in the thick of things, especially if these

³³⁹ For the suggestion that the Yale School was a “phantom formation,” see Ortwin de Graef, “The Yale Critics? J. Hillis Miller (1928-), Geoffrey Hartman (1929-), Harold Bloom (1930-), Paul de Man (1919-1983),” in *Modern North American Criticism and Theory* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2006), 42, 44. See also Nealon, “Deconstruction and the Yale School of Literary Theory,” in *The History of Continental Philosophy: Volume 6 Poststructuralism and Critical Theory's Second Generation*, ed. Alan D. Schrift (Chicago, The University of Chicago, Press, 2010), 391.

things were those most local of circumstances—Yale and New Haven, and more generally, North American intellectual, cultural, and institutional contexts. De Man's, Bloom's, Hartman's, and Miller's (and again to a lesser extent Derrida's) deconstructive forays during the early-1970s, for example in newly-established journals, resonated with North American scholars' post-1960s hope in the promises that the innovation and modernization of literary studies and humanistic projects held. As the 1970s wore on, however, the Mafia and their colleagues' techniques of suspicious reading began to resonate more with a younger generation of scholars, who distrusted institutions of all forms, political, educational, or religious. And by the time of the Yale School's "official" debut in 1975, the Yale School members' hermeneutics of textual suspicion began to nourish and draw strength from both a local and national atmosphere of crisis.

There was for example the intellectual and institutional vacuum left after the death or retirement of Yale's oldest and most prominent literary scholars. The irony that a number of these literary scholars were practitioners of the very formalist literary criticism that the Mafia had set out to revise should not be lost on readers—students and scholars at Yale in fact implied that the Yale School could and should fill this void. Another context of crisis that the Yale School's formation also coincided with was the widespread insistence on local and national levels on the relevance of literature and language programs and the humanities more generally after the 1973-1975 recession. And, lastly, similar to how the Yale School's formation coincided and resonated with the local and national mood of crisis produced by intellectual changes and financial retrenchment, the Yale School members' undergraduate classes also reverberated with a post-1960s skeptical attitude among undergraduates towards norms and institutions of all types. A key undergraduate class was de Man, Hartman, and Miller's Literature Z course, which instilled pupils with the deconstructive virtues of duality and contradiction. In the longer arc of

the story of deconstruction in the United States, the Yale School members' publications and teaching during the 1970s helped institutionalize distrust of the promise of literary study and humanistic studies in general, specifically by undermining claims of authenticity, naturalness, originality, and primordialness.

Deconstructive Innovation at Yale University

Before using literature as a *schwerpunkt* to launch their deconstructive forays into a number of fronts, and before doing so as the “Yale School of Deconstruction,” Hermeneutical Mafia members had to actually begin to teach and work on the Old Campus, not only the oldest area of Yale’s campus and the primary residence of Yale College freshman but where the offices for several humanities departments were located, including Classics, English, Comparative Literature, and Philosophy. A central member of the Yale School and who ended up teaching and working on the Old Campus by the early-1970s was Paul de Man, whom Marxist literary critic Frank Lentricchia would notoriously call in 1980 the “*capo di tutti capi*”—the Godfather or “boss of all bosses” of the Yale School. Indeed, it always seemed to those outside de Man’s inner circle that he had privileged access to the levers of institutional power and that he practiced his techniques of suspicious reading with an unmatched authority, a gravitas that Lentricchia called a “rhetoric of authority.”³⁴⁰

Though de Man’s advent in New Haven ended up being something of a coup for Yale, there was a major obstacle that almost halted his arrival. In 1969, while teaching at the University of Zürich, an institution he worked for part of the academic year as a Professor Ordinarius (the highest rank in German speaking countries), de Man received word that Yale University wanted to offer him a tenured Professorship jointly held in French and Comparative Literature. The offer however came with a stipulation: de Man must publish a book. At the time,

³⁴⁰ See Lentricchia’s chapter “Paul de Man: The Rhetoric of Authority,” 282-317.

though de Man had published highly-regarded essays in the most respected journals in his fields of French and Comparative Literature, he had yet to publish a full book manuscript. De Man's friend and former Cornell colleague Geoffrey Hartman, who had moved to Yale in 1967 to assume a joint Professorship in English and Comparative Literature and had just entered his fourth decade at the time of Yale's offer to de Man, relayed to his friend how important publishing a book was to help secure de Man's new position.³⁴¹ Yale's administration and the more conservative members of Yale's departments of literature, Hartman told de Man, would simply not allow tenure to be awarded without the publication of a major book.

Unbeknownst to de Man's colleagues at Yale or elsewhere for that matter, the reasons for de Man's lack of a book-length manuscript rested in his private struggle with the mistakes of youth, with the fact that he placed his writing as a young man in the service of politics (the existence of de Man's collaborationist writings would not be publically known until 1987). In 2011, one of his Cornell undergraduates recalled "an obsessive, strange aspect to [de Man]. He spoke over and over again of publishing too soon...of the 'shame' that ensued when that happened."³⁴² De Man's classroom behavior is comprehensible when placed in the context of his private mission to control—and clearly felt disgraced when he did not—the dissemination of his writings. In addition, though his Cornell students and colleagues expected de Man to produce a "great book on romanticism," his book would and in a way could never come. Rather, the essay form—the very genre of his youthful misdeeds—had become the life-long conduit for his self-conversion to an author who understood why and how he made his earlier political mistakes.

Regardless, when the time came for de Man to make a decision about Yale's demand—a demand that, one should note, was and the standard requirement for receiving tenure at a major

³⁴¹ Alvin B. Kernan to de Man, May 25, 1970, The Paul de Man Papers, The Critical Theory Archive, The University of California-Irvine.

³⁴² Jack Foley, "Paul de Man and the Cornell Demaniacs," *E-ratio Editions* 7 (2011): 13.

university—de Man took Hartman’s suggestions. He gathered a batch of his published essays, which he left unaltered, wrote an introduction to his projected volume, and voilà *Blindness and Insight: Essays in the Rhetoric of Contemporary Criticism* (1971), was launched into the North American literary-critical community. De Man resigned from his Professorships at the Johns Hopkins University and University of Zürich posts, and left for Yale, where he assumed, at the age of 51, the position of Professor of French and Comparative Literature in 1970. De Man would hold this post for the rest of his career, indeed until his death in 1983.

De Man’s advent at Yale—proudly announced in the Sept 14, 1970 issue of the *Yale Daily News*—came in the middle of a period of much innovation, turmoil, and change at Yale and the Elm City more broadly. As explored in Chapter Two, 1969 saw the first female undergraduates, while 1970 saw New Haven Black Panthers trials and the first year of the experimental course Literature X, the class that first taught proto-deconstruction stances and style of reading prose and poetry to undergraduates.³⁴³ In the midst of all these events was de Man’s first lecture at Yale, which not only exemplifies the role that his innovative stance and style of reading poetry and prose played in the formation of what became the Yale School. De Man’s lecture also demonstrates how his confidence in his techniques of suspicious reading resonated with the atmosphere of experimentation at Yale and in New Haven, and reverberated with scholars’ sense of the hope and promise in advanced literary criticism and theory.

De Man’s arrival was, first of all, highly anticipated. In his 2014 memoir, Howard Felperin, then Assistant Professor of English and Shakespearean scholar at Yale, recollected: “De Man’s advent, like that of the fabulous Godot, had been anticipated with an air of heightened expectation....[And] [w]hen de Man, unlike Godot, finally arrived, he did not

³⁴³ See “Faculty Briefs,” *Yale Daily News*, Sept. 14, 1970, 4.

disappoint.”³⁴⁴ Felperin recalled that de Man’s inaugural lecture, “unusually attended by almost everyone,” was a “dazzling explication” of French symbolist poet Stéphane Mallarmé (1842-1898).³⁴⁵ More than simply dazzling, de Man’s lecture was for all intents and purpose the first deconstructive foray at Yale. In his notes for his Mallarmé lecture, de Man pondered ways to introduce Derridean influences into his own stance and style of reading—which on several pages of his notebook he called “rhetorical deconstruction.” At one point in his notes, de Man juxtaposed Mallarmé’s poems *Un Coup de Dés Jamais N’Abolira Le Hasard* (“A Throw of the Dice will Never Abolish Chance”) and *Igitur* with quotes from Derrida’s 1968 essay “Différance.”³⁴⁶ But, significantly, it was not only Derrida whom de Man used to craft his “rhetorical deconstruction” for his first lecture at Yale. De Man was also thinking about Hartman, specifically Hartman’s Wordsworth. “[C]ontra Hartman,” de Man wrote, “writing is only possible by a leap into fiction, what in the case of autobiography is a leap into madness.”³⁴⁷ While not directly pertinent to Mallarmé’s poems, de Man’s comments in his notebooks show him working with and through the work of his future colleagues. Likely because of de Man’s advanced approach—his “rhetorical deconstruction”—de Man’s lecture was, Felperin also remembered, “greeted with...admiration and bafflement” and in this regard resonated with the atmosphere of experimentation at Yale; experimentation, whether or not in the reading of poetry, always involves a share of wonder and confusion.

Nevertheless, despite—or indeed perhaps because of—being welcomed with some awe and dose of bafflement, de Man’s interactions with future colleagues during the meet and greet

³⁴⁴ Felperin, *In Another Life*, 62.

³⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 61.

³⁴⁶ De Man, Box 12, Folder 1 Work journal: Rousseau, Mallarmé, Wordsworth, Autobiography, The Paul de Man Papers, The Critical Theory Archive, The University of California-Irvine. See also de Man, “Lyric and Modernity,” in ed. Reuden A. Brower, *Forms of Lyric* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1970), 151-176.

³⁴⁷ De Man, Box 12, Folder 1 Work journal: Rousseau, Mallarmé, Wordsworth, Autobiography.

succeeded in persuading audience members to adopt his techniques of suspicious reading. Following de Man's Mallarmé talk, for example, Hartman took the occasion to introduce Felperin, Hartman's colleague in Yale's Department of English, to de Man, Hartman's friend and with whom Hartman hoped to continue their joint mission to revise and reform formalist methods of reading prose and poetry. Felperin has reckoned that the interaction between himself and de Man went along the following lines: "It's a pleasure to meet you," [Felperin] said [to de Man], extending [his] hand. 'I've read most of your work and enjoyed it immensely.'" De Man however did not let his guard down in public events such as this one—he instead launched a response shaped by his techniques of suspicious reading back at Felperin: 'You enjoyed it?' [de Man] replied, taking [Felperin's] trembling hand. 'Then,' [de Man] added almost wickedly, 'you couldn't have understood it.'"³⁴⁸ Certainly, a less charismatic individual (de Man) would have simply offended their interlocutor (Felperin) with the suggestion that said interlocutor did not understand. De Man succeeded in doing the opposite—he made Felperin into a disciple of sorts, a follower who saw in de Man an almost spiritual guide. After de Man's accusation against Felperin's, Felperin has recalled: "I burst out laughing. The ice was broken. I felt myself in the presence of a man who had something to teach as few others did. After that meeting, Paul became my mentor, displacing Geoffrey [Hartman] from that exalted role in my mental life."³⁴⁹ The fact that Felperin replaced Hartman, by then deeply respected in the North American literary-critical community for his interpretations of William Wordsworth and inventive readings of English Romantic Poetry, with de Man speaks volumes about de Man's ability to transform listeners of his lectures into followers of what became the philosophical school of the Yale School. Over the course of the first half of the 1970s, Felperin—and many of de Man's

³⁴⁸ Felperin, *In Another Life*, 63.

³⁴⁹ *Ibid.*

colleagues—learned a great deal about how to apply de Man’s—or at least variations of de Man’s—techniques of suspicious reading.

After his advent at Yale, de Man did not waste time, and set about building new and strengthening older intellectual alliances. One New Haven front from which de Man launched his rhetorical deconstructions was guest speakers. Always the shrewd tactician, de Man offered his friend Jacques Derrida the opportunity to give a lecture on the theme “Literature and Psychoanalysis” for Yale’s Comparative Literature Colloquium, which de Man and Hartman jointly ran. De Man’s and Derrida’s comradeship had deepened since the 1966 Hopkins Symposium and the 1969 Bellagio conference, not to mention the publication, later famous among those in the deconstructive camp, of de Man’s essay “The Rhetoric of Blindness” on Derrida’s reading of Rousseau in *Blindness and Insight*. But, if de Man, in his own way, was steeped in Derridean thought, “Derrideanism” was only slowly spreading across humanities departments in the North American academy in the late-1960s. Derrida’s name—and the mystique of his deconstructive reading practice—was limited to small circles, above all language and philosophy departments where literary criticism and theory were hot topics—Yale, Cornell, Johns Hopkins.³⁵⁰

This limited reception resulted partly because Derrida taught in French, as in the seminars he delivered in Baltimore, and so only a restricted number of students—of whom the vast majority were members of French literature or Comparative Literature departments—could follow his lectures. Derrida’s limited reception was also simply because his writings were unavailable in English.³⁵¹ In the early-1970s, if an North American reader encountered Derrida’s work, then they had likely read one of three texts: *The Prison-House of Language*, Marxist

³⁵⁰ Rapaport, *The Theory Mess*, 7.

³⁵¹ Peeters, 227.

Fredric Jameson's 1971 overview of French intellectual currents; the 1972 paperback edition of the 1966 Johns Hopkins Structuralist conference, which included Derrida's "Structure, Sign, and Play in the Discourse of the Human Sciences"; or the 1973 English translation of *Speech and Phenomena: And Other Essays on Husserl's Theory of Signs*, a collection of Derrida's writings that included his 1967 deconstructive reading of the work of German philosopher Edmund



Figure 3.1 Paul de Man and Jacques Derrida, New Haven, 1978. De Man was Derrida's closest friend in intellectual life during the 1970s and early-1980s.

Husserl and Derrida's essay 1968

"Différance."³⁵² Though these texts included either discussions of Derrida's work and/or one of his texts, each failed to generate much heat, to encourage many North American readers to adopt his deconstructive stance and style of interpretation.³⁵³ Added on top of all of this was

Derrida's more or less non-reception among

North American philosophers, the exception was a group of phenomenologists at Northwestern University for whom Derrida's writings offered a new and seductive way of formulating traditional hermeneutic questions. Though Derrida was trained as a philosopher, he was a philosopher coming out of the continental tradition. As such, Derrida's deconstructive stance and style of reading in which the reduction of the meaning of phenomena to what is present-to-mind is revealed as co-existing with absent meanings either jarred with or was completely unintelligible to those members of the ostensibly straight-talking and plainspoken philosophical

³⁵² The major translations of Derrida's writings in fact would have to wait until the mid-1970s, as with, most notably, Gayatri Spivak's translation of *Of Grammatology*. Derrida, *Speech and Phenomena: And Other Essays on Husserl's Theory of Signs*, ed. Newton Garver, trans. David B. Allison (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1973); Fredric Jameson, *The Prison-House of Language* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1971).

³⁵³ For a sociological explanation of the intellectual, cultural, institutional, and social conditions that legitimized Derrida's work in France and the United States, see Michèle Lamont, "How to Become a Dominant French Philosopher: The Case of Jacques Derrida," *American Journal of Sociology* 93 (1987): 584-622.

camp: the Anglo-American philosophical tradition. Derrida's work for these reasons largely fell on deaf ears; little Anglo-American ink was spilt engaging his hermeneutic of suspicion.

Nevertheless, Derrida, thanks to de Man, was to get a favorable hearing in New Haven. In fact, de Man, always searching for ways to innovate interpretive methods, to press formalist techniques of reading prose and poetry to its limits, assured Derrida that, unlike what had happened when Derrida visited Yale in 1968 during his first whirlwind trip to the U.S., Derrida would have a "passionately interested audience" who read his work beforehand and had prepared for his visit.³⁵⁴ Having already begun to make weekly trips to other North American universities while giving his seminars at Johns Hopkins, Derrida accepted de Man's offer. And in 1972, Derrida delivered his lecture, "The Purveyor of Truth," a draft of the published text of the same name, to the delight of the assembled audience—at least from de Man's point of view.³⁵⁵ De Man was pleased with Derrida's lecture, and believed that audience members understood and enjoyed it.

Others remember Derrida's presentation differently. According to Jeffrey Mehlman, then a graduate student in French Literature at Yale (he earned his Ph.D the same year as Derrida's lecture), Derrida's lecture was a deconstructive foray gone awry: "Speaking about [Sigmund] Freud, Derrida, well into his lecture, cited...a rather impressive paragraph by [Swiss literary critic] Jean Starobinski. The aim was to set up the most impressive of fall guys for the deconstructive assault. So impressive was Starobinski's rhetoric, however...and so late the hour that the audience erupted into applause at what they took to be the conclusion of the lecture. I still recall Derrida's hapless shrug at the misdirected applause whose recipient he was. He agreed

³⁵⁴ De Man to Derrida, October 13, 1971. Box 10, Folder 7 Correspondence: Jacques Derrida, The Paul de Man Papers, The Critical Theory Archive, The University of California-Irvine.

³⁵⁵ See Jacques Derrida and Jeffrey Mehlman, "Freud and the Scene of Writing," *Yale French Studies* 48 (1972): 74-117.

that his lecture was over.” From Mehlman’s perspective, Derrida did not so much delight the audience—not to mention convince them to adopt his deconstructive stance and style of interpretation—as cause bewildered. Mehlman also remembered the sweet irony—appropriate considering de Man and Derrida’s aims—of Derrida’s reaction to his audience’s misdirected approval: “Derrida’s first champion in New Haven, Jacques Ehrmann [chair of the French Department, Mehlman’s doctoral advisor, and, one should recall, the organizer of the 1965 Yale Colloquium on Literary Criticism], who lay dying of kidney failure during that lecture, would have savored the moment. His favorite maxim: ‘Quand on voit un couillon dans l’erreur, on l’y laisse [When you see a fool in error, let him be].’”³⁵⁶ And Derrida had let his audience be.

Yet, that Derrida’s presentation—steeped in philosophical, literary, and psychological traditions—caused a mixture of respect and bewilderment in his audience did not mean that Derrida’s lecture simply and uncannily mirrored the Yale community’s reaction to de Man’s inaugural lecture. Nor does this combination of respect and bewilderment speak simply to the lack of general understanding of Derrida’s project in the larger New Haven community and among members of the Yale’s departments of literature. Rather, the combination of respect and bewilderment towards Derrida after his 1972 lecture resonated with the atmosphere of experimentation at Yale, in New Haven, and in North American academy. Though individuals in Yale’s literature departments during the early-1970s were not exactly sure what Derrida was arguing, their response to Derrida’s paper illustrates their willingness to embrace vanguard interpretive tactics, whatever they were and whatever their aim. Though Derrida’s first inroads into the North American academy were not to be through departments of philosophy, they were,

³⁵⁶ The *Yale French Studies* issue “French Freud: Structural Studies in Psychoanalysis” was dedicated to Ehrmann. See, “In Memoriam: Jacques Ehrmann, 1931-1972,” *Yale French Studies* 48 (1972): 3. Mehlman, 76.

with and alongside de Man, Hartman, and eventually Miller, to be through departments of literature, specifically the Comparative Literature Department at Yale.

While Felperin and others—including Hartman, de Man’s former colleague at Cornell University from 1965 to 1967—began to enjoy de Man’s presence at Yale, Miller lamented de Man’s absence in Baltimore. Nevertheless, even after de Man’s triumphant arrival at Yale, Miller and de Man continued their shared mission to solve the “problem” of the limits of formalist reading methods. In an October 11, 1971 letter to de Man, Miller informed his former colleague about the state of Hopkins’ English Department, the intellectual culture in Baltimore, and his continued refinement of his deconstructive stance and style of reading.³⁵⁷ From the D-level of Milton S. Eisenhower library, the deepest region of the library and where the humanities stacks were located, Miller reported: “Things are going well enough here this fall. The English department is solid as a rock as usual, and [Professor of English] Earl [Wasserman], having finished [English Romantic poet Percy] Shelley off for good, is deep in [William] Wordsworth, so we have something to talk about (I trying to subvert his metaphysics and mimetism; he now interested in ‘living rocks’).”³⁵⁸ De Man’s absence in Baltimore was a personal and professional loss for Miller, though Miller consoled himself with the fact that de Man was to participate in an upcoming Hopkins conference on French poet, essayist, and philosopher Paul Valéry (1871-1945).

Still, while Miller lost de Man’s direct presence in Baltimore, he continued to enjoy and learn from de Man and from Derrida. He specifically continued to adapt his interpretive methods to their work. Derrida in fact continued his lectures at Hopkins, something that Miller was grateful for and benefitted from. In the above-mentioned letter to de Man, Miller, though he

³⁵⁷ Miller to de Man, Letter, October 11, 1971, Box 31 Folder 26 Correspondence, J. Hillis Miller Papers, The Critical Theory Archive, The University of California-Irvine, 1.

³⁵⁸ Ibid.

lamented de Man's absence, also wrote of the benefits he drew from Derrida's presence: "The best part of the fall [of 1970], however, has been the presence of Derrida, with whom I lunch pretty often and whose lectures I've been attending, the ones on Freud especially valuable for me in my own work, which has been going pretty well."³⁵⁹ Derrida, who lectured a year later in New Haven at de Man's request and in Hartman's Comparative Literature Colloquium, still provided Miller with deconstructive tactics to appropriate for Miller's readings of prose and poetry. Derrida's Hopkins lectures on Freud offered Miller instruments for his own project—Derrida specifically provided Miller with a deconstructive Freud, one whose insights into the compulsion to repeat and iterability in signification aided Miller with his own deconstructive project. Miller would have had to learn a deconstructed Freud from Derrida and not de Man, as de Man always avoided psychoanalytic theories of any kind, because he believed psychoanalytic theories imputed hidden causes to language rather than focus on language itself, and, for de Man, the assignation of hidden causes to language absolved the reader from only and exclusively attending to language itself.

Miller was drawing closer not only Derrida's project in the early-1970s, but de Man's as well. De Man's writings were also greatly shaping Miller's way of readings texts. In his October 11, 1971 letter to de Man, Miller reported that de Man's most recent essays collected in *Blindness and Insight* helped Miller as well as encourage his graduate students to adopt the stance and style of suspicious interpretation. Alluding to de Man's essay "Criticism and Crisis"—the same essay Felperin recalled during his first meeting with de Man in New Haven—Miller wrote: "In all this it has been a great help to have your book in hand, both for my own reading and rereading..., and for sending my students to."³⁶⁰ Like he had begun at the 1965 Yale

³⁵⁹ Ibid.

³⁶⁰ Ibid., 2.

Colloquium on Literary Criticism and which he continued to do after de Man moved to JHU, Miller was in a sense studying under de Man, embracing deconstructive principles derived from de Man's work for Miller's own interpretive methods. And the last sentence of Miller's letter to de Man reveals how close Miller, de Man, and Hartman, the latter now de Man's colleague in Yale's Comparative Literature department, had become: "All best to you, Geoffrey, etc."³⁶¹ Miller clearly wanted, by whatever means, to continue their shared mission, which they had begun at Ehrmann's 1965 New Haven conference, to solve the "problem" of literary formalism, a method for reading prose and poetry that had, even in the early-1970s, considerable institutional power in Anglo-American departments of literature. This shared project was clearly developing, at least from Miller's perspective, into a deconstructive one.

A Different Front: Literary-Critical Journals

Though de Man parted institutional ways with Miller and Derrida when he left Hopkins for Yale in 1970, this sundered Ur-Yale School eventually found itself reconstituted—at least textually. In the early-1970s, members of the future Hermeneutical Mafia informally launched collective deconstructive forays into the North American literary-critical scene from newly-established journals devoted to innovative work in literary studies and the humanities. Much like in literature and language departments at Hopkins and Yale, these journals and the future Yale School's essays drew intellectual and institutional support from and contributed to an atmosphere of experimentation and hope. Miller, Harold Bloom (more on him later), and Hartman for example published essays—though each independently and almost never in the same issue—in

³⁶¹ Ibid.

New Literary History.³⁶² Ralph Cohen, who founded *NLH* in 1969, reflected in the first issue that the journal intended to fill “the need to reexamine the nature, interpretation and teaching of literary history, especially in the face of the current rejection of history either as guide to or knowledge of the present.”³⁶³ While Cohen did not explicitly say so, the *NHL* editors’ aims responded to the various methodological challenges to traditional literary history during the late-1960s, including those from Marxists and the New Left. As explored in earlier chapters, these challenges often involved interrogating the hegemonic New Critical technique of reading in which prose and poetry were viewed as a quasi-organic unity of opposite meanings that defied absorption into any historical or social context. Scholars’ questioning of the New Critics’ interpretive methods that removed literature from the influence of history helped stimulate a disciplinary renewal of sorts, a renewal that included the development of Lit X and the Lit Major at Yale and the establishment of journals such as *New Literary History*, journals that reached a readership that cut across the North American literary-critical community.

Future Yale School members were part of this renewal in North American literary-critical circles, though they used their journal articles to do more than participate in the widespread challenge in literary studies to traditional literary history and the hegemony of the New Criticism during the early-1970s. The Mafia used their journal essays to advance their own personal techniques of suspicious reading. And their journal essays’ rhetoric of radical newness—sometimes espoused by the Mafia’s allies, sometimes by the Mafia themselves—reflected and encouraged a sense of shared purpose between the individuals who became the philosophical school of the Yale School as well as with others of the literary-critical vanguard. And in this

³⁶² See for example Hartman, “History-Writing As Answerable Style,” *New Literary History* 2 (1970): 73-83; Miller, “The Still Heart/Poetic Form in Wordsworth,” *New Literary History* 2 (1971): 297-310; Bloom, “Clinamen or Poetic Misprision,” *New Literary History* 3 (1972): 373-391.

³⁶³ Ralph Cohen, “A Note on *New Literary History*,” *New Literary History* 1 (1969): 6.

regard, the future Yale School members' contributions to newly established journals were part of a North America tradition bubbling up into literary criticism and theory, an Emersonian tradition of renewal, individualism, and self-sufficiency.³⁶⁴

Take for example some of the contributions to the journal *diacritics*, established in 1971 at Cornell University, though published by the Johns Hopkins University Press, and which was part of that wave of literary-critical journals that sprang up after Cohen's *NLH* was founded in 1969. Similar to *NLH*, *diacritics* aimed to provide a forum for the reconsideration of the goals and methods of the humanities, specifically promoting a reflexive approach to literary theory and criticism, Continental philosophy, and political thought. Editors' stress on *diacritics*' "reflexive approach" positioned the journal as a place for the kinds of techniques of suspicious reading advanced by de Man, Hartman, Miller, and Derrida. Indeed, *diacritics* became an important organ during the 1970s for the dissemination of not only the future Yale School's work, but also commentary on or reviews of their writings. And several years before the creation of the "Yale School," the Mafia members' publications in *diacritics* formed a loose—textual—association between future Hermeneutical Mafia members, drawing similarities between their intellectual concerns and interpretive methods.

The Spring 1972 issue of *diacritics* for instance contained a review by North American literary critic Alexander Gelley of Derrida's 1967 *De la grammatologie*, which at the time remained untranslated and meant that it was more or less inaccessible to Anglophone readers, not to mention the majority of North American philosophers.³⁶⁵ Gelley's review is an early example of a literary critic outside of the Ur-Yale School who not only took interest in Derrida's project, but also promoted Derrida and his style and stance of suspicious reading to North American

³⁶⁴ See Sacvan Bercovitch, *The Puritan Origins of the American Self* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1975).

³⁶⁵ Alexander Gelley, "Form as Force," *Diacritics* 2 (1972): 9. American readers would have to wait until 1976 for Gayatri Spivak's translation of Derrida's *De la grammatologie*.

literary-critical circles. Gelley began his review with a comment on the shifting relationship that contemporary literary critics have with philosophy: “When literary critics turn to philosophy today [in 1972] it is...part of a new reflection on the foundation of their own discipline. For in spite of the varied and sophisticated approaches that have become available in the last years, there is a widespread sense of uncertainty, even anxiety, regarding the present juncture of criticism as a whole.”³⁶⁶ The explosion of sophisticated approaches for literary criticism—marxist, psychoanalytic, structuralist, etc.—did not impart a sense of confidence or assurance to literary critics, but perhaps added to it. And Derrida’s significance, according to Gelley, rested preciously there: in his ability to address literary critics’ doubts and anxieties about the underpinnings of their own discipline. Gelley’s Derrida revitalized literary critics’ sense of mission, a sense threatened both by what Ralph Cohen in his introduction to the first issue of *New Literary History* called “the current rejection of history” and, more broadly, literature critics’ growing discontent with New Criticism. Because he addressed the task of reading in its totality, because he submitted all reading of his deconstructive stance and style of interpretation, Derrida, Gelley suggested, could be a master thinker, a philosopher who could have, as philosopher Tom Rockmore wrote about Martin Heidegger’s influence on French philosophy, “an organizing or centralizing effect on the later discussion[s],” in this case, North American literary criticism, as Derrida’s views, like Heidegger’s, could “not only influence the debate,” but “define the boundaries within which it takes place, provide it with a focal point and stake out the positions that may be taken up by the contenders.”³⁶⁷ From Gelley’s perspective, Derrida could (and should) be the lodestar for those North American literary critics anxious about the foundations of their scholarship, about the activity of interpretation.

³⁶⁶ Gelley, 9.

³⁶⁷ Tom Rockmore, *Heidegger and French Philosophy: Humanism, Antihumanism and Being* (London and New York: Routledge, 1995), 25.

Though the Spring 1972 issue of *diacritics* contained Gelley's review of *De la grammatologie*, reviews of or work by future Yale School members dominated the Winter 1972 issue. This issue for example included Richard Klein's "Prolegomenon to Derrida," an introduction to Derrida's work, itself preceded by an interview with Derrida originally published in the French journal *Promesse*.³⁶⁸ In his review, Klein cast Derrida in terms similar to Gelley and aimed to convince readers to adopt Derrida's interpretive methods. A newly-minted Ph.D., Klein summarized in his "Prolegomenon to Derrida" the basic parameters of Derrida's endeavor: "Derrida's project...is to escape the systematic constraints of Western metaphysics, to disrupt it and disorganize it, while acknowledging the necessity of staying within it, inhabiting it, mobilizing the resources of its language against itself."³⁶⁹ Though he cast Derrida as a kind of intellectual rebel, Klein also portrayed Derrida as a dissident who at the same remained dedicated to traditional meaning and history. Outside of New Haven, off the Old Campus, in new journals such as *diacritics*, North American literary critics helped to textually assemble the philosophical school that became the Yale School.

Diacritics published new and important essays by Miller and de Man in addition to publishing reviews of or about future Yale School members' writings during the early-1970s. Even though there was yet to be an official collaboration, these *diacritics* essays helped textually gather the Yale School together and produced—at the very least the impression of—a joint deconstructive front on the North American literary-critical scene. In the case of Miller, 1972 saw both his first deconstructive expedition into *diacritics* and a major professional development—at the age of 44, after 19 years at Johns Hopkins, Miller assumed the position of Professor of English at Yale University. In 2015, Miller recounted that he moved to New Haven

³⁶⁸ "Interview: Jacques Derrida," in *Positions*, 35-43.

³⁶⁹ Richard Klein, "Prolegomenon to Derrida," *diacritics* 2 (1972): 31-32.

for professional and personal reasons: “[W]e at Hopkins had the belief that the Yale English Dept. was the best in the country, had superb students both undergraduate and graduate. A number of my colleagues in other departments had left Hopkins for Yale, [American historian] C. Vann Woodward for example. I was [also] attracted by once again having de Man as a colleague, not to speak of [Maynard] Mack, [Cleanth] Brooks, [Robert Penn] Warren, [Geoffrey]



J. HILLIS MILLER
Department Chairman

Figure 3.2 Miller was Chair of the Department of English for the 1975-1976 academic Year. December 8, 1976.

Hartman, [Harold] Bloom, etc.”³⁷⁰ As he expressed in his October 11, 1971 letter to de Man, Miller was especially pleased to have de Man as a colleague again and eager to join Hartman and the other respected and renowned members of Yale’s English Department. Indeed, the reputation of Yale’s English department extended beyond

Miller and his Hopkins’s colleagues. The renown of the Yale English Department registered by Yale

undergraduates, who wrote in the 1974 *Yale Course Critique* that “The Yale English major rests on a department which is still one of the best in the nation...the Yale English Department sports some of the best literary minds in the world.”³⁷¹

While Miller’s move to Yale began to channel deconstructive energies through the English Department—Miller for example quickly had a large number of dissertation advisees working on the Victorian novel with him—significant intellectual or institutional changes were to still come.³⁷² Though those changes rested in the future, however, Miller continued to launch

³⁷⁰ Jones-Katz, “Constantly Contingent,” 59. See also Howard Felperin’s comments on “The Best English Department in the World,” in *In Another Life*, 13-33.

³⁷¹ *Yale Course Critique 1974* (Yale University, Yale Daily News), 46-47.

³⁷² Warminski, 227.

deconstructive forays, as in his Winter 1972 *diacritics* review, “Tradition and Difference.”³⁷³

There, Miller applied his deconstructive stance and style of reading to M.H. Abrams’ *Natural Supernaturalism: Tradition and Revolution in Romantic Literature* (1971).³⁷⁴ Miller’s deconstructive reading of “Tradition and Difference” nourished and was nourished by the atmosphere of experimentation spreading across the North American literary-critical scene. Miller’s review of Abrams accomplished all this by applying his deconstructive stance and style of reading to Abrams’ traditional literary historical method. Miller’s Abrams maintained continuity and affirmed discontinuity between the Romantics and their predecessors—hence the title of Miller’s review, “Tradition and Difference.” And, in these ways, Miller’s Abrams, or rather Abrams as received by the larger North American literary-critical community, successfully dispelled Modernists’ polemics against Romanticism. Whereas Modernists argued that a radical break existed between the Romantics and the Moderns, with the Moderns’ poetry mature and sophisticated while the Romantics’ poetry just the opposite, Abrams showed the semblances between the Romantic and Post-Romantic writers and the traditional religious patterns that linked them all. While Miller’s essay was undoubtedly part of the appropriation of Continental thinkers to North American literary criticism, it also reverberated with and drew from an atmosphere of experimentation in the North American academy, having been published in a newly-established journals that promoted innovative thought for an Anglophone readership.

Miller was not the only future Yale School member to apply deconstructive techniques of reading in the Winter 1972 issue of *diacritics*. De Man’s own attempt “to deconstruct” Western metaphysics followed Miller’s reading of Abrams’ *Natural Supernaturalism*. The issue’s “Work in Progress” section tantalizingly included de Man’s essay “Genesis and Genealogy in

³⁷³ Miller, “Tradition and Difference,” *diacritics* 2 (1972): 6-13.

³⁷⁴ Abrams, *Natural Supernaturalism: Tradition and Revolution in Romantic Literature* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, Inc., 1971).

Nietzsche's *The Birth of Tragedy*," which became the fourth chapter of his influential 1979 book, *Allegories of Reading: Figural Language in Rousseau, Nietzsche, Rilke, and Proust*.³⁷⁵ In his *diacritics* essay, de Man endeavored to determine if, and if so how, "Romanticism puts the genetic pattern of history in question"—the pattern of history in which, "[i]nstead of being mere copies of a transcendental order, Nature or God, 'all things below' are said to be part of a chain of being underway to its teleological end."³⁷⁶ In this regard, de Man's suspicious reading echoed Miller's review of Abrams, because Abrams, like de Man's "genetic pattern of history," viewed history as a story of the recovery of an original unity. But, while Miller offered observations on Abrams' failure "to deconstruct" his metaphysical narratives, de Man provided a fully developed deconstruction by way of Nietzsche's *The Birth of Tragedy* (1872), a work of dramatic theory which posited that in classical Athenian tragedy there was an intellectual dichotomy between the Dionysian reality—reality as disordered and undifferentiated—and the Apollonian reality—reality as ordered and differentiated. De Man chose Nietzsche's text because, he wrote, though "it would indeed be difficult to find a text in which the genetic pattern is more clearly in evidence," this text also "participates in the radical rejection of the genetic teleology associated with romantic idealism."³⁷⁷ For de Man, Nietzsche's *The Birth of Tragedy* affirmed and denied—constructed and deconstructed—a history of Greek tragedy in which an original unity was recovered. Or, in de Man's language Nietzsche's *The Birth of Tragedy* was an "exercise in genetic 'deconstruction.'"³⁷⁸ And by "exercise," de Man meant that Nietzsche's text applied the deconstructive stance and style of reading on itself—Nietzsche's *The Birth of Tragedy*

³⁷⁵ De Man, "Genesis and Genealogy in Nietzsche's *The Birth of Tragedy*," *Diacritics* 2, no. 4 (1972): 44-53; See also de Man, *Allegories of Reading: Figural Language in Rousseau, Nietzsche, Rilke, and Proust* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1979), 79-102.

³⁷⁶ De Man, "Genesis and Genealogy in Nietzsche's *The Birth of Tragedy*," 45, 44.

³⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 45.

³⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 46.

“deconstructed” the genetic pattern of history, not by way of logically refuting or engaging in dialectic with statements that support genetic historical sequences but, by laying down and then uprooting, the genetic pattern of history.

Significantly, in terms of the growing reputation of “deconstruction” in North American literary-critical circles, de Man’s *diacritics* deconstruction of Nietzsche—as well as Miller’s *diacritics* review—supported the reputation of deconstruction criticism as anti-historical. As de Man wrote at the end of “Genesis and Genealogy”: “[t]he deconstruction of the genetic pattern in *The Birth of Tragedy* is not without consequences, not only within the special field of Nietzsche interpretation, but in that of historiography and semiology as well....[F]rom a historiographical point of view, it is instructive to see a genetic narrative function as a step leading to insights that destroy the claims on which the genetic continuity was founded.”³⁷⁹ For de Man, the question of Nietzsche’s intention is moot—what mattered was what could be found in *The Birth of Tragedy*, and what was found there, if one adopted de Man’s deconstructive stance and style of reading was that “origins,” “sources,” and “ends” were not to be searched for or found, because any genetic historical sequence was a rung that led to insights that obliterated the assertions on which the genetic link was established. De Man’s view of history should be seen in crypto-autobiographical terms. Though still nascent, the reputation of deconstruction as “anti-historical” grew throughout the 1970s. Nevertheless, Miller’s and de Man’s *diacritics* essays contributed to the atmosphere of experimentation and questioning, a mood that remained hopeful in the promise of innovative literary criticism in large swaths of the North American literary-critical community, but which, as evidenced by de Man’s Nietzsche, also was gradually becoming more suspicious of notions such as progress.

³⁷⁹ Ibid., 53.

Harold Bloom and the future Yale School during the early-1970s

The textual gathering of future Yale School members not only occurred in new essays in *diacritics*. The textual gathering also happened by way of reviewing one another's books. These reviews discreetly linked de Man, Hartman, Bloom, Miller, and even Derrida with one another. They also functioned as a juncture around and through which future Mafia members differentiated their respective intellectual projects from one another. Take for instance Geoffrey Hartman's "A War in Heaven," a review published in the Spring 1973 issue of *diacritics* of his Yale colleague and fellow Professor of English Harold Bloom's *The Anxiety of Influence: A Theory of Poetry* (1973).³⁸⁰ Though Bloom repeatedly denied any affiliation with deconstructionists, for instance stating in a 1985 interview that de Man, Hartman, Miller, and Derrida were "remote cousins, intellectuals speaking," Bloom in fact worked very closely and maintained friendships with Yale School members, above all de Man and Hartman, during the 1970s and early 1980s.³⁸¹ During this time, Bloom also struggled to find his own critical voice, a struggle that he often undertook by juxtaposing his own work against de Man's and Derrida's projects and using their deconstructive techniques of reading as a foil with which to carve out his own stance and style of suspicious reading.

Before diving into Bloom's work of the 1970s and Hartman's 1973 *diacritics* review, the following examines the main contours of Bloom's intellectual biography. These contours not only illustrate some of the reasons for his friendships and friendly rivalries with his Yale colleagues during the 1970s, but also explain how Bloom became so absorbed with developing his hermeneutic of suspicious reading with and against his New Haven colleagues. After his

³⁸⁰ Hartman, "War in Heaven," *Diacritics* 3, no. 1 (1973): 26-32; Bloom, *The Anxiety of Influence: A Theory of Poetry*; A year later, in 1974, de Man reviewed Bloom's *Anxiety* in *Comparative Literature*. See de Man, "Review of Harold Bloom's *Anxiety of Influence*," *Comparative Literature* 26, no. 3 (1974): 169-175.

³⁸¹ Imre Salusinszky, "Harold Bloom," in *Criticism in Society: Interviews with Jacques Derrida et al.* (New York and London: Methuen, 1987), 50, 68.

earning his BA. at Cornell University under the direction of Romanticist M. H. Abrams, Bloom pursued his Ph.D. in English Literature at Yale in 1955; he received his doctorate at the age of 25. Bloom began to teach on the Yale Faculty the same year that he earned his Ph.D., and one of his new colleagues was Hartman.³⁸² Since their time together as graduate students in New Haven and their first appointments at Yale's Department of English, Bloom and Hartman respected and inspired each other, even if they had their differences.³⁸³ Though he and Hartman shared the pressures of being Romanticists surrounded by those New Critics in New Haven who advocated the superiority of the Modernists over the Romantics, Bloom felt that he differed from Hartman in that European rather than North American interpretive methods shaped Hartman's work. From Bloom's perspective, Hartman was more interested in analyzing critics' and philosophers' stances and styles of interpretation, and conducting a serious, penetrating, and comprehensive inquiry into the comparison of national literatures. Bloom in contrast was mostly interested in English prose and poetry and did not have a clearly defined interest in methods of reading.

Yet, despite their differences, Bloom and Hartman shared a friendship, and one that, like Bloom, Hartman saw as having contributed a great deal to his early intellectual development: "One factor certainly contributed to the change that took place between my first two books [*The Unmediated Vision* (1954) and *Wordsworth's Poetry 1787-1814* (1964)]. At Yale, in 1955, I met Harold Bloom, like myself on first appointment, and our conversation (which has lasted) made me attend more closely to the example of [English Romantic poet] William Blake and his deceptive use of traditional apocalyptic imagery. A ghostly dialogue started in my mind between Blake and Wordsworth. Allegorists might even say between Bloom and myself."³⁸⁴ Bloom and

³⁸² Ibid., 45.

³⁸³ Ibid., 68.

³⁸⁴ Hartman, *A Scholar's Tale*, 41-42.

Hartman, both Romantic revivalists, learned from each other, with Bloom advancing a Blakean and Hartman furthering a Wordsworthian cause.³⁸⁵

Bloom's and Hartman's undergraduate teaching also facilitated their camaraderie and advanced their Romantic revivalism at Yale well before the 1970s. In 1966, the year of the Hopkins Symposium which neither Hartman nor Bloom attended and a year before Hartman moved to Yale, Bloom taught English 45b, "English poets of the Nineteenth-century," a course devoted to the writings of William Blake, William Wordsworth, Samuel Taylor Coleridge, Percy Shelley, and John Keats. Bloom's undergraduates saw Bloom as literally immersing himself in his material—Bloom, like his Romantic heroes, used poems to become a Romantic seer. Yale students wrote: "The material is romantic poetry, and Harold Bloom is a romantic lecturer as well as a scholar. His reading of the romantic poets—sensitive and penetrating—is emotionally creative... For Mr. Bloom lectures to his class not as a cold vivisectionist, but as if he were a brother of his romantic forbearers... [H]earing Mr. Bloom in person is an unparalleled experience, 'he makes book-learning come alive.'"³⁸⁶ Bloom utilized his readings of Blake, Wordsworth, Coleridge, Shelley, and Keats to become a Romantic, and a Romantic beyond the division between artist and scholar.

One year later, in 1967, during Hartman's first term at Yale, undergraduates again expressed their enjoyment of Bloom's transfiguration into a Romantic poet, and recognized the benefits of Bloom's possible differences from Hartman. Yale English majors reflected on English 45b: "The youngest and one of the most brilliant full professors in the English

³⁸⁵ De Man had also been Bloom's friend for many years prior. Felperin for example has recounted that the story of Bloom's first meeting with de Man was a frequent topic of conversation among his Yale colleagues. In his 2014 memoir, Felperin recalled: "Harold had met [de Man] more than a decade before, in the course of being interviewed for a Junior Fellowship at Harvard, an exclusive club of which Paul was a member. Amazingly, Harold didn't get the fellowship, but returned to New Haven with news. 'A blond Apollo,' he reported [to] Geoffrey. 'I met a blond Apollo named Paul de Man. He's read your book [*The Unmediated Vision*—and understood it.'" Quoted in Felperin, 62.

³⁸⁶ *Yale Course Critique 1967* (Yale University, Yale Daily News), 61.

department, Mr. Bloom revealed in his lectures a total immersion in the understanding and criticism of the Romantic poets... However, he is so passionately involved in the poetry that his viewpoints tends to become monolithic, leaving little room for individual student interpretation. But things may change. Another professor, Mr. Hartmann [sic], will be teaching this course next year.”³⁸⁷ Students hoped that Hartman, who took over Bloom’s course “English poets of the Nineteenth-century,” though united with their mission to revive the study of Romantic poets in North American departments of literature, specifically Yale’s Department of English, would perhaps be less inward-turned and permit students to speak up in class.

The summer following the publication of Hartman’s *diacritics* 1973 review found de Man, Bloom, Hartman, and Miller all working in New Haven. And correspondence between these friends shows that their camaraderie continued to grow. In a August 10, 1973 letter to Bloom, Miller wrote: “You have been much on my mind this summer, partly because I have missed our cheerful violence..., partly because I have been working some in fields known to you, [English essayist and literary critic Walter] Pater, [English art critic John] Ruskin, [Irish author, playwright, and poet Oscar] Wilde, and the ‘lesser’ Victorian poets.” Miller was not only thinking of Bloom because of their common interest in Victorian poets and critics, however. Miller wanted to report the surprising place that he recently found his friend’s work: “You particularly came to my mind when in the Phillips Bookstore here I found *The Anxiety of Influence* shelved in a section consisting entirely of poetry. (I don’t mean criticism of poetry; I mean poetry, verse.) You were in there with Yeats, Pound, Robert Bly, etc.”³⁸⁸ Miller, appropriately enough considering Hartman’s observations regarding Bloom’s project, found Bloom’s latest book—the subtitle of which was *A Theory of Poetry*—in a bookstore’s poetry

³⁸⁷ *Yale Course Critique 1968* (Yale University, Yale Daily News), 66.

³⁸⁸ Miller to Bloom, letter, August 10, 1973, Box 31 Folder 26, J. Hillis Miller Papers, The Critical Theory Archive, Irvine, California, 1.

section. The public, or at least the part that stocked Phillips Bookstore, considered Bloom, not a literary critic, but a poet. On some level, Bloom had achieved his aim to become an equal to the Romantic writers he wrote about.

Miller also wrote to Bloom about more mundane matters. He wanted Bloom to accompany him back to New Haven. In his August 10, 1973 letter, Miller wrote: “It looks as if I’ll be in Maine the last week in August. . . , will drive down to Cambridge St., Sept. 1, and drive back to New Haven Tuesday, 4 Sept. If that all happens, I’d much enjoy having your company (and Paul’s) on the drive back. I have not heard from him, though we had a card from Pat[ricia de Man, Paul’s wife].”³⁸⁹ De Man did in fact write to Miller, and he too wanted to gather his close friends, future Yale School members, for the trip to New Haven. In his August 26 1973 letter to Miller, de Man expressed his wish to “see you [Miller] in Cambridge” and that he “had a letter from Geoffrey [Hartman], who will be back from Switzerland on the 31st and may also be coming to Cambridge, though it is isn’t certain. But Harold, of course, is bound to be there.”³⁹⁰ Clearly, de Man, Bloom, Hartman, and Miller were more than colleagues or intellectual sparring partners—they were close friends. Regarding the closeness of de Man’s and Miller’s projects, for instance, de Man relayed in his letter to Miller that he had “complete[d] the final version of a Nietzsche paper first read in Syracuse.”³⁹¹ Presumably, de Man’s paper was “Genesis and Genealogy in Nietzsche’s *The Birth of Tragedy*,” included in aforementioned 1972 issue of *diacritics*.

Though de Man, Bloom, Hartman, and Miller’s friendships developed at a quick clip, the intellectual and institutional culture at Yale only gradually changed to one favorable to the

³⁸⁹ Ibid.

³⁹⁰ De Man to Miller, August 26, 1973, Box 12 Folder 9, Correspondence, The Paul de Man Papers, The Critical Theory Archive, The University of California-Irvine, 1.

³⁹¹ Ibid., 1-2.

nascent Yale School members' deconstructive stances and style of reading. While no major developments in curricula occurred, Miller did serve as Chairman of the recently established Literature Major for the 1973-1974 academic year.³⁹² And de Man, who continued to use his teaching and writing to develop his "rhetorical deconstruction," began to transform the French Department into a one more compatible with his goals. Like Yale's English department during the early- 1970s, Yale's French department, from the perspective of undergraduates in 1974, was "long considered the best in the country," and meant "excellence," because "[t]he faculty, one of the finest in the country, approach[ed] the texts with an enthusiasm and skill fully commensurate with the greatness of the literature itself." "The department," enthused students two years earlier, "combines brilliant scholarship with a truly impressive interest in undergraduate teaching."³⁹³

However, the French Department was undergoing significant changes. To the more conservative members of his department, de Man was an enemy to be kept abroad at all costs, as he was seen as aiming to increase the prominence of literary theory—considered radical to some—in the curriculum. The situation quickly turned to de Man's advantage, however. Godzich wrote: "de Man proved a most formidable though always academic infighter. Within a matter of months he had things under control both in the French department, of which he was the chairperson, and in Comparative Literature, where he was soon to be."³⁹⁴ And, from Godzich's point of view, de Man accomplished these goals because he was able to exert an astonishing amount of power. Yale undergraduates noticed a shift, writing in the 1974 *YCC*, the year after de Man became chair, that "[t]he professors are all talented teachers but they differ from one another in their approaches to literature. Some teach traditional courses on themes and genres;

³⁹² Horace D. Taft to Thomas M. Greene, letter June 21, 1973, Box 30, Folder 43, Yale College Records of the Dean 1969-1973, Yale Archives, New Haven, Conn.

³⁹³ *Yale Course Critique 1974*, 56; *Yale Course Critique 1972*, 61.

³⁹⁴ Godzich, "Paul de Man and the Perils of Intelligence," *The Culture of Literacy* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1994), 134.

others are more attracted to contemporary movements, and even, (as in the case of M. Godzich) in their application to ancient forms.”³⁹⁵ Though de Man’s influence would take several more years before it would bear more fruit, as it did—spectacularly so—in the *Literature Major*, de Man was beginning to change the intellectual culture of Yale’s French Department.

With a series of essays that probed the limits of formalist styles and stances of reading, de Man also launched deconstructive forays from New Haven into the North American literary-critical community. De Man’s essay, “Semiology and Rhetoric,” published in the Autumn 1973 issue of *diacritics*, one issue after Hartman’s review on Bloom’s *Anxiety of Influence* and almost a year after Miller’s review of Abrams’ *Natural Supernaturalism*, was central to this endeavor.³⁹⁶ When de Man’s essay first appeared, it was, reflected Professor Stanley Corngold, one of de Man’s graduate students at Cornell University, in 1994, “regarded by many as a courageous thrust at the violence of the American intervention in Vietnam.”³⁹⁷ Members of the North American literary-critical community also came to view de Man’s essay as a model of “deconstructive criticism.” But unbeknownst to readers, and in keeping with his habit, de Man employed his essay as a spiritual exercise, this time to purge his subjectivity or personal character in order to achieve a “view from above,” a Stoic vision from which he could determine the inescapable laws that governed the universe, which, for him, were the rules that ruled literature.

De Man for example began his essay with a warning against accepting the belief that “the fruits of ascetic concentration” allowed one to “move ‘beyond formalism’ towards questions” such as “the self, man, society.”³⁹⁸ Rather than “confidently devote ourselves to the[se] foreign

³⁹⁵ *Yale Course Critique 1974*, 56.

³⁹⁶ De Man, “Semiology and Rhetoric,” *Diacritics* 3 (1973): 27.

³⁹⁷ Corngold, 188.

³⁹⁸ De Man, “Semiology and Rhetoric,” 27.

affairs” of literature, however, de Man counseled readers to concentrate on “de-constructive reading.”³⁹⁹ To perform such a “de-constructive reading,” de Man turned to a selection from Proust’s *Du côté de chez Swann*, which “describes the young Marcel...hiding in the closed space of his room in order to read.” At first, de Man’s Proust—like a good formalist— appeared to achieve a “perfect synthesis” between the “properties of coolness, darkness, repose, silence, imagination and totality” that ruled Marcel’s chamber and “the heat, the light, the activity, the sounds, the senses and the fragmentation that govern the outside.” This fusion of binaries “render[ed] the Summer in the room more complete than the actual experience of Summer in the outside world.”⁴⁰⁰ Yet, de Man’s Proust also undid this synthesis—Marcel’s cool repose in his room “supported, like the quiet of a motionless hand in the middle of a running brook, the shock and the motion of a *torrent of activity*.”⁴⁰¹ For de Man, Proust “thus surreptitiously smuggled...[h]eat”—a property of the outside—into the “passage from a cold source.” By affirming and denying that Marcel was inside or outside his room, that his room was cold or hot, that his room’s fictional Summer was more real than the actual Summer outside, de Man’s Proust closed “the ring of antithetical properties” and allowed “for their exchange and substitution.” De Man’s Proust, in other words, “deconstructed” the formalism that at first seemed to shape an organic whole between the inside and outside of his room.

With this deconstructive essay, de Man promoted the most advanced form of his rhetorical deconstruction. And during the early-1970s, de Man’s, Bloom’s, Hartman’s, and Miller’s intellectual and institutional efforts gradually assembled the philosophical school of the Yale School. The Mafia executed their techniques of suspicious reading in journal essays, many of which they published alongside one another, as well as in their reviews of one another’s

³⁹⁹ Ibid., 32.

⁴⁰⁰ Ibid., 31.

⁴⁰¹ Proust, quoted in *ibid.*, 31. Emphasis added.

books. The future Yale School members even dedicated and contributed blurbs to one another's books. Hartman's *Beyond Formalism* was for Bloom; Bloom's *The Ringers in the Tower* for Hartman; Miller contributed a blurb to Hartman's *Wordsworth's Poetry 1787-1814*, writing "this admirable book, a subtle and long-mediated vision of literary history."⁴⁰² In addition, as explored, the philosophical school of the Yale School was also formed by way of the slow appropriation of institutional power and transformation of curriculum, as in Miller's chairing of the Literature Major, de Man's of the French Department, and Hartman's (and then de Man's) of Comparative Literature.

Watershed Years in The Best English Department in the World

By the early-1970s, the atmosphere of experimentation and optimism in the French, English, and Comparative Literature departments at Yale began to shift. During these years, the intellectual and institutional changes that helped to shift the mood from one of general optimism to anxiety were also pivotal for the history of deconstruction in North America. In a period of approximately three or four years, a whole generation of literary critics in Yale's English Department, most of whom were New Critics or in some way associated with the New Critical stance and style of reading, either retired or died suddenly. These scholars included: Robert Penn Warren (1905-1989), Cleanth Brooks (1906-1994), William Wimsatt Jr (1907-1975). Maynard Mack (1911-2001), Alvin Kernan (1923-), E. Talbot Donaldson (1920-), and Richard Sewall (1908-2003). These luminaries' absence at Yale was more than a completed chapter of Yale's institutional history, however. As undergraduate Kim Rogal perceptively noted in the March 6, 1974 issue of the *Yale Daily News Magazine*, these professors' passing was also a political crisis: "Everything has a political aspect—even poetry, and Yale is the center in America for the

⁴⁰² Hartman, *Beyond Formalism* (1970); Bloom, *The Ringers in the Tower: Studies in Romantic Tradition* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1971).

politics of poetry. In some ways the university's reputation rests on conflicts between certain men's literary theories, simply because those men teach in Yale's best department, English, and because that department is the best of its kind in the country."⁴⁰³

From professors to graduate and undergraduate students like Rogal, contemporaries recognized the retirement or death of a cohort Yale English professors, above all Wimsatt, Brooks, and Warren, as a watershed moment in Yale's intellectual and institutional history. Not only had these literary critics put Yale's English department in the map, so to speak, they had also given the department a sense of a shared mission. In the absence of the older giants of criticism, Yale junior English department faculty—not simply Bloom, Hartman, Miller, but Felperin and others—found themselves confronted with how to navigate the “The Best English Department in the World” into the future. They had to for instance confront the politics of hiring and of tenure. Pressures from within and without the Old Campus, including the local burdens created by the retirement of a whole generation of literary critics and the global pressures produced by the 1973 oil crisis and the fall of the Bretton Woods system, both of which helped to end the general post-World War II

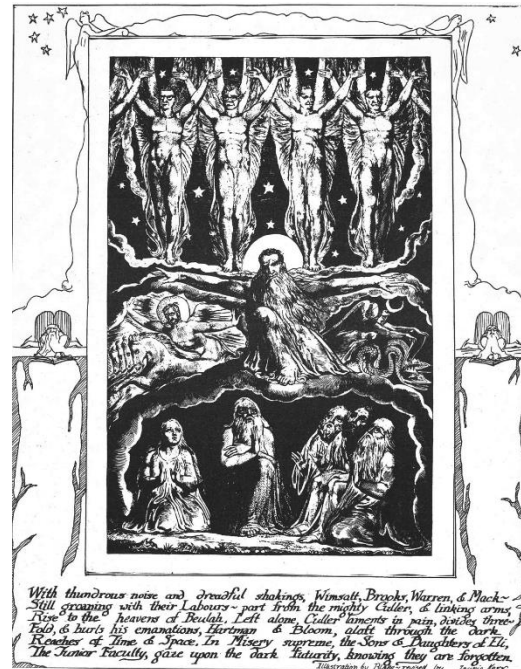


Figure 3.4 Illustration by William Blake; revised by Zaurie Kerr. The caption, in pseudo-Blakean verse, read: “With thunderous noise and dreadful shakings, Wimsatt, Brooks, Warren, & Mack/Still groaning with their Labours, part from the mighty Cullter, & linking arms, Rise to the heavens of Beulah. Left alone, Cullter laments in pain, divides, three-Fold, & hurls his emanations, Hartman & Bloom, aloft through the dark Reaches of Time & Space. In Misery supreme, the Sons & Daughters of Eli, The Junior Faculty, gaze upon the dark Futurity, knowing they are forgotten.” Kerr’s illustration humorously captured the intellectual and institutional earthquakes caused by the passing of a generation and spawning a new one of literary critics and theorists in Yale’s English Department. Rogal, 8.

⁴⁰³ Kim Rogal, “The Politics of Poetics,” *Yale Daily News Magazine*, March 6, 1974, 8; Kaufman, “Department mourns loss of Wimsatt and Gordon,” *Yale Daily News*, January 12, 1976, 11.

economic boom, bore down on Bloom, Hartman, and Miller. They carried the burden not only of becoming the established theorizers, the scholar-laureates, but also of having to fill the, by 1976, five tenured openings in their department.

Despite these challenges and though less than a year would pass until any official collaboration between the Hermeneutical Mafia occurred, these intellectual and institutional responsibilities fostered Bloom, Hartman, and Miller's collective philosophical-literary endeavor as well as cultivated their camaraderie, above all their sense of a common mission to innovate and revise formalist methods of reading prose and poetry. Practically speaking, the absences left by older scholars and the vacancies of senior positions in Yale's English department created a vacuum that junior faculty members Bloom, Hartman, and Miller hoped to fill. Yale's English faculty nevertheless found themselves confronted, not with opportunities, but competition with one another for funding, for colleagues' attention, and older and better-known names from faculties all around the world. In the Rogal piece, Miller himself noted that this created a tense situation, one that would not likely be resolved soon, because, he stated "[p]art of the problem now is there are no more Geoffrey Hartmans around. The reservoir of people [in the university system] is not very great...[T]here is some anxiety...The real wisdom is the ability to spot the new Wimsatt."⁴⁰⁴ While Miller wished he and others could find more "Hartmans," his department had to tackle an increasingly dire financial and political situation.

And yet, during these threshold years in Yale's English department when the earlier mood of experimentation and hope in the promise of innovative literary criticism and theory gave way to skepticism, Bloom, Hartman and Miller rose through the ranks. And, by rising through the ranks, they each helped to institutionalize and legitimize their own and one another's techniques of suspicious reading. In 1974, several years prior to de Man's and Hartman's co-

⁴⁰⁴ Ibid.

development of deconstructive curricula for the Literature Major, Bloom was appointed to the DeVane Professorship, an honorary post, a feature of which is that “those who hold it devote time to teaching students outside their own field.”⁴⁰⁵ During the 1974-1975 year, Bloom continued to teach undergraduate courses in the English department and undergraduates continued to recognize Bloom’s embodiment in his courses of the very poetry he loved, as evidenced by their comments in the *YCC* on Bloom’s 1975 “American Romantic Poetry” class (English 55a), which, students wrote, “demonstrated why Harold Bloom is a leading light of modern literary criticism. The course was devoted largely to Emerson, for the terms that arose out of Mr. Bloom’s treatment of that poet provided the tools for dealing with Whitman, Dickinson, and Stevens. The course was as much first-hand confrontation with the American Sublime—in the person of Mr. Bloom—as it was an examination of its literary products.”⁴⁰⁶ Besides teaching his English department courses, however, Bloom, as DeVane Professor, also designed and taught a special course for the 1974-1975 academic year. This course, developed from his antithetical methodology in his *Anxiety of Influence*, was entitled “Revisionism and Canon-formation in Poetry and Interpretation.”⁴⁰⁷

The DeVane Professorship did more than provide Bloom with the intellectual and professional space to expand the reach of his pedagogy on Yale’s Old Campus. After receiving the DeVane Professorship, which requires its holder to give a formal and original lecture every week and thus necessitate the production of a great deal of new material, Bloom ramped up his production schedule, publishing five books over the next several years.⁴⁰⁸ After *Anxiety*, came *A Map of Reading* (1975), *Kabbalah and Criticism* (1975), and *Poetry and Repression:*

⁴⁰⁵ “Bloom fills DeVane seat,” *Yale Daily News* March 14, 1974, 1.

⁴⁰⁶ *Yale Course Critique 1976*, 105. Emphasis added.

⁴⁰⁷ “Bloom fills DeVane seat,” 1.

⁴⁰⁸ Godzich, “Harold Bloom as Rhetorician,” *Centrum: Working Papers of the Minnesota Center for Advanced Studies in Language, Style, and Literary Theory* 6 (1978): 43.

Revisionism from Blake to Stevens (1976) in rapid succession.⁴⁰⁹ (Bloom’s second and third lectures of the DeVane series for example were respectively titled “Kabbalah and Revisionism” and “Kabbalah and Criticism.”⁴¹⁰) Bloom’s remarkable rate of production—as opposed to, say, de Man, who worked very slowly and with only a handful of core texts—helped to transform him “from a critic of high standing into a cult-figure of sizable proportions.”⁴¹¹ In 1978, once Yale Professor of French, then Chairman of Comparative Literature at the University of Minnesota Wlad Godzich, wrote: “When [Bloom’s] name is mentioned, it has become de rigueur to shake one’s head in wonderment, and it is no longer shameful to admit that one may not have read all of his books.”⁴¹² Significantly, in all of his texts of the mid-1970s, Bloom used his writings to carve out his intellectual sovereignty, a task often undertaken by way of the work of his friendly rivals de Man or Miller.

Each of Bloom’s books for example was written not only to explore the poets’ confrontations their own admired and resented authority figures, but also Bloom’s confrontations with contemporary critics he admired and, by implication, feared. There for instance continued to be—in Hartman’s memorable phrase—“war in heaven,” with jealous fathers and patricidal sons clashing in all-out psychomachia (“battle of the spirits”), each father and son subject one another’s work to the violent and vindictive distortion of systematic “misprision.” At stake for



HAROLD BLOOM
Professor of English

Figure 3.5 Witness Bloom’s disappointed and anxious expression, despite his success. “Bloom fills DeVane seat.” *Yale Daily News*, March 14, 1974, 1.

⁴⁰⁹ Bloom, *A Map of Misreading* (Oxford University Press, 1975); *Kabbalah and Criticism* (Seabury Press, 1975); *Poetry and Repression: Revisionism from Blake to Stevens* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1976).

⁴¹⁰ Elizabeth Tate, “Bloom,” *Yale Daily News*, Tuesday, March 25, 1975, 2.

⁴¹¹ Felperin, *In Another Life*, 43.

⁴¹² Godzich, “Harold Bloom as Rhetorician,” 43.

Bloom was not simply his poets' uniqueness, but his own, as his colleague in English Howard Felperin wrote, "absolute individuality, autochthonic originality, transcendental selfhood."⁴¹³ Even undergraduates, though a little behind the times in terms of whom Bloom was struggling against, recognized Bloom's project: "Student gossip holds that this series [the DeVane series] represents Professor Bloom's attempt to 'defy' the New Critics at Yale."⁴¹⁴

Rather than, as in his 1973 *Anxiety of Influence*, silently wrestle contemporaries, Bloom openly challenged his scholar-friends and former teachers in his post-DeVane texts, attempting to become a critical voice heard over the chatter of competing theories of interpretation. Bloom's 1975 *A Map of Misreading* wed his increasingly brazen confrontation with colleagues with his practice of using his texts as techniques of suspicious reading. Bloom for instance cheerfully dedicated *Map* to his colleague in Yale's French and Comparative Literature departments: Paul de Man. In fact, *Map*, Bloom explained, was "provoked...by [de Man's] brilliant polemical review of *The Anxiety of Influence*" in a 1974 issue of *Comparative Literature*.⁴¹⁵ With his techniques of suspicious reading in *Map* as well as the aforementioned *Kabbalah and Criticism* and *Poetry and Repression: Revisionism from Blake to Stevens*, Bloom attempted—more openly than ever—to transform himself from a mere literary critic into a kind of contemporary Romantic poet. His colleagues were beginning to place Bloom's project, though he would have shuddered at the thought, squarely alongside his Yale colleagues, soon to be known as the Yale School. A review in the *Georgia Review* of *Map* stated: "[T]here is no real precedent for *A Map*, aside from, perhaps, *The Anxiety*, some of the brilliant work of Geoffrey Hartman and Paul de Man."⁴¹⁶

⁴¹³ Felperin, *In Another Life*, 42-43.

⁴¹⁴ Tate, 2.

⁴¹⁵ See note 179.

⁴¹⁶ Stuart Ende, "Review of *A Map of Misreading*," *Georgia Review* 29 (1975): 510.

Despite Bloom's professed resistance to the de Manian Überleser of prose and poetry, however, Bloom never did in fact truly oppose Derrida, de Man, or even Miller. In fact, Bloom's letters to Miller during the summer of 1974 and 1975 reveal, not an antagonism, but a friendship and the entwinement of their developing projects of suspicious reading. In his August 27, 1974 letter to Miller, Bloom, with a dry sense of humor, wrote: "Dear Dry Voice of Deconstructive Reason: I raise my exhausted hulk from the labors of writing 'Against Deconstruction: A Dialectical Lyric' (perhaps to be incorporated in the lucid work-in-progress, *Kabbalah and Criticism*), to salute you, and to express my pleasure at being driven by you from Harvard at 1:30-2 PM on Sunday."⁴¹⁷ Like the previous August, Miller and Bloom planned to travel back to New Haven together before the start of the fall semester. But, on this occasion, Bloom, rather than Miller, expressed his hope that de Man would join them on their trip—and, unlike in 1973, Bloom's writing about de Man provides a window into their fellowship. Bloom wrote: "I also look forward to returning from Boston hopefully on Tuesday afternoon, perhaps with both of us accompanied by the Notable Deconstructor Paul de Montevideo (true, natural son of the superb Mrs. Alfred Uruguay)." Bloom's nickname—the "Notable Deconstructor Paul de Montevideo"—was not simply playful. Bloom's nickname was a tool with which he conducted his struggle against his respected and feared contemporaries—in this case de Man. For Bloom, there was no separation between his work, his teaching, and his friendships.

De Man taught Bloom—by representing the essence of deconstructive stance and style of reading prose and poetry—how to become himself. For example, Bloom's comment to Miller about "the Notable Deconstructor Paul de Montevideo (true, natural son of the superb Mrs. Alfred Uruguay)" reveals the intensity of his engagement with de Man. Bloom's "Paul de

⁴¹⁷ Bloom to Miller, August 27, 1974, Box 31 Folder 26, J. Hillis Miller Papers, The Critical Theory Archive, The University of California-Irvine, 1.

Montevideo” was an oblique reference to American modernist Wallace Stevens’ poem, “*Mrs. Alfred Uruguay*.” In 1980, Bloom reflected that “‘*Mrs. Alfred Uruguay*’ ... is a comic masterpiece, in a mode that Stevens never developed, a quest-romance not so much parodied... as raised to an unparalleled pitch of sardonic irreality.”⁴¹⁸ Stevens’ *Mrs. Alfred Uruguay* quested for herself by approaching her mountain of meditation—Uruguay’s capital Montevideo, etymologically a mount of vision—the wrong way round, starting at the base of the mountain instead of the top. *Mrs. Alfred Uruguay* was so afraid of becoming soiled and sinking into the real world that she resigns to remain in the same place.⁴¹⁹ Bloom’s comment about Paul de Man—or rather Paul de Montevideo, the “true, natural son of the superb *Mrs. Alfred Uruguay*”—highlights Bloom’s view that de Man diminished the power of poetry to the trope of irony, that de Man, like *Mrs. Alfred Uruguay*, remained aloof from the world, unwilling to sink into the dirt and grim of reality. In a letter written a few days later, Bloom for example expanded on his own “anxiety of influence,” relating to Miller that he “spent the summer reading + brooding on De Man, Miller, Derrida, and [Gilles] Deleuze.... On the whole, I am uneasy to find Derrida everywhere ahead of me, even on Lurianic Kabbalah, but in the end I cheerfully reject you all, because you ride the great Beast *Concept!*, the Beast from the Sea!”⁴²⁰ And yet, though he joyfully spurned the authority of his deconstructive colleagues, who, according to Bloom, exclusively focused on ideas rather than the life-giving energy of poetry (Could Bloom’s “Beast from the Sea!” be the Beast of Continental philosophy?), Bloom at the same time admitted that he remained a deconstructor: “I too believe that texts can only be interpreted as other texts and I get more + more attached to Nietzsche, but whatever the poets who matter (Browning, Shelley,

⁴¹⁸ Bloom, *Wallace Stevens: The Poems of Our Climate*, (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1980), 161.

⁴¹⁹ See Northrop Frye “The Realistic Oriole: A Study of Wallace Stevens,” in *Northrop Frye on Twentieth-Century Literature*, ed. Glen Robert Gill (Victoria University, University of Toronto), 135.

⁴²⁰ Bloom to Miller, undated, 1974, Box 31 Folder 26, J. Hillis Miller Papers, The Critical Theory Archive, The University of California-Irvine, 1.

Milton, Whitman) may *mean*, we had better learn to *restore* their meanings as well as *de-mystify* them.” Finally, Bloom ended his indirect discussion of own “anxiety of influence” in his letter to Miller with an admission of his respect for Paul de Montevideo: “I prefer Paul to all reconcilers, even Geoffrey, but I wish Paul would forget *all* the philosophers he has ever read!”⁴²¹

Bloom’s letters to Miller do not simply reveal his attempts to carve out a textual space of self-sovereignty. Bloom’s correspondence also discloses how his intellectual confrontations dovetailed with his changing institutional position in New Haven. In his August 27, 1974 letter to Miller, for example, Bloom relayed to Miller his intention to leave Yale’s English Department: “I don’t look forward to Eng. Institute or to this yr. at Yale, as I am dead weary + sad. I have seen [Dwight] Culler [the remaining Professor of English from the previous generation at Yale] + given him the glad news that I am now Bloom Professor of Bloom, never again to attend Eng. Dept. professors’ meetings, committee meetings etc. (including Miller sub-committee on a Modernist). Though amiable enough (unto this day), Culler worries me, since I intend to be obdurate (to save what is left of the Bloomian sanity).⁴²² Bloom departed Yale’s English Department, “The Best English Department in the World,” not for a different department, not with the hope to work among more congenial and stimulating colleagues. Rather, Bloom left “The Best English Department in the World” for a department comprised of himself—“Bloom Professor of Bloom” became a department of one, as it were, a department where he did not have to deal with meetings of any kind, he was only responsible for his personal curricula, his “Bloomology,” his study of Bloom via other poets’ poems. But, Bloom’s explanation to Miller as to why he left “The Best English Department” reflects a new stage in Bloom’s assertion of self-sovereignty, however.

⁴²¹ Ibid., 2.

⁴²² Bloom to Miller, letter, August 27, 1974, Box 31 Folder 26, J. Hillis Miller Papers, The Critical Theory Archive, The University of California-Irvine, 2-3.

While Bloom prepared himself for his departure from the English department, Hartman confronted the challenges to the English Department and the humanities more broadly. In Spring 1973, Yale President Kingman Brewster Jr. appointed Hartman to chair a planning committee for a council on the humanities. This council, Hartman stated to the *Yale Daily News* on March 6, 1973, would “discuss the issues that confront a humanist within the university,” including the isolation of the humanist from the larger intellectual community, the “fragmentation” of “community” in “the graduate school and the faculty,” and “the tendency that has arisen nationally to cut back on language departments when there is a financial crisis.”⁴²³ Rather than retreat into a disciplinary silo in the face of the intellectual and financial threats, Hartman hoped his council on the humanities, which he served as chair until 1975, would cultivate a sense of community across the humanities, particularly among graduate students and faculty. A sense of community was in fact sorely needed at Yale, because, though an increasingly strengthened fellowship existed between Bloom, Hartman, and Miller, this camaraderie did not exist among many members of “The Best English department in the World.”

Undergraduates and faculty were keenly aware of the relationship between declining financial support and the tone of the English department. Undergraduates for example reflected in the 1975 *Yale Course Critique* that “continued cutbacks in federal funding and the almost non-existent job market have conspired to make life for the student who intends to pursue graduate study in English fully as grueling and as worrisome as that of the pre-med.” “The overly-serious attitude,” the student continued, “that has developed among undergraduate majors during the past two or three years certainly detracts from the learning experience.”⁴²⁴ Yale Professor of English Dewey Faulker explained to the *Yale Daily News* in 1974 that the English department did not

⁴²³ “Brewster names Hartman to plan humanities council,” March 6, 1973, *Yale Daily News*, 3.

⁴²⁴ *Yale Course Critique 1975* (Yale University: The Daily News, 1975), 73, 74.

simply have a poor sense of community: “Nobody here sees anybody else... Sure, there are department lunches on Thursdays—and only six or seven people show up. In the last year almost everyone has given up the pretense that there is a community.”⁴²⁵ But this was not the case with Hartman, even though he recognized the difficulties facing Yale’s English department and the humanities more broadly. In 1974, in the middle year of his tenure as chair of the council on the humanities, Hartman pondered the future of teaching the humanities, particularly English literature. Following the 1960s and after the retirements of Wimsatt, Warren, Brooks, and others, Hartman noted, the “academic overhead has increased—not more teaching, but the activity of teaching is surrounded by more bureaucracy.”⁴²⁶ The increase in administration—and the increase in students—has made “[t]he teacher... more of a teacher and somewhat less productive as a scholar.” For Hartman, the intellectual and financial threats facing—which he hoped to address as chair of the council on the humanities—had to be confronted.

Hartman’s administrative attempts to meet the crisis in Yale’s English department and the humanities dovetailed with his efforts in the mid-1970s to refine techniques of suspicious reading that also recognized what he believed to be poetry’s uniqueness. In fact, all three—the loss of senior scholars and sense of community in the English department, the loss of financial support for language and literature departments, the loss of the uniqueness of poetry—combined to trigger an intellectual threshold moment for Hartman. Regarding the threats to poetry’s uniqueness, Hartman did not for example believe that these dangers took “the form of a general transparency and excessive clarity,” in which the meaning of poetry effortlessly and flawlessly flowed from poet to reader. Instead, Hartman—similar to Bloom—believed that threats to poetry’s uniqueness was “the cultural leveling process,” a leveling that “led to a situation of

⁴²⁵ Rogal, 9.

⁴²⁶ *Ibid.*

radical obliquity” of not simply the meaning of poetry, but the meaning of all cultural products.⁴²⁷ The task for Hartman, who cared about and for poetry’s exceptionality, was to find a way to talk about poetry—what it was and what it did—that both recognized poetry as being similar to and distinguished from other cultural products. Hartman felt that the literary critic needed to find an interpretive method to talk about poetry’s uniqueness amid all the other cultural ruins, the meanings of which now, Hartman argued, read like poetry.

Hartman found a way through the ruins and the interpretive tools to address the uniqueness of poetry by way of French philosopher Jacques Derrida’s 1974 *Glas*, a deconstructive reading of German philosopher Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel’s philosophical works and French novelist Jean Genet’s autobiographical writing. Though Miller introduced Hartman to Derrida almost five years earlier at the 1969 Bellagio conference, Derrida’s *Glas* inspired Hartman to further develop his formalist interpretive methods.⁴²⁸ In 1981, Hartman recalled that, while he was “always thinking about the status of commentary, and what the history of interpretation, in the form of commentary, could teach,” Derrida’s *Glas* “presented a challenge.”⁴²⁹ Hartman’s response to Derrida’s *Glas* resulted in two essays in which Hartman adopted Derrida’s deconstructive stance and style of reading to explicate Derrida’s *Glas*—the first, “Monsieur Texte: On Jacques Derrida, his *Glas*,” was published in the Winter 1975 issue of the journal *Georgia Review*, the second, “Monsieur Texte II: Epiphony in Echoland,” was published in the Spring 1976 issues. Hartman’s essays on Derrida’s *Glas* not only aimed to

⁴²⁷ Verlmeulen, 72.

⁴²⁸ Denis Donoghue and Morris Dickstein have both acknowledged *Glas*’s influence on Hartman, but overlooked the personal and institutional context of his influence. See Denis Donoghue, “Reading About Writing; Writing,” *The New York Times Books Review* and Morris Dickstein, “Praising Not the Hedgehog but the Fox,” *The New York Sun*, December 26, 2007, accessed October 5, 2015.

⁴²⁹ Hartman, “Introduction,” in *Saving the Text: Literature/Derrida/Philosophy* (Baltimore and London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1981), xv.

address what Hartman viewed as the loss of the uniqueness of poetry, and advanced his deconstructive techniques of reading.

Hartman for instance, though steeped in the Continental phenomenological tradition and aiming to further refine formalist stances and styles of reading, yearned for a superior degree of philosophical self-respect. Framed by the more general sense of crisis in his department, at Yale, and the future of the Humanities, Hartman, at the age of 46, wanted what he saw some of his peers as possessing, above all, Paul de Man, then 56 and whose “analytic acumen,” Hartman reflected in his 2007 memoir, especially “when it came...to philosophic texts[,] left me [Hartman, that is] far behind.”⁴³⁰ By writing his commentary—his two *Georgia Review* essays—on Derrida’s *Glas*, Hartman felt he could gain a degree of philosophical confidence. He recalled: “What I lacked, and Derrida seemed to promise, was a theory to back up the more-than-close-reading I had been practicing and which I now directed at his own text.”⁴³¹ Hartman, in other words, viewed Derrida’s *Glas*—and Derrida’s deconstructive stance and style in general—as a chance to rise to the level of philosophical sophistication of a de Man.

But that was not all. Derrida’s *Glas* offered to Hartman, a Romantic revivalist, what Hartman considered to be the culmination of approximately two hundred years of Romantic striving for the unification of philosophy and literature: “Soon after it was published in 1974, I recognized in *Glas* a pivotal work of both philosophical criticism and art. *Glas* blended commentary on Hegel, in one column of a vertically divided page, with commentary on Jean Genet in a facing column. The Romantic dream of *Symphilosophieren*, first conceived in the Germany of the 1790s, and which pointed to a symbiosis of philosophy and art, had finally come

⁴³⁰ Hartman, *A Scholar’s Tale*, 79.

⁴³¹ *Ibid.*, 73.

to fruition.”⁴³² Hartman thought that Derrida was therefore professionally and historically significant, as it provided Hartman with an avenue in and through which to continue his Romantic revivalism in the North American academy and advance the Romantic wish of *Symphilosophieren*.

Yet Hartman pursued his goals with such meticulous attention to the deconstructive intricacies of Derrida’s *Glas* that Hartman’s essays—ironically, considering—undermined his own aims. Hartman reflected: “Was I drawn to Derrida because I aspired to a greater measure of philosophical dignity? Yes... But something unexpected happened. *Glas*, as a ‘discours de la folie’ [discourse of madness]..., took its toll and convinced me of the foolishness of that ambition. For it confirmed that the ideal of totality—...was not only impossible but also dangerous. Dangerous because it denied that something was always left over or out, treated as dirt, excess, irrelevant texture.”⁴³³ Indeed, each column of Derrida’s *Glas*—one devoted to Hegel, the other to Genet—had its own stability but was not impermeable to oblique interconnections with the other column. And these oblique interconnections produced for Hartman a multidirectional way of reading that the bordered “verbal and semantic space, the bookishness of the book, can barely encompass (if at all) such border crossing.”⁴³⁴⁴³⁵ While adopting Derrida’s deconstructive reading practice in *Glas* to interpret *Glas*, Hartman realized his impulse for philosophical mastery and Romantic dream of *Symphilosophieren* was misguided, as any attempt was always subverted from within, much like Genet and Hegel’s columns in Derrida’s *Glas*. Thus, though Hartman was drawn to Derrida for what promised to be new way and new instruments to discourse on reason, on truth, on the uniqueness of poetry,

⁴³² Ibid., 69.

⁴³³ Ibid., 74-75.

⁴³⁴ Ibid., 69-70.

⁴³⁵ Hartman, “Monsieur Texte: On Jacques Derrida, his *Glas*,” *The Georgia Review* 29 (1975): 782.

Hartman's *Georgia Review* essays—as Derrida's *Glas*—transformed into a discourse of madness, a discourse that undid Hartman's or any attempt to master or harmonize harmony sign and signifier, word and concept, philosophy and art. While Hartman's Derrida seemed at first to achieve the almost two hundred year-old Romantic dream of *Symphilosophieren*, he in fact unraveled any and all attempts to marry philosophy (Hegel) and art (Genet).

Derrida Arrives at Yale and the Creation of the “Yale Group”

Several months before the publication of Hartman's first essay on *Glas*, Derrida began his appointment as a visiting professor at Yale University. Derrida's arrival in New Haven was a crucial piece that built the philosophical school of the Yale School, as Derrida's presence aided the deconstructive projects of de Man, Miller, and Hartman. Arriving in September 1975 for stay of about three weeks, Derrida gave a seminar to a group of graduate students in twenty or so sessions: the six or seven first ones were at Yale, the others in Paris. Derrida's arrival had been a long time coming—Miller, after his own move to Yale from Johns Hopkins in 1972, started working at having Derrida “transferred.” Two years would pass before Miller would achieve his goal. By the end of April 1974, de Man assured Derrida that the arrangements were essentially in place, writing: “Enthusiasm for your presence, however intermittent, in Yale will not fail to triumph over the administrative obstacles.”⁴³⁶ Though there were and would continue to be administrative obstacles—Miller and de Man had to renew Derrida's appointment for years—a little more than six months later, in January 1975, de Man was able to officially confirm Derrida's appointment for three years to a post as visiting professor.⁴³⁷

⁴³⁶ De Man to Derrida, April 28, 1974, The Paul de Man Papers, The Critical Theory Archive, The University of California-Irvine.

⁴³⁷ Peeters, 272.

Tellingly, the department of Comparative Literature—a department where de Man and Hartman had appointments and which at that time was strictly a graduate, not an undergraduate, program—rather than Yale’s Philosophy department sponsored Derrida’s visiting professorship.⁴³⁸ That the philosophy department had no interest in backing Derrida’s position is yet another example of how and why Derrida’s work found its first intellectual and disciplinary home where it did: departments of literature. Though in literature departments, Hartman recalled, “even undergrads flocked to Derrida’s lectures, however lengthy and difficult.”⁴³⁹ But Derrida’s presence in New Haven was also crucial not only to Comparative Literature, but to Miller and de Man, with the latter writing to Derrida that he had found the “accomplice he needed if the Department of Literary Studies were to grow to its fullest extent.”⁴⁴⁰ In another letter to Derrida, de Man expressed how important Derrida’s presence was at Yale: “[I]t is literally the first time for very many years that a group of people from varied backgrounds has gathered together in Yale to pursue an intellectual goal. In fact, everyone’s been bored since you left and things seem really grey and monotonous in your absence.”⁴⁴¹

While Derrida was visiting the Comparative Literature Department, and though no idea of any official collaboration between the members of the future Yale School existed yet, Miller began to consider if and if so, how, he and his colleagues in New Haven were in fact on the same intellectual path. In published and unpublished writings, Miller slowly concluded that he, de Man, Hartman, and Bloom constituted a critical school, but not, as has been suggested, “mostly

⁴³⁸ Hartman, *A Scholar’s Tale*, 77.

⁴³⁹ *Ibid.*, 93. Jeffrey Mehlman, back teaching at Johns Hopkins University, heard “[W]ord was beginning to spread through Yale that Europe’s ‘greatest philosopher’ happened to be not only in New Haven but, more improbably still, in the Yale French Department.” Quoted in Mehlman, *Adventures in the French Trade: Fragments Toward a Life*, 75.

⁴⁴⁰ De Man to Derrida, October 17, 1975, The Paul de Man Papers, The Critical Theory Archive, The University of California-Irvine, 1.

⁴⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 2.

for polemical reasons.”⁴⁴² Rather, Miller suggested, indeed marketed, this group as one united by collectively pursuing deconstructive techniques of suspicious reading. The fall of 1975 for example saw Miller working on a small essay, “The Year’s Books: Literary Criticism,” which was solicited by *The New Republic*, a liberal magazine that had a major influence on American political and cultural thinking. In his essay, published on November 29, 1975, Miller not only had the temerity to announce—for the first time in print—the existence of a new group of literary critics at Yale, a new faction in New Haven. Miller also attempted to convince his readers to accept this Yale group’s writings as the most advanced—as the undeniably cutting-edge and philosophically sophisticated—work on the North American literary-critical scene.

Like a dramaturge, Miller attempted to achieve his goal by directing a dramatic scene with an intense cast of characters. Miller began his *New Republic* essay with the claim that, while “Anglo-American literary criticism” was largely “innocent”—in that Anglo-American critics, partly intentionally, had remained ignorant of recent intellectual developments from abroad—“the most important in the criticism of 1975 are those critics...who are developing a strongly individual criticism partly in deliberate antithesis” to the new criticism emerging from Continental Europe.⁴⁴³ Miller’s movers and shakers in North American literary criticism worked within but also against this innovative European criticism, which was, he wrote, “sufficiently complex to be irreducible to a single paradigm,” such as “French structuralism.”⁴⁴⁴ And, as it turned out, Miller’s New Haven colleagues were the central figures who labored for and against the “naturalization of recent continental criticisms”: “Paul de Man,” “one of the most rigorous and pervasively influential of present American critics”; “Geoffrey Hartman,” who “is at crucial movements [in] a dialogue with what he calls ‘the School of Derrida’”; and “Harold Bloom,”

⁴⁴² Miller on Yale School, 12; Cusset, 115.

⁴⁴³ Miller, “The Year’s Books: On Literary Criticism,” *New Republic*, 173 November 29, 1975, 30-33.

⁴⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 31.

“perhaps the most dazzlingly creative and provocative of critics writing in English today.”⁴⁴⁵

Miller portrayed his Yale colleagues as an advanced North American faction always a few steps ahead of their fellow—though not numerous—Anglo-American critics.

But, Miller’s “group of critics” did not simply produce “the most significant Anglo-American literary criticism” while working against the newly naturalized continental criticism. Instead, though Miller used the word “deconstruction” only during his explanation that “[o]ne important feature of ‘structuralism’ is its...reinterpretation or even ‘deconstruction’ of the seminal masters of modern thought: Hegel, Marx, Nietzsche, Freud, Heidegger, Saussure,”⁴⁴⁶ Miller’s New Haven movers and shakers applied their deconstructive techniques of reading to the very notion of a “group of critics.” Against his suggestion that “Hartman, Bloom, and de Man are members, in fact, of a new circle of critics centered at Yale,” Miller argued that his New Haven faction did not, as one might suppose if using a modern notion of the philosophical school, adhere to the same theoretical position.⁴⁴⁷ “These critics are by no means unified in their methodological commitments,” Miller wrote. Rather, Miller’s circle was a circle because for them “[t]he fundamental issue at stake...is the question whether the ‘cure of the ground’ which [American modernist poet Wallace] Stevens demands of poetry and of discourse about poetry is to be a ‘grounding,’ a making solid of the foundation,...or whether the ground is to be cured by being effaced, made to vanish, as medicine cures a man of disease by taking it away.”⁴⁴⁸ Miller’s Yale group was a group not because they coalesced around any specific content or methodology, but because they proposed different answers to the same question: the question about whether to cure poetry and criticism of poetry of the desire for foundational meanings. Miller’s Yale circle

⁴⁴⁵ Ibid., 31, 32-33.

⁴⁴⁶ Ibid., 31.

⁴⁴⁷ Pierre Hadot, *What Is Ancient Philosophy?* (Cambridge, MA.: Harvard University Press, 2002), 98.

⁴⁴⁸ Miller, “This Year’s Books: On Literary Criticism,” 33.

was—yet again—one step ahead of their innocent North American colleagues, this time because they deconstructed the very notion of a “school”—they affirmed but also denied the very idea of a school, or as Derrida would say, put the term “under erasure.”⁴⁴⁹ In this regard, it behooves one to remember undergraduate Rogal’s suggestion in the March 6, 1974 issue of *Yale Daily News Magazine* that the “philosophies” of Hartman, Bloom, and Miller “will begin to interlock at the edges, like the pieces of a puzzle, until they will all fit perfectly together.”⁴⁵⁰ While Bloom would of course deny any affiliation with his colleagues, Miller rather consciously aimed to draw boundaries around himself and his colleagues.

Miller for example ended his *The New Republic* essay with the suggestion that his Yale group embodied the avant-garde of American literary criticism and the very essence of poetry. He wrote: “Is a ‘cure of the ground’ the clearing away of the ground, leaving nothing to stand on, or is it a securing of the ground, making it firm, so one can build on it?...It must suffice here to say that the difference [between this clearing away and securing of the ground] generates the inner drama or *polemos* of contemporary criticism, for example that among the members of the Yale group.”⁴⁵¹ By proposing that the Yale group’s questioning of the ground was what bound them together as well as what produced the internal theater of North American critical culture poetry, Miller positioned his Yale circle as functioning in a similar fashion to literary criticism of poetry. It was to the Yale group’s work, in other words, that Anglo-American readers hoping to keep up with the most advanced literary criticism in the U.S.—a criticism that permitted one to discern the meaning and being of poetry—ought to look. One can justifiably imagine readers of Miller’s essay, many of whom were educated but lacked his specialist knowledge, consenting to Miller’s assertions.

⁴⁴⁹ Derrida, “Translator’s Preface” in *Of Grammatology* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1976), xiv.

⁴⁵⁰ See above, Rogal, 9.

⁴⁵¹ Miller, “Literary Criticism,” 33.

In his *The New Republic* essay, Miller aimed to convince readers to accept the idea of the Yale School as a philosophical school. Miller privately considered this notion as well. Miller, while preparing for his *The New Republic* piece and shortly after Derrida's first term at Yale, embraced his hermeneutic of suspicion to the notion of the Yale School in his personal journal. Miller's notes also anticipated his *Republic* piece as well as show the programmatic intent with which he constructed the Yale School. In his Oct. 7, 1975 journal entry, for example Miller's "Yale Group"—here with a capital "G"—"is riven by fissures but sharing a problematic or set of question[s] or putting in question."⁴⁵² Miller's Yale Group adopted deconstructive principles of reading, and, by doing so, remained within the text.

Miller reinforced his initial musing on the Yale Group in subsequent journal entries. On Oct. 14, 1975, Miller conceived an additional tactic for his own adoption of the deconstructive principles of the Yale Group: "Ahha, I think I see a way to speak of the Yale Group," he wrote. "[T]he Yale Group is Dionysiac [not] in the sense that this criticism is wildly orgiastic or irrational, but in the sense that might be symbolized by the marriage to Dionysus to Ariadne: the labyrinthine explanation of the labyrinth criticism as the uncanny."⁴⁵³ Miller compared the Yale Group to North American literary critics knowledgeable and in fact partly responsible for introducing European criticism to the Anglophone world. Miller concluded: "This is why they have been assaulted by the reviewers: [the] moment (in different [ways] for Bloom, Hartman, De Man, Derrida) when it no longer makes rational sense, when the bottom drops out, or when there is an abyssing."⁴⁵⁴ For Miller, the Yale Group members were therefore attacked not only by North American critics who, as he wrote in his *Republic* review, were "often implicitly hostile to

⁴⁵² Miller, Box 1 Folder 8 1975, J. Hillis Miller Notebook, The J. Hillis Miller Papers, The Critical Theory Archive, The University of California-Irvine, 3-4.

⁴⁵³ Miller, Oct 14, Box 1 Folder 8 1975, J. Hillis Miller Notebook, 6.

⁴⁵⁴ Ibid.

continental criticism or indifferent to it,” but also by North American critics well-versed in the innovative criticism emerging from Europe—both launched their assaults against the Yale Group, Miller believed, because they pushed one to question the very categories of “knowing.”⁴⁵⁵ Like Socrates, Miller’s Yale Group challenged readers to interrogate any and all knowledge claims. In this respect, Miller’s Yale Group was a group of hermeneuts of suspicion who continued their shared mission, earlier established at several conferences in the 1960s, to refine formalist method of reading.

XYZ: the ABCs of Deconstruction

At around the same time that Miller wrote about his “Yale Group,” a formation that coincided with the growing sense of intellectual, institutional, and cultural crisis in New Haven and in North America more broadly, de Man, Hartman, and Miller began to use the core courses of the undergraduate Literature Major as a *schwerpunkt* for their deconstructive forays. An often-told anecdote nicely hints at not simply the rapport between these by-then old friends, but also how their Lit Major classes extended de Man’s, Hartman’s, and Miller’s shared mission to revise formalist stances and styles of reading prose and poetry into the undergraduate student population. During the spring term of 1977, in 317 Linsly-Chittenden Hall, a Romanesque building on the High Street edge of Yale’s Old Campus that housed “The Best English Department in the World,” Hartman had just finished his Wednesday lecture in Lit Z, an innovative course in the Literature Major that he team-taught with de Man. Hartman’s lecture was based entirely on the final lines of Keats’s famous poem, “Ode on a Grecian Urn”: “Beauty is truth, truth beauty,—that is all/Ye know on earth, and all ye need to know.” Coming to the podium the following week to deliver his own lecture on Locke, Kant, and Marx, de Man

⁴⁵⁵ Miller, “This Year’s Books: On Literary Criticism,” 30.

handled the transition with his habitually ironic aplomb, commenting: “Professor Hartman has given you beauty, now you will get de trut” (de Man’s way of pronouncing “the truth”).⁴⁵⁶

Undergraduate literature classes—specifically Literature 120a Narrative Forms (known first and best as Lit X), Literature 300b Introduction to Literary Theory (Lit Y), and Literature 130b Reading and Rhetorical Structures (Lit Z)—collectively played a serious and central role in the production and diffusion of deconstructive reading practices at Yale University during the 1970s and early-1980s. Not only serving as testing grounds for the Yale group’s new material, these classes also introduced deconstruction, as much an disposition as an array of reading methods, to a student population whom academics and the public at large commonly think of as untouched by the octopus of “high theory.” What is commonly thought of as deconstructive reading—ironic, reflexive, demanding, prescient, a relentless foe of dualisms and foundational truths—rather surprisingly occurred, in various forms, in different ways, in several key low-level undergraduate courses. In these classes in New Haven, deconstruction inhabited undergraduates, and undergraduates became habituated to deconstruction. And in the longer arc that is the construction and installment of the hermeneutics of suspicion as the *de rigueur* for innovative humanities scholars in the North American academy, de Man’s, Hartman’s, and Miller’s Lit Major courses helped institutionalize mistrust of any claim of authenticity, originality, and primordialness. De Man, Hartman, and Miller’s Lit Major courses crystalized in their teaching their by-then almost decade and a half mission to refine formalist methods of reading.

As explored in Chapter Two, Yalies eagerly embraced the new hermeneutic of suspicion. In fact, by the early 1980s, Yale undergraduates’ enthusiasm for a radical revision of literary studies had become something of a tradition, stretching back to the late 1960s. In 1970, during a period of unrest in New Haven, with May Day anti-Vietnam protests and, perhaps most

⁴⁵⁶ Hartman, *A Scholar’s Journey*, 42.

disruptive of all, the decision, resisted by faculty and alumni alike, to admit women to Yale's undergraduate ranks, Yale students demanded substantial alterations to the curriculum. Under the heading for Comparative Literature in the 1970 *YCC*, students cheekily wrote: "You look in vain. Yale has no Comp. Lit. major. Harvard does. Berkeley does. Aren't we ready?"⁴⁵⁷ Students were ready; Yale was not. The university did not establish an undergraduate "Comp Lit" major until the 1980s, when faculty folded the Literature Major into the graduate program in Comp Lit.

Nevertheless, Yale students throughout the "'Me' decade" enjoyed the heady sequence of courses in the Lit Major. In these classes, undergraduates performed acts of textual deciphering that instilled in them a heightened awareness of the duplicity of language and the uncertain links between signs and meaning. And, significantly, undergraduates understood courses in the Lit Major as not simply fostering relativistic doubt, but also as training them how to systematically, methodologically, decode meaning. In the 1980 *YCC*, students explained that, though a "controversial, avant-garde endeavor in the sixties," the Lit Major was "now recognized as one of the foremost Literature departments in the country." The major was "unique in that it is an interdisciplinary study" founded on an "approach towards literature [that] is not historical—it is concerned more with the function and nature of literature. Some prefer to think of it as a more 'scientific' approach to literature."⁴⁵⁸ This uniquely interdisciplinary approach of Lit Major courses cultivated a deconstructive temperament.

Take the figure of the detective, with whom Yale's young deconstructive apprentices were trained to share not only a suspicious mind, but a mood of mistrust as well. In the fall 1981 iteration of Literature 120, a course first known as "Literature X," then "Man and His Fictions," and finally, in the fall of 1980, the inaugural year of Yale's Women's Studies Program, as the

⁴⁵⁷ *Yale Course Critique, 1971* (Yale University: The Daily News, 1971), 23.

⁴⁵⁸ *Yale Course Critique, 1980* (Yale University: The Daily News, 1980), 46.

gender-neutral “Narrative Forms,” Miller, upright chief inspector that he was, drilled his pupils to adopt a deconstructive stance and style. “In the detective story,” Miller’s September 28 exercise explained, “the inquest is fixed on the past, in an effort to elucidate the events leading to the ‘crime.’ Yet the inquest takes place in the present, and creates its own chain of events.” Narrative Forms investigators were to conduct inquiries by applying the “model of the detective story” to discern “the transformations of the model in one or more of...four works”: Sophocles’ *Oedipus the King*, Conrad’s *Heart of Darkness*, Freud’s “Wolfman,” and James’ *The Aspern Papers*.⁴⁵⁹ Though Miller’s students executed their inquests on texts in the Western literary tradition rather than the streets of New Haven (or London), they mimicked the methods of the police inspector, searching, in each story, for a criminal, a clue, and a crime.

But Miller’s young sleuths did not solely embrace the persona of the detective. From the beginning of the academic year, “Narrative Forms” students were encouraged to far more generally adopt a spirit of skepticism with which to question accepted meanings of literature. Sophomore Judy Wurtzel (a Literature major who went on to become Deputy Assistant Secretary for Policy at the U.S. Department of Education from 2009-2011) found herself lost in an abyss of illimitable interpretations rather early in the fall 1981 semester. In response to a question Miller posed—“How does one know if one’s interpretation of a text is correct?”—Wurtzel declared in her partly autobiographical confession that her Yale experience broke her trust in the bond between word and world, and cast her into a sea of doubt:

From childhood I have read voraciously and always trusted that I could understand and correctly interpret what I read. Yet at Yale, confronted with interpretations of literature different than mine, I am forced to reevaluate my sense of security and familiarity with interpretation. I feel in a critical watershed caught between standards & choice.

⁴⁵⁹ J. Hillis Miller, “Literature 120: Paper Topics,” September 28, 1981, Box 31, Folder 6 Literature 120 Narrative Forms 1979-1984, The J. Hillis Miller Papers, The Critical Theory Archive, The University of California-Irvine.

The very fact that others may have interpretations different from mine indicates that there is not one “absolute” reading of a text. I have found no “how to” guide for interpretation, no set of directions which lead to a fool proof correct analysis. I have discovered no absolute standard by which I can judge analysis & say “Yes, this is correct.” For a correct analysis one must first look at the text and explore it... There seems to be a limit—determined more by moderation & good sense than by rule or formula—beyond which one should not go. But where that limit lies is still questionable.⁴⁶⁰

This aesthetic experience of being atop a critical precipice, suspiciously staring into an interpretive abyss, accelerated—albeit at varying rates—“Narrative Forms” students’ habituation to deconstruction. Junior Juliet Guichon (currently an Assistant Professor at the University of Calgary whose work addresses human vulnerability at the intersection of law, health care, ethics, religion, and journalism) was already such a cadet by early fall 1980. In her response to Miller’s question, she calmly stressed the need for self-effacement and impersonality: “The validity of one’s reading of a work is determined by the text itself. The text stands alone and must be interpreted in relation to the unwritten rules the author implies throughout the work.”⁴⁶¹ This internalization of the ascetic deconstructive ethos occurred even among students not all that serious about literary study. Guichon’s classmate, a dual major in Economics and Political Science named Dong Ho Ahn, confidently declared: “There is no one right interpretation of literary writings. One can find many shades of meanings from a very simple nursery rhyme. In reading a story, one never really know[s] the intention of the author.”⁴⁶² A deconstructive bearing and technique of reading unmistakably disciplined these Yale students, and well before

⁴⁶⁰ Judy Wurtzel to J. Hillis Miller, Box 31, Folder 7 Literature 120 Narrative Forms 1979-1984, The J. Hillis Miller Papers, The Critical Theory Archive, The University of California-Irvine.

⁴⁶¹ Juliet Guichon to J. Hillis Miller, Box 31, Folder 8 Literature 120 Narrative Forms 1979-1984, The J. Hillis Miller Papers, The Critical Theory Archive, The University of California-Irvine.

⁴⁶² Dong Ho Ahn to Hillis Miller, Box 31, Folder 8 Literature 120 Narrative Forms 1979-1984, The J. Hillis Miller Papers, The Critical Theory Archive, The University of California-Irvine.

“deconstructionism”—not to mention “poststructuralism,” “postmodernism,” and other isms—clogged many American academics’ parlance.

Regardless of whether it overturned or simply strengthened a student’s approach to literary interpretation, Narrative Forms inspired students to produce critical essays of a labyrinthine complexity. One of Miller’s final assignments in the 1979 iteration of the course required his pupils to parody an interpretive method employed by a school of literary critics that Borges described in his short story “Tlön, Uqbar, Orbis Tertius.” Miller’s deconstructive apprentices were to “[a]ttribute two works (eg. *The Words* and *The Confessions*, *Great Expectations* and *Absalom, Absalom!*) to the same author and discuss how one revises and elaborates the plot model of the other.”⁴⁶³ In his inquest, “Closure in Literary Criticism: A Parable,” sophomore Bill Jewett, imitating Borges’ style and stance, weaved a *mise en abîme* that surely made his New Haven chief proud. Jewett escorted readers through a deconstructive maze in which the plots of Freud’s “Wolfman” and Conrad’s *Heart of Darkness* “develop[ed] two examples of enigma with complementary yet diametrically opposed methods: in Freud’s ‘Wolfman’ the reader sees the unknown illuminated by clues, whereas in Conrad’s *Heart of Darkness* the reader sees clues illuminated by the unknown.” In addition to opposing methods of detection, Freud’s and Conrad’s stories “progress through a process of revelation in opposite directions yet end up in the same place.”⁴⁶⁴ By exchanging clue for enigma, enigma for clue, and reversing beginning and end, end and beginning, Jewett’s Freud and Conrad turned out to be deconstructive detectives who disassembled (the other’s) narrative form, not just temporally but structurally as well.

⁴⁶³ December 10, Box 31, Folder 10 Literature 120 Narrative Forms 1979-1984, The J. Hillis Miller Papers, The Critical Theory Archive, The University of California-Irvine.

⁴⁶⁴ Bill Jewett to J. Hillis Miller, “Closure in Literary Criticism: A Parable,” Box 31, Folder 8 Literature 120 Narrative Forms 1979-1984, The J. Hillis Miller Papers, The Critical Theory Archive, The University of California-Irvine, 1.

Jewett's paper must have provided a good deal of pedagogical pleasure to Miller, above all because of its impressively self-aware internal mirroring. In fact, from the very start of his gumshoe work, Jewett, with a Borgesian grin, alerted his reader that it was Jewett and Miller—not simply Freud and Conrad—who were guilty of the essay's deconstructions. It was a "T.A." named "Miller," Jewett knowingly claimed in his paper's first paragraph, who distributed Freud's and Conrad's stories for his professor's final assignment in "Elementary Hermeneutics (conducted in English)."⁴⁶⁵ After fictionalizing Miller, Jewett began his paper on Freud and Conrad, but not before placing scare quotes around the entire essay. By doing so, Jewett self-reflexively advanced the deconstructive claim that texts refer in a frame-in-frame way to other texts; Jewett consigned his paper to another layer in his *mise en abîme*. The real Miller was likely impressed with Jewett's use of intertextuality and metafiction, central writing techniques for postmodern literature. Alas, Jewett's fictional professor, following a series of critical remarks on Jewett's failure to prove that "there can be no closure to either the text or the reading of the text," simply gave his student a "C." Jewett's imaginary teacher wrote: "[Y]our paper has some merit for what it is; also, grade inflation compels me not to fail you."⁴⁶⁶

After Lit X, the next letter floating in the Lit major's alphabet soup: Y. In the early 1970s, Peter Brooks and Michael Holquist—two of three architects of Lit X—lobbied hard to conjure "Literature Y: Introduction to Literary Theory" into existence. Though the object of a good deal of intellectual support from faculty and students (that is, after fierce resistance from conservative professors in several Humanities' departments [as explored in Chapter Two of this dissertation), the fledgling Literature department lacked financial support—Brooks and Holquist had to cobble together funding for Lit Y. Their effort succeeded, with Lit Y initially sponsored

⁴⁶⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶⁶ Ibid., 6.

and paid for by the German department, and Peter Demetz in German and Comp Lit presiding over its first semester in the fall of 1972. To the untrained eye, Lit Y likely appeared the least innovative—and consequentially the least interesting—of Lit major courses, as the class schooled students, not to practice exegesis or apply critical theories, but in the history of contemporary critical theory. It was simply a survey course of twentieth-century literary theory.

Lit Y drilled Yalies to rapidly embrace and then just as quickly shed an impressive sequence of skeptical personae and techniques of reading. By the early 1980s, Lit Y's semester-long semi-chronological cycling through of suspicious hermeneutics had helped produce an atmosphere in which deconstructive reading practices of all kinds flourished in New Haven. Traces of this atmosphere are found in the early 1970s iterations of the course, where Lit Yers explored an array of texts and interpretive methods then customarily overlooked in literary study. In a May 26, 1972 letter to Horace Taft, dean of Yale College, Demetz explained that Lit Yers considered: "Literature, oral tradition, and the media; theories of meaning and interpretation (hermeneutics); questions of genre, with discussion of representative examples, the mixture of forms, and the fusions of various arts. The structure and range of literary value judgments, and a critical analysis of Marxist, psychoanalytic, formalist, and structuralist approaches to literature."⁴⁶⁷ Lit Yers' absorption of this assortment of critical languages—each which stressed the artificiality of boundaries drawn around or accepted definitions of literature—habituated them to the deconstructive manner and style of reading.

A decade after its—admittedly local and relatively minute—first attempt to transform Yale into a residence for varieties of deconstructive life, Lit Y's atmosphere was thicker, its elements heavier, and, important for fulfilling the course's pedagogical aims, its historical

⁴⁶⁷ Peter Demetz to Horace Taft, May 26, 1972, Box 30, Folder 429, RU 126, Yale College records of the dean, Manuscripts and Archives Yale University.

trajectory clearer. On January 13, 1982, for instance, Demetz's Lit Y—or, per the Yale administration, Literature 300b Introduction to Literary Theory—began disciplining students in the tradition of skeptical reading with the lecture, “Homo Signifer: The Challenge of the Semiotic Tradition.”⁴⁶⁸ Demetz's lecture aimed to inculcate in undergraduates the view of humanity as a translating and signifying subject, as much the producer as product of an endless sign process of semiosis. Embracing humanity as fluid, a dynamic process that has no essence or substance, Lit 300 students became hermeneuts of suspicion, mistrustful of the established, the obvious, the familiar meanings of texts. And for the rest of the spring semester, Lit 300 lectures and exercises groomed undergraduates for the class's skeptical mood and mind. Students absorbed techniques of suspicious reading by influential Americans and Europeans—Frye, Hegel, Propp, Heidegger, Marx, Freud, Lacan, Barthes, Foucault, and, in the final weeks, shifted focus to Feminist Criticism, including the work of Hélène Cixous, Luce Irigaray, Mary Jacobus, and Sandra Gilbert, and Afro-American Studies and the ways those fields revised literary canons.⁴⁶⁹

To acclimate young hermeneuts to a deconstructive atmosphere, Lit 300 instructors sometimes exploited a native resource: the most prominent deconstructionists in America, most of whom worked just a stone's throw away in Linsly-Chittenden Hall. On April 5, 1982 at 11:30am in 113 William L. Harkness Hall, another of the striking Collegiate Gothic buildings on the Old Campus, Miller lectured to Demetz's Lit 300 course on “Post-Structuralist Thought: Derrida.”⁴⁷⁰ Almost precisely three years later, Miller treated the assembled hermeneuts of Paul Fry's Lit 300 with another dose of Derrida and de Man. Equipped with the English translations

⁴⁶⁸ “Literature Y: Syllabus,” Box 31, Folder 7 Literature 120 Narrative Forms 1979-1984, The J. Hillis Miller Papers, The Critical Theory Archive, The University of California-Irvine.

⁴⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 1-4.

⁴⁷⁰ “Literature 300: Syllabus,” Box 31, Folder 7 Literature 120 Narrative Forms 1979-1984, The J. Hillis Miller Papers, The Critical Theory Archive, The University of California-Irvine.

of relevant texts on reserve or xeroxed, Miller administered what are now seen as the classic deconstructionist terms and concepts of “trope,” “unreadability,” and “metaphor.” While students embraced Miller’s deconstruction and the deconstructive spirit of Lit 300’s other authors, the cumulative effect of students’ exercising of skeptical personae and methods of reading was to help build a domicile for deconstructive reading practices in New Haven. And yet, each time Lit 300 students used a literary theory to step back from and interrogate what seemed self-evident about literature, they also—ironically—added another brick to what today appears to be a permanent house arrest: the canon of “high theory.” Though it had changed by the mid-1980s to reflect the shifting intellectual trends, Lit 300’s reading list during the late-1970s and early-1980s reads as a who’s who of “high theory” precisely because it helped to birth “high theory.” The fact that this labor partially occurred in undergraduate classrooms at Yale should give pause to the impulse to solely investigate the history of theory at a high elevation.

Literature Z, the third (and final) core course of the Literature major, was, in the words of Paul Fry, “the world according to de Man.” This class’s introduction to the curriculum was well timed. In the 1975 *YCC*, undergraduates, though they proudly acknowledged the Lit major as “the ultimate liberal arts major,” complained that the major’s core course—Lit X—needed “revision.” The class was “supposed to be an innovative course, but seem[ed] to have gotten into a rut.”⁴⁷¹ Several professors also sensed the need for change; a few in the Slavic Department complained that Lit X and Lit Y—and more generally the Literature Major—neglected the “verbal art,” or poetics, the theory of literary forms and literary discourse.⁴⁷² The same year that undergraduates bemoaned the dullness of the formerly exciting and experimental Lit X found de Man, then Chair of the French department, and Hartman, who had been on the Governing Board

⁴⁷¹ *Yale Course Critique 1976* (Yale University: The Daily News, 1976), 114.

⁴⁷² Peter Brooks, interview by Jones-Katz, October 14, 2014.

of the Literature Major since 1972 and would be until 1976, drafting plans for this new course in the Lit Major. Proposed to be taught in the fall of 1976 but in fact taught for the first time in spring 1977, Lit Z became what some have deemed—though this is open to debate—Yale’s most distinctive undergraduate literature course.⁴⁷³ What is surely indisputable is that Lit Z—more so than Lit X or Lit Y (and these courses’ subsequent versions)—offered the most rigorous deconstructive training for undergraduates, not just at Yale, but in the entire world. De Man and Hartman’s brainchild was simply and utterly unique. There was neither precedent nor contemporary equivalent, not in New Haven and not in Paris.

Lit Z’s success can be partly traced to de Man and Hartman’s 1975 course proposal. De Man and Hartman pitched Lit Z to their New Haven colleagues in a curious—and implicitly deconstructive—manner. “[A]t Yale and elsewhere,” the two arch-deconstructors wrote, “the curriculum for the teaching of literature...has undergone very little change over the last two or three decades.”⁴⁷⁴ Teachers have trained students to consider literature either “as a succession of periods and movements that can be articulated as an historical narrative” or “a set of statements which, taken together, lead to a better understanding of human existence.” But, de Man and Hartman suggested, these two approaches—the historical and the philosophical—lagged behind cutting-edge pedagogies in America and Europe. Innovative pedagogies “moved toward [treating] literature as a language about language, or a metalinguistic discipline best understood as a response to the specific complexities and resources of language.”⁴⁷⁵ Like this progressive curriculum, Lit Z would train students to consider literature as a self-deconstructive text, a text that possesses a sort of metacognition of its own irresolvable contradictions. In addition to

⁴⁷³ Hartman c.v., 8; Martin McQuillan, “Introduction,” in *The Paul de Man Notebooks* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2015), 227, 228.

⁴⁷⁴ Paul de Man and Geoffrey Hartman, “Curriculum for Lit Z Proposal (1975),” Box 12, Folder 11, Literature Z 1975-1983, The Paul de Man Papers, The Critical Theory Archive, The University of California-Irvine, 1.

⁴⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 2.

schooling undergraduates to recognize a text's deconstructive agency (it undoes itself), Lit Z trained students "to decide how gifted they in fact are for literary study."⁴⁷⁶ The last letter in the Lit Major's alphabetical soup, the course would be a gatekeeper, after which undergraduates, not professors, would choose to either guard themselves from or further embrace the challenging descent into the crypt of "high theory."

De Man and Hartman not only suggested in their proposal that Lit Z would transform undergraduates into deconstructive debunkers as well as offer students the chance to jump on textual whirligigs of vertiginous troping. Beauty and de trut also implied that Lit Z deconstructed literary studies. Though contemporaries might have viewed it as a new "orientation of literary studies toward language," according to de Man and Hartman, Lit Z was "far from being something new-fangled," and "represents in fact a return to an age-long tradition which rooted the study of literature in philology, poetics, rhetoric, and grammar."⁴⁷⁷ For several decades, Yale undergraduates had encountered this kind of de-emphasis on historical considerations and emphasize on the naked text in the course English 25, the pedagogical manifestation of the New Critics' formalist approach and in some sense a forerunner of de Man and Hartman's Lit Z.⁴⁷⁸ Undergraduates reflected in 1974: "[English 25] was at the same time a journey through tradition and a deeply enjoyable exposure to a close, analytical reading of poetry."⁴⁷⁹ In 1975, undergraduates wrote: "Students leave this course with a working knowledge of some classic literature, a developed skill for analytical and close reading, and an abiding respect, even love, for good poetry."⁴⁸⁰ But by (re)aligning literary studies toward the complications of language, Lit Z was innovative *and* traditional. De Man and Hartman's portrayal in their Lit Z proposal—

⁴⁷⁶ Ibid., 3.

⁴⁷⁷ Ibid., 4.

⁴⁷⁸ Rogal, 9.

⁴⁷⁹ *Yale Course Critique 1975* (Yale University: The Daily News), 76.

⁴⁸⁰ *Yale Course Critique 1976* (Yale University: The Daily News), 100.

which likely appealed to both faculty who hoped to preserve conventional methods of literary interpretation and faculty eager to move beyond the established boundaries of literary study—perhaps accounts for de Man and Hartman’s success at persuading their colleagues to introduce Lit Z as a core course in the Lit major. Such a portrayal also hints at the extent to which deconstruction was built into the very fabric of Lit Z, as the course both affirmed and denied its radicalness, training itself as it trained undergraduates to interpret literature—including the course proposal—as a language about language. From Hartman’s perspective, the criticism taught in Lit Z, “as reading to the second power, did not have to conflict with the pleasures of the text [this is where Hartman differed from de Man]. It was not the idea of the course to apply theory as a mode of ‘mastering’ or ‘resolving’ complex verbal artifacts or even to gain a disciplined distance from them in order to make some enlarged worldly statement. I preferred to draw a verbal artifact named ‘theory’ from our readings and present it as an active mode of contemplation feeding back into the text. If philosophy and literature had an affinity rather than being adversaries, this would emerge from the possibility de Man and I were jointly exploring.”⁴⁸¹ For Hartman, Lit Z—similar to what he hoped to achieve on—could Nevertheless, Hartman dryly noted in his 2007 memoir: “Many thought I was practicing deconstruction without a license.”⁴⁸²

This self-deconstruction of Lit Z extended—kudzu-like—to all levels, all aspects, and all versions of the course. During Lit Z’s second month, instructors often required trainees to sit at the feet of Nietzsche, who foresaw nearly every move that an arch-deconstructor could make. Students were specifically expected to wrestle with mimeographed selections from Nietzsche’s corpus where he argued that language is the locus of conflict and power. In the inaugural spring

⁴⁸¹ Hartman, *A Scholar’s Journey*, 79.

⁴⁸² *Ibid.*

1977 iteration of Lit Zb Reading and Rhetorical Structures, for instance, de Man and Hartman solicited students to dance with this ur-deconstructor of dualisms. “In the second part of the essay *Truth and Falsity* (pp. 512-15),” de Man and Hartman’s February 13 exercise explained, “Nietzsche sets up what appears to be a contrast, a polarity, between the man of ‘science’ and the man of ‘art.’” However, adopting the deconstructive stance and style required Lit Zers to not simply identify, but—like Nietzsche—interrogate this ostensibly natural and self-evident binary. “By a close reading of this section,” de Man and Hartman wrote, “you are invited (1) to discuss the structure of this opposition and (2) to examine its implications with regard to the relative value of both activities, in themselves as well as regard to history.” De Man and Hartman certainly recognized the demands of this assignment. And, as such, they offered four “suggestions to assist [students] in organizing [their] thoughts.” One prompt asked Lit Zers to center their thoughts on how “the opposition between ‘science’ and ‘art’ relate[d] to the theory of language as figuration developed in part I of [Nietzsche’s] essay in answer to such questions as ‘What is a word?’ (p. 506) or ‘What is therefore truth?’ (p. 508).”⁴⁸³ With this suggestion, students oriented themselves—like de Man and Hartman’s Nietzsche—toward a deconstructive compartment and technique of interpretation in which the self-evident opposition between “science” and “art” as well as foundational truths were caught in the grip of unstable linguistic and semiotic systems.

Lit Zers became Nietzschean sticks of dynamite. And these *pupils’* explorations of texts’ inner stresses and strains continued unabated in Miller’s and de Man’s spring 1979 version of the course: Lit 130b—its notorious Z, like its siblings X and Y, having been translated into administratively acceptable course numbers. In a revised version of de Man and Hartman’s

⁴⁸³ De Man and Hartman, February 13, 1977, Box 31, Folder 7 Literature 120 Narrative Forms 1979-1984, The J. Hillis Miller Papers, The Critical Theory Archive, The University of California-Irvine.

February 13 Lit Z exercise, for example, Miller and de Man offered students tactical information about where and how Nietzsche conducted his deconstructive raid on the notion that the Subject is a unitary whole without difference—an explosive idea for undergraduates; future boilerplate for many a culturati’s opinion pieces a decade later. Lit 130b debunkers-in-training were to “[w]rite an essay of not less than 5 and not more 10 pages” about Nietzsche’s description in Section V of *The Birth of Tragedy* about the “transformation of what he calls ‘subjectively willing man’ (p. 50) into ‘the one truly existent subject’ (p. 52) that appears in the work of art.”⁴⁸⁴ To help pupils unpack Nietzsche’s dismantling of the Subject, Miller and de Man not only, as during de Man and Hartman’s Lit Z, pinpointed an opposition, in this instance the binary between “[t]he self” and the “Aesthetic Phenomenon” in Nietzsche’s text. They also directed students toward the fact that Nietzsche often stated the “interplay” between this opposition “by means of such terms as, on p. 49, copy (Abbild), repetition (Wiederholung), example, symbol (Gleichnis), etc.”⁴⁸⁵ By tracing how Nietzsche’s conversion of selfhood into an artwork pivoted on figures of speech, Lit Zers joined Nietzsche in stripping the Subject of substance, and in transforming it into a chain of linguistic substitutions, which, like Nietzsche’s smooth, worn down coins, is a mobile army of metaphors, metonyms, and anthropomorphisms.

The deconstructive (de)bunker in New Haven housed a number of other classes taught by de Man, Hartman, and Miller during the 1970s and early 1980s. In one of Miller’s 1978 undergraduate poetry courses, junior Carl Goldfarb (an English and Philosophy major who three decades after leaving Yale led 2011 and 2014 briefings against Halliburton at the U.S. Supreme Court) executed a series of textbook deconstructions in his essay “‘The Wild Swans at Coole,’

⁴⁸⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁸⁵ Ibid.

‘Leda and the Swam’ and ‘Coole Park and Ballylee, 1931:’ a toehold in Yeats’ poetry.”⁴⁸⁶ Yeats’ “The Wild Swans at Coole,” written between 1916 and 1917 for Yeats’ friend Lady Gregory and dedicated to her son who was killed during World War I, pondered the changes since he counted the swans swimming at dusk in a lake at Coole Park nineteen years ago. Acclimated to the deconstructive bearing and method of reading, Goldfarb argued that Yeats, due to the duplicity of language, could neither have said what he meant nor meant what he said. At first, Goldfarb’s Yeats appeared to offer readers a stable foothold on his poem’s meaning: “Yeats shape[d] an emblem as he transform[ed] the natural swans of the second stanza—mounting, wheeling, and clamoring—to the meaning laden emblems of the fourth and fifth stanzas—unwearied, unaging, mysterious, and beautiful.”⁴⁸⁷ However, Goldfarb maintained, readers’ hopes for a secure narrative about the swans’ voyage from change to permanence were dashed, as Yeats “contradict[ed] himself,” “claim[ing] ‘All’s changed...’ (p. 322 1.15)” since he first counted the swans but also that “[t]he swans have not changed,” “are ‘unwearied still’ (1.19),” “[t]heir hearts have not grown old’ (1.22).” “In formal terms,” Goldfarb wrote, “the poem deconstructs itself, laying bare the change that Yeats had tried to cover.”⁴⁸⁸ Thanks to Yeats’ deconstructive dexterity, his swans did and did not transition from the sublunary to the celestial world. Like Lit Zers, like Narrative Forms’s students, like students schooled in various courses in the Lit Major, Yeats self-deconstructed. Ultimately, Goldfarb’s reading of Yeats demonstrates the extent to which he and other students acclimated to deconstruction in New Haven.

French philosopher (and oft dubbed “father of deconstruction”) Jacques Derrida began teaching at Yale during the fall of 1976 semester. From that point, Yalies occasionally latched

⁴⁸⁶ Carl Goldfarb, “‘The Wild Swans at Coole,’ ‘Leda and the Swam’ and ‘Coole Park and Ballylee, 1931:’ a toehold in Yeats’ poetry,” Box 31, Folder 13 Poetry Courses 1970-1980, The J. Hillis Miller Papers, The Critical Theory Archive, The University of California-Irvine, 1.

⁴⁸⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸⁸ Ibid., 5.

onto Derrida's notorious statement "there is nothing outside the text" to orient themselves toward the deconstructive stance and style. Goldfarb implicitly used Derrida's maxim during his reading of Yeats' "Coole Park and Ballylee, 1931" in his paper for Miller's aforementioned 1978 poetry course. Upon a first reading of the poem's final two lines of the third stanza, Goldfarb maintained, Yeats appeared to suggest that the reader should trust the ontological independence of his swan emblem, its externality to nature. Goldfarb's Yeats "explain[ed] both the power of the emblem, it's 'so lovely that is set to right / What knowledge or its lack had awry' and its illusory appearance, it's 'so arrogantly pure, a child might think / It can be murdered with a spot of ink' (11.21-24)."⁴⁸⁹ (In the paper's margins, Miller—or one of his Teaching Assistants—enthusiastically wrote: "That is, by being written about, [the swans] turned into writing!") But, Goldfarb argued, because of its independent existence, Yeats' swan emblem could not, despite what a child might think, be killed with a spot of ink, as *it*—that is, the swan emblem—was actually the real swan. While Yeats gave the impression of sketching an opposition between his swan emblem and the real swan, he in fact questioned this binary. "[T]he child is indeed right," Goldfarb wrote, though "his reasoning is mistaken," as "[t]he swan can be murdered by a spot of ink, not because the swan is so pure, but because the swan is itself only a spot of ink. The swan is not a real swan, but Yeats' creation. The swan only exists as a spot of ink, as Yeats' verbal creation, and can be easily murdered as it was created by words." (Scribbled in the margins: "Yes, good!" wrote his TA approvingly).⁴⁹⁰ In the space of a couplet, Yeats collapsed the opposition between his swan emblem and his real swan—with his poem, writing and reality had become united by their difference. Goldfarb's paper further exemplifies the extraordinary ways that Yale undergraduates embraced the deconstructive mind and mood.

⁴⁸⁹ Ibid., 4.

⁴⁹⁰ Ibid., 5.

Lit X, Lit Y, and Lit Z introduced the ABCs of deconstruction to undergraduates at Yale University during the 1970s and 1980s. But these Lit major courses—and their various iterations—did not simply instruct pupils in deconstructive methods of reading. Instead, XYZ inculcated a sensitivity in undergraduates to the intellectual virtues of irresolution, contradiction, and duality. While scholars and non-academics often believe this student population to have been either oblivious to or uninterested in the arcane workings of “high theory,” a number of Yale students, as these fragments of a larger history of XYZ shows, intensely embraced the deconstructive stance and style. To be sure, the vast majority who enrolled in Lit major courses did not pursue graduate studies in literature. Nor did they necessarily apply deconstructive principles to their future endeavors. Nevertheless, to the varying degrees that they became hermeneuts of suspicion, debunkers of dualisms, slayers of foundational truths, XYZers, though practicing an array of deconstructions in a rather circumscribed area of the Old Campus, helped shape the current—and dominant—tradition in the American academy of mistrust—indeed in some cases denouncement—of any claim of naturalness, originality, primordialness, and authenticity.

While Miller publically and privately meditated on the Yale School in the fall of 1975, while Hartman drafted his first *Georgia Review* essay on Derrida’s *Glas*, the aforementioned institutional changes were afoot in New Haven. Miller’s colleagues de Man and Hartman helped launch a pedagogical program that trained undergraduates as well as their teachers to adopt deconstructive reading practices. De Man and Hartman’s pedagogical program established a route through the Literature Major, an undergraduate version of comparative literature, that offered comprehensive training in deconstructive techniques of reading. Before this route was developed, deconstructive reading was simply out of reach for undergraduates at Yale and

elsewhere. Though deconstruction viewed as an elite method for readings only utilized by professors and graduate students during the late 1970s, 1980s, and beyond, an examination of de Man and Hartman's program in Yale's Literature Major reveals the dissemination of deconstructive reading skills and practices in New Haven on the undergraduate level.⁴⁹¹

Deconstruction and Criticism: Or, Promoting the Yale School

The volume *Deconstruction and Criticism* (1979) was the first—and only—publication that textually assembled all five members of the Yale School—Bloom, de Man, Derrida, Hartman, and Miller. The volume, which has remained in print for over three and a half decades, was then and continues to be marketed as “the ground-breaking work that introduced Deconstruction to the Western world, with five major essays by its principal proponents.”⁴⁹² Indeed, the volume became tremendously influential, helping as it did to produce the image of the Yale School and introduced “deconstruction” to a wide variety of North American readers. An investigation into the planning of *Deconstruction and Criticism* reveals the roles that—indeed, the programmatic intent and marketing skills of—Mafia members played in promoting deconstructive criticism to North American academic communities. This examination also shows how closely members of the Yale Group—above all Bloom and Miller—drew energy and support from their years of working together in New Haven. An understanding of the planning of *Deconstruction and Criticism* shows the extent to which Bloom, de Man, Hartman, and Miller saw themselves as part of a formed critical school, the primary goal of which was the cultivation of deconstruction, a disposition as much as an array of reading techniques.

⁴⁹¹ See Maude Tisch, “A Critical Distance,” last modified October 1, 2015, last accessed November 17, 2015, <http://yaleherald.com/news-and-features/a-critical-distance/>

⁴⁹² Back flap, *Deconstruction and Criticism*.

Though North American professors and graduate students would first come to hear about the Yale School and deconstruction from *Deconstruction and Criticism*, the impression that many in the U.S. literary-critical community first received sharply differed from the volume's initial aims. In an August 25, 1977 letter to Miller, Justus George Lawler, Editor-in-Chief at Continuum Books and The Seabury Press and who worked closely with each member of the Mafia on their joint book project, summarized the calculated efforts behind the project: "Harold Bloom has told you [Miller, that is] of our conversations concerning a book to be written by yourself, Paul De Man, Jacques Derrida, Geoffrey Hartman, along with Professor Bloom."⁴⁹³ Indeed, it was Bloom, who first conceived of the idea that he and his colleagues should publish a volume together, as Bloom realized the commercial and academic rewards of such a venture. Alvin Kernan, one of the architects of the Lit X at Yale, recalled that Bloom, "[f]or all his romanticism," was a "careerist of unusual abilities," and understood the financial and intellectual rewards in marketing "deconstruction and criticism."⁴⁹⁴ It is certainly correct that Bloom was the Yale School member, as later recalled in a November 1985 interview, who instigated the joint book project: "I devised the volume, I created the volume, I thought it up, got the publisher, brought everybody together and gave the book its title, *Deconstruction and Criticism*. The title was my personal joke, which no one can ever understand: I meant that those four [de Man, Derrida, Hartman, and Miller] were deconstruction, and I was criticism."⁴⁹⁵ In 2014, Miller stated that "*Deconstruction and Criticism* was a pretty causal affair. I had published a short review essay [on November 29 in *The New Republic*] naming a new group of theorists and critics at Yale. Bloom took the ball from there and phoned us all to ask for an essay from each about

⁴⁹³ Justus George Lawler to J. Hillis Miller, August 25, 1977, Box 24 Folder 25, Critical Inquiry 1976-1977, The J. Hillis Miller Papers, The Critical Theory Archive, 1.

⁴⁹⁴ Kernan, *In Plato's Cave*, 71.

⁴⁹⁵ Salusinszky, 67, 68.

Shelley's 'The Triumph of Life.' We never met face to face to discuss the book."⁴⁹⁶ As evidenced by Lawler's August 25, 1977 letter to Miller, however, neither Bloom's nor Miller's recollections precisely match the historical record.

What Bloom's and Miller's recollections obscure is both the collection's proposed audience and the almost-programmatic attempt to form a school. Lawler wrote: "Since we see this book as primarily directed to course use, both on the undergraduate and graduate levels, the bulk of the sales will be in the paperback edition which we intend to publish concurrently with the hardcover. Harold has given me a brief sketch of each contribution, but I think it is important in view of the likely use to which the book will be put that each essay be a kind of summation of where the individual author sees himself in terms of contemporary critical theory." What is also clear is that Bloom—and presumably his Yale School colleagues, not to mention Seabury Press—were not only keen to differentiate their personal projects from their contemporaries, but also portray themselves, in relation to one another, as a critical school. Lawler wrote: "To the degree that each author can show affinities between his work and that of other contributors to this book—so much the better. What we above all want to avoid is the appearance that this is a collection of disparate pieces by five scholars who happen to share an institutional affiliation."⁴⁹⁷ And indeed it was not that. *Deconstruction and Criticism* illustrates that the Yale School was very much a school. Despite Bloom and Miller's later attempts to emphasize their differences, the planning of their shared volume shows a joint deconstructive project. The Mafia's undergraduate and graduate teaching, their intellectual friendships, their professional visions—all of these should by rights be considered the glue that not only bound *Deconstruction and Criticism* and also the Yale School itself.

⁴⁹⁶ Jones-Katz, "Constantly Contingent," 58.

⁴⁹⁷ Ibid.

4

An Organ of Deconstruction: The Theory and History of Literature SeriesIntroduction

The late-1970s was a time of inflation and recession, oil shortages, faltering cities. In the North American academy, it was also a time of theory, and particularly so in humanities departments at the University of Minnesota-Twin Cities.⁴⁹⁸ There, theory helped scholars to decipher “the text,” a category considered to include everything: a corporate organization chart, a cereal box, Prince’s “Little Red Corvette.”⁴⁹⁹ Though these theorists’ jargon gave the impression to the uninitiated that to understand, not to mention practice, theory was akin to entrance to a secret society, theorists’ purpose was simply to examine the clichés of culture and language, and question the authority on which those assumptions rest. But theory was not just practiced and disseminated in UMinn’s humanities buildings. Theory was also applied and distributed at the UMinn Press, which came to house the most influential publishing venture of the last half-century in the North American humanities: *The Theory and History of Literature* series (1978–1998).⁵⁰⁰ An influential organ of deconstructive thought, THL persuaded readers’ to adopt various deconstructive ways of reading. The dissemination of these deconstructive interpretive methods—made possible by the press’ efforts to tap into and largely create the niche market of theory—helped to produce deconstructive academic culture in North America.

Two UMinn faculty members, Jochen Schulte-Sasse (1940-2012) and Wlad Godzich (1945-), edited the THL series with then Editor-in-Chief Lindsay Waters (1947-). Schulte-

⁴⁹⁸ See Wlad Godzich’s comments about “theory” in Paul Dienhart, “The Joy of Text,” *University of Minnesota Update* 13 (1986): 1-3.

⁴⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, 3. 2.

⁵⁰⁰ Mark Bauerlein, “Diminishing Returns in Humanities Research,” *Chronicle of Higher Education*, July 24, 2009, B4–B5; Stanford Lehmberg and Ann M. Pflaum, *The University of Minnesota 1945-2000* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2001), X, 305, 306.

Sasse, Godzich, and Waters were uniquely poised to build the Leviathan of American Theory. These editors' intellectual program, which developed out of their graduate school experiences and early scholarship, was unusual by contemporary standards, defined as it was through critical method and perspective—social and cultural theory and interdisciplinary inquiry—rather than traditional scholarly disciplines. Like many of the theories they published, Schulte-Sasse, Godzich, and Waters' program transcended disciplinary boundaries, recasting all knowledge as genres of literature. By consuming THL texts, readers' adopted the deconstructive mind and mood. And the distribution of these deconstructive compartments and methods of interpretation helped to generate the deconstructive culture of the 1980s.

The story of the THL series has only been—very briefly—recounted in promotional materials for the UMin Press.⁵⁰¹ While historians have attended to the “efforts [of] conservative intellectuals and their institutional sponsors” in late twentieth-century North America, they have disregarded how the THL series—helmed by leftists—at the disseminated deconstruction.⁵⁰² Historians' neglect likely also stems from the fact that scholarship has echoed the view of the “American critical establishment of the 1970s that the European continent stretches from the Channel to the Western Alps, but not beyond the Rhine.”⁵⁰³ François Cusset for example subsumed the THL series under the “brand” of “French theory,” obscuring the non-Francophone thinkers published in the series as well as the North Americans who worked at and whose work was disseminated by Schulte-Sasse, Godzich, and Waters' endeavor.⁵⁰⁴

⁵⁰¹ See, for example, the paragraph devoted to the THL series in Lehmborg and Ann M. Pflaum, 359. Or “University of Minnesota Press history,” the University of Minnesota, <http://www.upress.umn.edu/about-us/history-and-fact-sheet-folder/university-of-minnesota-press-history>, accessed December 4, 2014.

⁵⁰² Rodgers, *Age of Fracture*, 7.

⁵⁰³ Robert Holub, *Reception Theory: A Critical Introduction* (London and New York: Methuen, 1984), 4.

⁵⁰⁴ Cusset concedes that French theory was an invented product and that the THL series was devoted only in part to French theory. Cusset wrote: “French theory...mean[t] above all the invention of a label..., as occurred with all of the most well known series devoted, completely or in part, to French theory.” These series included the “‘Theory and History of Literature’ at the University of Minnesota Press.” See Cusset, 87.

North Americans did not, however, simply airlift French thinkers to American shores, transferring thought made in Parisian cafés to pages printed in the U.S. Instead, theory largely emerged out of a North American context of the 1970s and 1980s. The THL series for example included North American critics' work, which though partly inspired by the European models, developed out of and was geared toward the blossoming theoretical community in the U.S. Even the vision implemented by Godzich, Schulte-Sasse, and Waters was largely American, in that, at every step of the publication process, it was planned and executed to meet the needs of their target audience. And it was this target audience that, by adopting and adapting deconstructive reading techniques, fashioned their deconstructive scholarship. Thus, while the THL series built the Leviathan of theory, this Leviathan was not French but more American than any other nationality. And there was not so much a "deconstructive invasion of America," but a flowering of deconstructive interpretive techniques in America.⁵⁰⁵

On How to Become "Three Men in a Boat"

Jochen Schulte-Sasse, Wlad Godzich, and Lindsay Waters were a bit like English writer Jerome K. Jerome's "three men in a boat," the central characters in Jerome's comical story of the same name about three men who convince themselves during a sociable evening that overwork has made them ill.⁵⁰⁶ The remedy for their ailments, they decide, is a change of scenery: a two-week boating trip on the Thames. On their holiday, a series of madcap adventures help the three men overcome the grinds of daily life and, more importantly, readjust their relation to their selves and others. Similar to Jerome's trifecta's predicament, intellectual and professional

⁵⁰⁵ Jonathan Culler, "Preface to the 25th Anniversary Edition," in *On Deconstruction: Theory and Criticism after Structuralism* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1983), 21.

⁵⁰⁶ Lindsay Waters, interview by Gregory Jones-Katz, November 15, 2014. Waters himself referred to Jerome K. Jerome's *To Say Nothing of the Dog!* to characterize his work and relationships with Schulte-Sasse and Godzich. See Jerome K. Jerome, *Three Men in a Boat: To Say Nothing of the Dog!* (London: Penguin Books, 1999).

“ailments” drove Schulte-Sasse, Godzich, and Waters away from their homes to the University of Minnesota. Moreover, Waters, Schulte-Sasse, and Godzich came of age intellectually during the turmoil of the late-1960s and early-1970s; they all questioned the divisions between philosophy and literature and high and low culture in their early scholarship; and all were interested in various intellectual components that became known as “theory.”

Jochen Schulte-Sasse was born in 1940, a year after the start of the Second World War, in Salzgitter, Germany, near where the Iron Curtain was later to run. The war and its aftermath deeply affected his life. Schulte-Sasse’s father, trained to be an engineer, was a soldier and ended up as a Russian POW, sent to Siberia to a labor camp. Three years after the war, his father returned, maimed from his harsh treatment. Not only did World War II mark his family, it also affected Schulte-Sasse’s worldview. He later recalled the Allies’ terrifying bombing of the city of Braunschweig, specifically how the British and Americans flew what he as a child labeled as “the Burning Christmas Trees” formation in order to illuminate a city, while the formation behind “the Burning Christmas Trees” delivered their payloads to the city below. “[I]t was like fireworks,” he recalled in 2003, “the way a kid today would experience the Fourth of July.” In his second-to-last year of high school, Schulte-Sasse and his classmates attended a screening of Alain Resnais’ *Night & Fog* (1955), a documentary that described the lives of prisoners in Nazi concentration camps, including Auschwitz. He recollected: “We saw the steam shovels pushing the dead into mass graves, the concentration camps—images that shocked us.” Germany’s Nazi past moved Schulte-Sasse in still other ways. In the late-1950s, he and friends hitchhiked across

Europe. In the Netherlands, a person hearing Schulte-Sasse speak German screamed at him in Dutch; he “only understood certain terms like ‘Hitler,’ ‘Nazi,’ and so forth.”⁵⁰⁷

Schulte-Sasse struggled with his country’s Nazi past as a young adult as well. While at the renowned University of Göttingen, he initially concentrated on chemistry, though he ended up studying German literature, linguistics, math, and philosophy. After Göttingen, Schulte-Sasse became a doctoral candidate in philology, the study of language in written historical sources, at the Ruhr-Universität Bochum, under the direction of literary scholar Hans Joachim Schrimpf and philosopher Hermann Lübbe.⁵⁰⁸ It was during this time that Schulte-Sasse also enthusiastically participated in the Leftist democratic activism of the 68er-Bewegung, for whom the German episode of fascism was far from over. 68ers believed that one must remain vigilant of the totalitarianism present throughout German society; because former National Socialists worked for the government and at universities, 68ers believed authoritarianism remained appealing to many. As a 68er and member of the German SDS (Sozialistischer Deutscher Studentenbund), Schulte-Sasse joined sit-ins and teach-ins, protesting the German university system, the United States’ war in Vietnam, and the 1968 German Emergency Acts, which permitted the federal government to restrict freedom of movement and limit the privacy of telecommunications correspondence in order to ensure the governments’ ability to act in crises such as natural disasters, uprisings, or war.⁵⁰⁹

Schulte-Sasse’s political activism as much as his intellectual interests in philosophy and literature characterized his early adulthood. His engagement is clearly readable in his early scholarship. Schulte-Sasse was part of the attempt, begun by a younger generation of literary

⁵⁰⁷ Mirko M. Hall, “In Memoriam: Jochen Schulte-Sasse (1940-2012),” *The German Quarterly* 86, no.1 (2013): 90-92. See also “A Conversation: Jochen Schulte-Sasse,” *German, Scandinavian, and Dutch Magazine*, 2003 Faculty Article, accessed December 14, 2014, <http://www.gsd.umn.edu/news/mag2003Schulte-Sasse.html>.

⁵⁰⁸ Hall, 9.

⁵⁰⁹ “A Conversation: Jochen Schulte-Sasse.”

scholars during the 1960s in West Germany in the wake of the movement of 1968, to question the dichotomy between high and low culture and the inherent value judgment upon which this dichotomy was based.⁵¹⁰ These literary scholars took issue with the meaning attributed and values attached to works under the heading of “trivalliteratur,” a term that implied sensationalism, the repetition of motifs and structures, the irrational, and the use of stereotypical characters—anything, in other words, but “High Art.” These—often-younger—literary scholars employed a literary-sociological approach to the critical reception of trivalliteratur, exploring how and why the social and political functions of trivalliteratur reinforced the position of elites.⁵¹¹ By trivializing trivalliteratur, these literary scholars argued, the entrenched cultural authorities shored up their own sense of self and position in society. Some of these younger scholars went so far as to suggest that the Nazi’s policy against “Entartete Kunst,” art deemed un-German and therefore degenerate, was a logical outcome of the centuries-long vilification of “low art,” of which trivalliteratur was but one example.

Schulte-Sasse’s interventions into debates on the history and value of trivalliteratur began with his dissertation, “The Criticism of Popular Literature since the Enlightenment: Studies in the History of the Modern Concept of Kitsch.”⁵¹² In this work, Schulte-Sasse traced the aggressive critiques and various storms of protest against trivalliteratur, which, he maintained, commenced in earnest in the eighteenth-century. Using an abundance of documentary evidence, Schulte-Sasse argued that condemnations of and complaints against trivalliteratur were in fact directed, neither toward trivalliteratur nor its actual producers, but

⁵¹⁰ Bruce B. Campbell, Alison Guenther-Pal, and Vibeke Rützou Petersen, “Introduction,” in *Detectives, Dystopias, and Policy: Studies in Modern German Genre Fiction* eds. Bruce B. Campbell, Alison Guenther-Pal, and Vibeke Rützou Petersen (Rochester, New York: Camden House, 2014), 2-3.

⁵¹¹ Ibid.

⁵¹² Jochen Schulte-Sasse, *Die Kritik an der Trivalliteratur: seit der Aufklärung. Studien zur Geschichte des modernen Kitschbegriffs*, Bochumer Arbeiten zur Sprach- und Literaturwissenschaft 6 (München Fink, 1971), 13. He received the prestigious “Metzler ribbon” on literary Appreciation in 1971 for his first book.

toward the reading public and their impoverishment of taste.⁵¹³ According to Schulte-Sasse, Aufklärer policed their status as champions of the Enlightenment via attacks on the public's reading tastes. In his study, Schulte-Sasse highlighted the criticisms of various giants of German intellectual history, such as Schiller and Goethe, who routinely censured trivialliteratur—which they first labeled “dilettantismus” and then “kitsch”—as the antithesis of art.⁵¹⁴ By showing not only how elites guarded their selves and stations but also suppressed the liberatory power of trivialliteratur, as trivialliteratur was the repressed “other” of “art” and therefore contained subversive meanings, Schulte-Sasse made a significant contribution to the evaluation of German literature and its history.⁵¹⁵

The politics of trivialliteratur continued to play a role in Schulte-Sasse's academic life after he earned his Ph.D. in the spring of 1968. Following the attempted assassination of Rudi Dutsche, one of the most important members of the SDS, and the May 1968 protests, when 80,000 people, including students, schoolchildren, and members of workers' unions demonstrated in the capital Bonn against the German Emergency Acts, Schulte-Sasse decided to leave his home in order to try “something adventurous.” Rather than hunker down in West Germany, where the student movement's campaign for democracy looked hopeless and violence against Leftists seemed likely to increase, Schulte-Sasse traveled to America's Heartland, to the University of Minnesota, the flagship university of the North Star State, becoming a visiting instructor in the German department for the 1968-1969 academic year.⁵¹⁶ He chose UMinn

⁵¹³ For a useful summary of the generation of younger literary scholars in West Germany devoted to investigating kitsch, see Rachel Carnaby, “Kitsch in the Prose Works of Theodor Storm” (Ph.D. diss., University of Sheffield, 1985), 70, 66.

⁵¹⁴ Schulte-Sasse, *Die Kritik an der Trivialliteratur*, 12.

⁵¹⁵ Hall, 90; Jürgen Link, “Zum Tod von Jochen Schulte-Sasse Aufklärung als Inspiration,” *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, December 12, 2012, accessed April 8, 2016, <http://www.faz.net/aktuell/zum-tod-von-jochen-schulte-sasse-aufklaerung-als-inspiration-11996818.html>.

⁵¹⁶ Rudi Dutzke, Linda Schulte-Sasse, Jochen's eventual wife, was raised in Minneapolis' Project Park neighborhood.

because Hans Joachim Schrimpf, his doctoral advisor, was friends with Wolfgang Taraba and also knew Gerhard Weiss and Frank Hirschbach, whom were all in the university's German department.⁵¹⁷

In addition to professional contacts, a romantic—and naïve—element motivated Schulte-Sasse's decision to “go West.” Imitating the heroes of the adventure novels of German writer Karl May, paragon of trivalliteratur and whose work saturated “just about every Central European boyhood,” Schulte-Sasse bought a “Studebaker for \$100 and drove around the prairie in search of the Old West, even going to an Indian reservation.”⁵¹⁸ “It was some childlike quest,” he later recalled. But Schulte-Sasse's Studebaker-driven search for the Old West—for America, that is—ended in disappointment: “[H]e didn't find much left.”⁵¹⁹ Schulte-Sasse did not find much reality behind his fantasy. He neither was May's Old Shatterhand, a German immigrant who earned a new name and a new identity in the West, nor did he make a new blood brother, as May's noble Apache leader named Winnetou—in fact only several months before Schulte-Sasse's arrival in Minnesota, the American Indian Movement had been founded in Minneapolis to mobilize against the Civil Rights violations of Native Americans.⁵²⁰

America had never been what Schulte-Sasse imagined, though his eagerness to follow through with his “childlike quest” reveals not only how closely his work and self were intertwined, but also how frustrating he found the political and professional situation in West

⁵¹⁷ Hall, “A Conversation: Jochen Schulte-Sasse.”

⁵¹⁸ Frederic Morton, “Tales of the Grand Teutons: Karl May Among the Indians,” *New York Times*, January 4, 1987, accessed December 15, 2014, <http://www.nytimes.com/1987/01/04/books/tales-of-the-grand-teutons-karl-may-among-the-indians.html?pagewanted=all>; Katja H. May, “German Stereotypes of Native Americans in Context of Karl May and Indianertümelei,” in *Victorian Brand Indian Brand: The White Shadow on the Native Image*, ed. Naila Clerici (Torino, Italy: Il Segnalibro, 1993), 82-83.

⁵¹⁹ Marua Lerner, “Obituary: Powerhouse Joche Schulte-Sasse never stopped learning,” *StarTribune*, December 26, 2012, accessed December 6, 2014, <http://www.startribune.com/local/184868351.html>.

⁵²⁰ For the story of Dennis Banks, a founder of the American Indian Movement, and the rise of the American Indian Movement, see Dennis Banks and Richard Erdoes, *Ojibwa Warrior: Dennis Banks and the Rise of the American Indian Movement* (Norman, Oklahoma: University of Oklahoma Press, 2004).

Germany. Despite his failure to start anew in the West, Schulte-Sasse's Leftist democratic activism remained, and he continued his involvement in the antiwar movement during his stay in Minnesota. A colleague at the THL series would later recall that Schulte-Sasse was uncompromising with his politics. He stood by his political aspirations and his aim to unite ideology critique and his scholarship, even if his childhood dream of becoming Old Shatterhand had been shattered.⁵²¹

Schulte-Sasse's commitment to politically engaged scholarship persisted even after his stint at UMinn in the late-1960s. He returned to Ruhr-Universität Bochum to complete his habilitation, an academic qualification required to hold the rank of Professor in Germany, and which he earned eight years later, in 1976, making him eligible for a full university faculty position. Notwithstanding having gone through the time consuming and arduous process of completing his habilitation, however, Schulte-Sasse remained unsatisfied with his intellectual life and recent scholarship in West Germany. A mere two years after arriving back at Ruhr-Universität Bochum, Schulte-Sasse had become skeptical of his and others'—by then conventional—sociohistorical approach to literary study. This approach, he believed, uncritically relied on metanarratives, those overarching narratives of historical meaning, experience or knowledge, legitimated through the anticipated completion of a principal idea. By gathering meaning, experience, or knowledge around a principle idea, metanarratives repressed difference, leading to not only an intellectual, but also a political “dead end.”

For example, from Schulte-Sasse's perspective, vulgar Marxism reduced all social and political arrangements to economic relationships. In the study of literary history, a vulgar Marxist identifies texts that fit their understanding of class struggle and ignores texts or the

⁵²¹ In this respect, Schulte-Sasse was like most German leftists—unimpressed with U.S radicalism. Waters, interview by Gregory Jones-Katz, November 15, 2014.

meanings of texts that do not. By doing so, the vulgar Marxist covers over potentially subversive interpretations. The only way out of this methodological impasse, Schulte-Sasse believed, was to problematize the notion of a principle idea. This problematization would destabilize narrative closure—the gathering of meaning, experience, of knowledge around the principle idea—and liberate repressed meanings.⁵²² But Schulte-Sasse saw little promise in his native Germany for such an undertaking. And instead of remaining at Ruhr-Universität Bochum, he was drawn back to the North America, again to the Midwest, accepting a position in the German Department at the UMinn 1978. One year later, in 1979, he was promoted to full Professor and began teaching in the university's German and the Department of Comparative Literature.

Though his childhood fantasy trampled his vision of America, Schulte-Sasse believed that it was in America's Heartland rather than his native West Germany where progressive scholarship—that is, scholarship unburdened by allegiance to a metanarrative—could be pursued. He embraced his new home and continued his ambition to marry his ideology critique with his scholarship. While he made significant contributions at the Ruhr-University Bochum, Schulte-Sasse at the UMinn became a key representative of the second wave of native Germanists, who arrived in the U.S. during the 1960s and helped reshaped the “transatlantic field of German studies by developing a social critique that investigated the political functions of cultural texts.”⁵²³ Schulte-Sasse also became a key figure, partly because of the support he enjoyed at the UMinn, in the creation and promotion of the theory.⁵²⁴ By the early-1980s, Schulte-Sasse had become an internationally recognized scholar of German cultural and

⁵²² Schulte-Sasse and Renate Werner, *Einführung in die Literaturwissenschaft* became a principal text of German literature students for over twenty years.

⁵²³ Paul Michael Lützeler, *Transatlantische Germanistik Kontakt, Transfer, Dialogik* (Berlin and Boston: Walter de Gruyter, 2013).

⁵²⁴ For example, Schulte-Sasse received a research appointment for summer 1981, for his project, “A Social History of Aesthetic Theory in Germany: 1700-1830.” See *Lares* 6 (1980-1981): 3.

intellectual history, helping establish the UMinn as a center for innovative research in German Studies and Comparative Literature.⁵²⁵

Like it did Schulte-Sasse, the Second War World, particularly the twin totalitarianisms of Nazism and Soviet Communism, profoundly influenced the second founder of the THL series Wladyslaw Bogusz Godzich's life. Godzich was born on May 13, 1945 in a German prisoner of war camp of Ukrainian and Polish parents, almost a week after the surrender of Nazi Germany to allied forces. His parents "suffered at the hands of the Nazis" and his extended family "lost four lives to Nazi persecution, though an uncle survived Auschwitz, much diminished." Godzich's own health was also forever affected by having been conceived and born in a camp—he suffered from chronic leg pain.⁵²⁶ After the War, his family moved to France to escape Soviet control, where he was educated at first, like Schulte-Sasse, as a chemist.⁵²⁷ Godzich's pursuit of the sciences did not characterize his early adulthood, however. Instead, similar again to Schulte-Sasse, a mixture of political activism and interest in philosophy, literature, and literary study distinguished Godzich's early life.

This mixture only coalesced after Godzich came to the U.S. In 1965—the year of the Immigration and Nationality Act, which opened the doors to immigrants from Asia, Africa, and the Middle East—Godzich left France, a country on the threshold of concluding two decades of colonial wars, most notably the Algerian War of Independence (1954-1962), which was characterized by guerrilla warfare, terrorism, and the use of torture.⁵²⁸ Following Godzich's arrival in New York City, the Civil Rights Movement captivated Godzich's attention. His

⁵²⁵ Jochen Schulte-Sasse und Renate Werner, *Einführung in die Literaturwissenschaft* (München 1977), 63.

⁵²⁶ See Lindsay Waters, "Paul de Man: Life and Works," in *Paul de Man: Critical Writings 1953-1978* (Minneapolis: The University of Minnesota, 1989), lxxiv f101.

⁵²⁷ Dienhart, 2.

⁵²⁸ For the influence of the Algerian War on France, see Todd Shepard, *The Invention of Decolonization: The Algerian War and the Remaking of France* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2006).

reaction to it was “immediate and undoubtedly at variance with my American contemporaries, typical of the misperceptions that Europeans visit upon the United States: it represented to me the authentic historical voice of the United States as the beacon of democracy.” The voice resonated with Godzich because his “parents had spent long years in Nazi camps and . . . were forced into permanent exile by the imposition of Soviet rule upon their land.” This context, Godzich has reflected, “cannot be easily overestimated.”⁵²⁹ Godzich seemed to believe that his comportment, shaped by his and his family’s suffering during and dislocations because of World War II, attuned him to the discrimination he saw in the U.S. He, for instance, wanted the “civil rights struggle to succeed because of a sentimental attachment to the idea of America.” But as he gravitated closer to the movement, and as the movement developed toward the declaration of Black Power in the late-1960s, he observed the marginalization of black women from within the Civil Rights Movement. This observation shattered his romanticized image of “America,” leading him to not only question his politics, but also the idea of an “authentic historical voice.”⁵³⁰

Though his dream of “America” was crushed and his notion of America’s historical mission broken, Godzich found the means to remain political as well as remain in the U.S. While disillusioned with marginalization of black women, for example, he continued his involvement in the Civil Rights Movements during his graduate studies in Comparative Literature and Romance Philology at Columbia University. He joined protests and remained in contact with Civil Rights activists.⁵³¹ And in the spring of 1968, there were many—sometimes-violent—demonstrations at Columbia, especially after students discovered the university’s connections with the U.S.’s participation in Vietnam and a proposal to renovate the nearby Morningside Park into a

⁵²⁹ Wlad Godzich, “Introduction,” in *The Culture of Literacy* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press), 34.

⁵³⁰ *Ibid.*

⁵³¹ *Ibid.*

segregatory gymnasium.⁵³² However, despite all this turmoil and despite his interest in the Civil Rights Movement, Godzich's dissertation, "Etude D'Un Genre Le Fabliau," hardly contained a trace of his activism. His dissertation analyzed the fabliau, a comic short story of a type found in early French poetry (ca. 1150 and 1400).⁵³³ The fabliau was often anonymous, told as it was by a professional storyteller or public entertainer, and characterized by "sexual and scatological obscenity" as well as a set of contrary attitudes to the church, nobility, and women.⁵³⁴

Similar to Schulte-Sasse, then, Godzich examined a kind of literature—the fabliau—that questioned the ostensibly eternal but in fact historically contingent division between high and low, serious and comic.⁵³⁵ While Godzich's dissertation lacked any explicit link between his politics and scholarship, his study was thus political in the sense that it questioned these provisional divisions. The fabliau—often extravagantly—exposed the incongruities between a subject, for instance respect for the Church, and its treatment, for example sardonic and ribald. In addition to the topic of his dissertation, Godzich's methodology—tools derived from the then cutting edge of structuralist thought, the latest linguistic and philosophical work coming out of France—could also be read as evidence of his lack of a political program and rejection of history. His bibliography included Michael Riffaterre, Roland Barthes, Émile Benveniste, and Jacques Derrida.⁵³⁶ And in his introduction, Godzich expressed his hope that he could contribute to the structuralist enterprise to develop a science of literature, as he examined, not the content of fabliau, but the properties—functions and relations—of literary discourse that constituted the

⁵³² Stefan Bradley, *Harlem vs. Columbia University: Black Student Power in the Late 1960s* (New York, N.Y.: University of Illinois, 2009), especially 5–19, 164–191; Fabio Rojas, *From Black Power to Black Studies: How a Radical Social Movement Became an Academic Discipline* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2010), 2007), xi-xvii, 1-226.

⁵³³ Wladyslaw Bogusz Godzich, "Etude d'un Genre Le Fabliaux," (Ph.D. diss., Columbia University, 1972).

⁵³⁴ Howard R. Bloch, *The Scandal of the Fabliaux* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1986), 11.

⁵³⁵ Godzich, "Etude d'un Genre Le Fabliaux," 105.

⁵³⁶ *Ibid.*, 158-164.

fabliau.⁵³⁷ As with his dissertation topic, however, Godzich's method only appeared apolitical if one adopts a narrow definition of what constituted politics—the structuralist dream was to subject all discourse, whether high or low or comic or serious, to the same procedures of analysis.

Like many politically constrained academics assuming posts at an American university in the early-1970s, Godzich sublimated his politics into his scholarship. With his background in the structuralist fashions then in vogue and a doctorate from Columbia University, which he earned in 1972, Godzich's future must have seemed bright, not only to himself, but also to his colleagues. Following his graduation, Godzich accepted a position in 1973 in Yale's French department, then under the direction of Ehrmann from 1961-1972.⁵³⁸ At the time, Godzich was "very much taken with French structuralism" as well as Russian Formalism because he believed that this thought was "in search of itself," and, as such, "so much at odds" with what he felt was the "prevalent self-satisfaction of most traditional criticism and with the incipient dogmatism of the new one."⁵³⁹ Godzich was interested in ideas that took one on an endless voyage, in thought with which one never reached an end, but continued onward toward new and more challenging thoughts. Godzich, in a sense, was interested in historical thought. And it was in New England—at Yale and in America—where Godzich felt that this "thought in search of itself" was securely on its quest.

At Yale, Godzich also developed friendships with faculty members, above all Paul de Man. Though Godzich arrived on Yale's Old Campus while de Man was spending the 1973-1974 academic year at the University of Zürich, Godzich found an ally in de Man against the more conservative members of the department, who wanted to decrease the prominence of

⁵³⁷ Ibid., 6, 154.

⁵³⁸ See Chapter One for more on Ehrmann's role at Yale and his organization of the 1965 Yale Colloquium.

⁵³⁹ Godzich, "Paul de Man and the Perils of Intelligence," in *The Culture of Literacy*, 134.

literary theory in the curriculum. For Godzich, Yale must have seemed like an institution where he could pursue his projects.⁵⁴⁰ Godzich indeed enjoyed his appointment at Yale and took advantage of the opportunity to incorporate theory, above all structuralism, into his French language and Medieval Literature courses. In “Introduction to Medieval Literature,” Yale undergraduates explained in the 1974 *YCC* that, though they considered him “a brilliant scholar” who “present[ed] a social interpretation of the works,” had a “tendency to wander into unintelligible mathematical analyses and irrelevant bibliography.”⁵⁴¹ These comments reflect Godzich’s interest in structuralist thinkers, whose writings, above all Claude Lévi-Strauss’s, “routinely integrated mathematical procedures, diagrammatic strategies, and technologies.”⁵⁴² Another student in the 1975 *YCC* commented that Godzich liked to digress into “bizarre aspects of French life and the French mind,” preventing “students from becoming bored.”⁵⁴³ Godzich’s instruction clearly resonated with students. While he was able to integrate theory into his teaching, however, Godzich ran into professional troubles. De Gruyter had accepted his dissertation for publication. However, Mouton publishers’ financial reorganization and eventual take-over of De Gruyter delayed its publication.⁵⁴⁴ As a result of this delay, Yale denied Godzich tenure and he was forced to find a position elsewhere.

Godzich once again went West, this time to the North Star State, landing a position at the University of Minnesota-Twin Cities in the spring of 1978 as the permanent, full-time core director for the institution’s Comparative Literature program.⁵⁴⁵ Though cast out from New Haven and forced to reinvent himself in the Midwest, Godzich remained committed to his

⁵⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 134-135.

⁵⁴¹ *Yale Course Critique 1974*, 59.

⁵⁴² See Bernard Dionysius Geoghegan, “From Information Theory to French Theory: Jakobson, Lévi-Strauss, and the Cybernetic Apparatus,” *Critical Inquiry* 38, no. 1 (2011): 96-126.

⁵⁴³ *Yale Course Critique 1975*, 87.

⁵⁴⁴ “Minutes of the Executive Committee Meeting Thursday,” May 5, 1983, Archives and Special Collections, The University of Minnesota-Twin Cities, 27.

⁵⁴⁵ “1976-1978 Biennial Report,” Archives and Special Collections, The University of Minnesota-Twin Cities, 69.

intellectual vision. Now in the Comparative Literature department at UMinn, however, Godzich shifted his research and teaching away from French literature—his emphasis while at Yale—to literary theory and comparative literature. In the 1978-1979 academic year, for example, Godzich taught a course on “Oedipus, the Theory of Interpretation.”⁵⁴⁶ Godzich also began to write and think more about the state of humanities and knowledge production more generally. In an in-house newsletter circulated at UMinn, Godzich offered some thoughts on the problems—acute during the 1970s because of budget cuts—of humanists seeking and receiving funding for research.⁵⁴⁷ Godzich wrote: “Even though the best of Humanists have always recognized that there are no eternal values, . . . this view is still a heresy against Humanistic dogma. The irony here is that it is the outside goad of funded research which forces us to reexamine our own goal as producers of values, and therefore to rethink our function as Humanists.”⁵⁴⁸ At UMinn, Godzich did not give up his interest in thought “in search of itself,” but pursued this thought with further vigor, in his teaching as well as research.⁵⁴⁹

While professional “ailments” drove Schulte-Sasse and Godzich to America’s Heartland, Lindsay Waters, the third founder of the THL series, was born and raised in the Midwest and professional “ailments” encouraged Waters to remain there.⁵⁵⁰ Similar to Schulte-Sasse and Godzich, however, Waters questioned the partitions between philosophy and literature and high and low culture in his graduate work. Waters was also the youngest of the future “three men in a

⁵⁴⁶ “Class Schedule Fall 1978-Spring 1979,” Archives and Special Collections, The University of Minnesota-Twin Cities, 37.

⁵⁴⁷ “Faculty Update,” *Lares* 3 (1977): 6-7. College of Liberal Arts Office of Research Development. 2; “Liberal Arts Research Newsletters: 1977-1978,” College of Liberal Arts, the University of Minnesota-Twin Cities, accessed November 15, 2014, the University of Minnesota Digital Conservancy, <http://purl.umn.edu/147861>.

⁵⁴⁸ Godzich, “Report on Humanities,” *University of Minnesota Update* 4, no. 2 (1978): 2.

⁵⁴⁹ And as a sort of parting wave to his Yale colleagues, Godzich published an essay, “Harold Bloom as Rhetorician.” Godzich’s essay is not only devoted to Bloom, but also covers de Man’s review of Bloom’s book, as well as scattered references to the culture at Yale. See Wlad Godzich, “Harold Bloom as Rhetorician,” *Centrum* 6 (1978): 43-49, 43.

⁵⁵⁰ Though he travelled to Florence in 1971 for research and language training during his doctoral program, Waters remained in the American Midwest.

boat,” born in 1947 and raised in Chicago in the “bosom of the Roman Catholic Church,” an education that he believed made him “savvy about how to navigate and get the most out of complex social structures.”⁵⁵¹ He earned a Ph.D. in English and Italian Literature from the University of Chicago in 1976. At UChicago, Waters stayed clear of American philosopher Richard McKeon, whom he along with many others viewed as an “academic bully—a view immortalized in Robert Pirsig’s 1974 autobiographical novel, *Zen and the Art of Motorcycle Maintenance*, in which the Chairman, a character reputedly based on McKeon, browbeats students ‘with a gleam in his eye’ while graduating ‘only carbon copies of himself.’”⁵⁵² Rather than being intimidated by McKeon, Waters embraced his emerging interest in pluralism, exploring diverse ways to revive aesthetics as well as literary history. He was particularly fascinated with poetics, the study of how a text’s different elements come together and structure one another in order to produce certain effects on the reader.⁵⁵³ In the mid-1970s, North American academics were using the term “poetics” so broadly as to denote the concept of “theory” itself.⁵⁵⁴ Waters, then, steeped himself in “theory” well before “theory” had gained a grip on the North American literary-critical community. And his alternate path toward theory mirrored how philosophy had—after the McCarthyism of the 1950s—moved away from philosophy departments in the U.S.⁵⁵⁵

Waters embraced his interest in poetics in his early scholarship. His 1976 dissertation, “Free, Flowing Rhymes: Byron’s *Don Juan* and Pulci’s *Morgante*,” reflected his aspiration to

⁵⁵¹ Waters, interview by Gregory Jones-Katz, November 14, 2014.

⁵⁵² Tim Andrew Obermiller, “Will the real Richard McKeon please stand up?,” *University of Chicago Magazine* 12 (1994), accessed November 21, 2014, <http://magazine.uchicago.edu/9412/Feat4.html>.

⁵⁵³ Waters, interview by Gregory Jones-Katz; Jonathan Culler, *Structuralist Poetics: Structuralism, Linguistics, and the Study of Literature* (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1975), 31.

⁵⁵⁴ Gérard Genette, *Essays in Aesthetics Volume 4* trans. Dorrit Cohn (Lincoln and London: University of Nebraska Press, 2005), 14.

⁵⁵⁵ See John McCumber, *Time in Ditch: American Philosophy and the McCarthy Era* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 2001).

interrogate the opposition between high and low literature, as Waters compared the style, not the content or historical significance, of both poems.⁵⁵⁶ In his study, Waters argued that 15th-century Italian poet Luigi Pulci's *Morgante*, an epic and parodistic poem about a giant that converted to Christianity, "must have been of the greatest interest" to and influence on Lord Byron, English poet and leader of the Romantics. Waters maintained that Byron drew inspiration for his satiric poem from "Pulci's manner of telling a tale," specifically his "'free'" approach and presentation of a "part-comic and part-serious style." According to Waters, Byron even offered Pulci's epic as a "model for adapting the conversational tone of the medley style to a story-telling narrative." Put differently, Waters argued that Pulci's and Byron's poetic practices were similar in style and form.⁵⁵⁷ This analysis was innovative in the mid-1970s, as scholars had long acknowledged that the successes of Byron's later work were due to an "Italian influence," but they had not pinpointed from whom this influence originated.⁵⁵⁸

Not only Waters' scholarship, but also his friendships shaped and reflected his deconstructive attitude. During his last year as a graduate student at UChicago, Waters met Paul de Man, then enjoying a term as a visiting professor at the university. Waters recalls that de Man held court at UChicago like a modern-day Socrates, with professors and graduate students alike gathering around to listen to his sage advice (which ranged from which German aesthetic thinkers to read to which Major League Baseball team to support) for hours on end.⁵⁵⁹ But it was more than de Man's striking presence that attracted Waters. During their conversations, Waters realized that he and de Man were both deeply interested in poetics and, by extension, theory in general. Though Waters had pursued his interest in poetics throughout his graduate career, de

⁵⁵⁶ Waters, "Free, Flowing Rhymes: Byron's *Don Juan* and Pulci's *Morgante*" (Ph.D. dissertation, The University of Chicago, 1976).

⁵⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 236, 248.

⁵⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, iii, iv.

⁵⁵⁹ Waters, interview by Jones-Katz.

Man, steeped as he was in French and German thought, sparked Waters' curiosity in "a broad range of untranslated European cultural criticism and literary theory."⁵⁶⁰ De Man especially enjoyed talking with Waters about German-Jewish philosopher and cultural critic Walter Benjamin (1892-1940)—and he "would do this for hours and hours." And it was at his meeting at Chicago that Waters saw himself as aligned with de Man's project. This meeting formed the basis for the relationship that eventually grew into a friendship and professional alliance until de Man's death in 1983. Waters became de Man's publisher as well as defender against critics who, after revelations of de Man's pro-Nazi wartime articles, called for the dismissal of de Man's postwar work.⁵⁶¹

Waters also felt aligned with the political valence to de Man's project. This valence, Waters later recalled, resonated with "many of the postwar generation," who felt that there "was a particular sort of dead end" into which they "wandered after the glorious dawn' of 1968 and the initial political successes of the mobilization against racial segregation in the United States."⁵⁶² According to Waters, many people led "lives of impoverishment in the early- to mid-70s after the failure of the dream of instituting a *novus ordo seclorum* (New Order of the Ages) on earth." Waters believed that de Man's formulations about how there "can be no overall theory of how the symbolic and the economic work together offered many people a way out of this poverty."⁵⁶³ De Man's explorations of how language short-circuited, preventing the congruence between symbol and material reality, struck a chord with many academics who felt their political aspirations thwarted. And or Waters, a pluralist trained at UChicago, the study of poetics, a

⁵⁶⁰ Eric Banks, "Walter Benjamin's Afterlife," *The Chronicle Review*, March 17, 2014, 60 (27), B7.

⁵⁶¹ Waters, "Professah de Man: He Dead," *American Literary History* 7, no. 2 (1995): 296.

⁵⁶² Though Waters' words here written in reference to Paul de Man, his use of the word "us" signals Waters' inclusion of himself in his reflection and narrative. Lindsay Waters, "Paul de Man: A Sketch of Two Generations," in *On Paul de Man's Wartime Journalism*, ed. Werner Hamacher (Lincoln and London: University of Nebraska Press, 1989), 400.

⁵⁶³ *Ibid.*, 401, 402.

project that he shared with de Man, offered a way to explain the political and social failures of the New Left. Like Schulte-Sasse and Godzich, then, for Waters there was a link between theory—specifically literary theory—and politics and the question of history. In 1976, Waters, after earning his doctorate from UChicago and briefly teaching at Chicago State University, accepted the position of acquisitions editor at the University of Minnesota Press. Two years later, in 1978, Schulte-Sasse and Godzich arrived at UMinn.

L'Étoile du Nord: A State of American Theory

Like all institutions of higher education in the U.S. during the late-1960s and early-1970s, the star university of the North Star State “faced the challenges of activism, from Civil Rights and anti-Vietnam War demonstrations to concern for the environment.” Unlike what occurred at a number of other public institutions, however, “political engagement and protest” at the University of Minnesota retained “an air of civility.” There was a sense of the importance of negotiation, so that, though the fabric of the community was strained, it was never fissured, as was the case at Yale. In fact, by fall 1974, when U.S. military deaths had been officially reduced to 1 and Gerald Ford assumed the presidency after Nixon’s resignation, the campus was even more peaceful than in the late-1960s and early-1970s.⁵⁶⁴ “[I]f the campus gets any quieter,” Brian Howell, editor at the *Minnesota Daily*, observed in 1978, “we’re all going to sleep.”⁵⁶⁵ Though Howell thought UMinn was about to enter hibernation, others felt it was in slow and painful decline. Resources began to shrink and financial retrenchments set in, leading to “inflation cut into the real worth of salaries for the professoriate and for supporting staff in every

⁵⁶⁴ Quoted in Pflaum, 137.

⁵⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 138.

department.” As a result, “core colleges, departments, and programs underwent significant change.”⁵⁶⁶

Despite these challenges, the 1970s at UMinn were a decade of innovation in curriculum and programs, with “the formation of new departments such as Afro-American studies, American Indian studies, Chicano studies, and women’s studies.”⁵⁶⁷ An intellectual culture revolving around theory and interdisciplinarity also continued to develop. The early-1970s saw the establishment of the Minnesota Center for Advanced Studies in Language, Style, and Literary Theory as well as the distribution of *Centrum*, which circulated papers that concentrated on the “theory of language, style, and literature, including computer-aided analysis of discourse and papers with an interdisciplinary approach.”⁵⁶⁸ *Centrum*’s overarching aim was to stimulate debate about theory across disciplines. UMinn was also home to the interdisciplinary Center for Humanistic Studies, which was concerned with making departmental barriers more permeable, including those in the humanities as well as science departments.⁵⁶⁹ By the mid-1980s, this culture of theory and interdisciplinarity at UMinn had become a major attraction to professors who “did theory.”⁵⁷⁰

Not only the intellectual culture of UMinn, but also its Press experienced significant changes in the early-1970s. In the postwar decades, university presses flourished by publishing work by faculty members at their home institutions. But after 1970, with federal funding in decline, “the bottom fell out of the market for scholarly books.”⁵⁷¹ While these financial stringencies led to the near shutdown of some university presses, the editors at the UMinn Press

⁵⁶⁶ Ibid., 243, 125, 126.

⁵⁶⁷ Ibid., x, xi..

⁵⁶⁸ “Introduction,” *Centrum: Working Papers of the Minnesota Center for Advance Studies in Language, Style, and Literary Theory*, 1 (1973). *Centrum* ran from 1973 through 1978 and then from 1981 to 1982.

⁵⁶⁹ Dienhart, 9.

⁵⁷⁰ Ibid., 3.

⁵⁷¹ Jennifer Tarufi, *Chronicle of Higher Education*, June 27, 2003, B9.

were able raise money and increase the number of books it published. The Press set a policy of publishing virtually all titles in paperback editions with the aim to increase access to scholarship by lowering the cost to readers and maximizing circulation of the works it published.⁵⁷² This approach was unusual—university presses customarily did not publish works simultaneously in clothbound and paperback editions. Instead, presses hoped to maximize profits by issuing the more expensive hardcover edition first and then the cheaper paperback version. The UMinn Press also raised money by publishing in a “broader range of academic disciplines—areas of concentration included race and ethnic studies, Scandinavian studies, urban studies, cinema studies, women’s studies, art and architecture, literature, sociology, and political science—and reviving its regional publishing program, which now encompassed horticulture, natural history, nature writing, and cooking.”⁵⁷³ The UMinn Press, in other words, confronted the drying-up of resources by employing “the principle of market segmentation—of appealing to a specific slice of the population rather than the people as a whole.”⁵⁷⁴ The Press’ use of market segmentation helped it reach a wider readership and not simply survive, but ultimately flourish.

Schulte-Sasse, Godzich, and Waters all arrived in the North Star State in the midst of these intellectual and institutional changes. From an outsider’s perspective, their timing might seem rather unfortunate. They each had already suffered professional setbacks—Schulte-Sasse stunted by intellectual life in West Germany; Godzich having failed to achieve tenure at Yale; Waters was unable to land a university position. The financial situation at UMinn seemed destined to compound these setbacks. But these “three men in a boat” in fact landed ashore at an

⁵⁷² “University of Minnesota Press,” *Annual Record 1980-81* (1981): 67, Archives and Special Collections, The University of Minnesota-Twin Cities.

⁵⁷³ Pflaum, 305; Paul Parsons, *Getting Published: The Acquisition Process at University Presses* (Knoxville, Tenn.: Tennessee University Press, 1989), 175.

⁵⁷⁴ Lizabeth Cohen, *A Consumer’s Republic: The Politics of Mass Consumption in Postwar America* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2003), 316.

opportune moment, eventually charting an audacious course through the turbulent waters of the “Land of 10,000 Lakes.” Waters in particular realized that, because of the precarious situation at UMinn, he had a freedom that he likely could have never had at a more prestigious press. He has recalled that, at prominent and less regional press, not to mention during a more financially stable period, more people would have been involved in intellectual and financial decisions.⁵⁷⁵ Larger and more established presses also had a reputation to protect. Waters for instance had entertained the idea of starting a series at the Yale University Press with Geoffrey Hartman and Paul de Man. To their frustration, acrimonious inter- and intradepartmental politics in New Haven, specifically the resistance to theory among conservative faculty members of literature and philosophy departments, prevented any such undertaking.⁵⁷⁶ In contrast, at a public institution in the Midwest where no one was looking over their shoulder, anything seemed possible, from literary theorists’ theorizing in the Northrop Mall to new projects that disseminated deconstructive theory across the country. The UMin Press had a lot to gain by going out on a limb with a new book series—which is precisely what Waters intended to do.⁵⁷⁷

Shortly after Schulte-Sasse and Godzich arrived in this Wild West of academia, Waters told them that he was interested—like they were—“in intellectual ideas emerging from Europe that were not finding their way into the U.S. publishing mainstream,” including “exciting articles and books that were not being translated in America.”⁵⁷⁸ These “three men in a boat” agreed to discuss the North American intellectual scene and how they could address Waters’ interest. They had lunch—Waters has since labeled it a “mythical meeting”—at the Italian Restaurant Vescio’s Originale in Dinkytown on the UMin campus. Schulte-Sasse recalled each of them driven by

⁵⁷⁵ Waters, interview by Jones-Katz.

⁵⁷⁶ Members of the Yale, for example, had to find a press unaffiliated with Yale or a major, elite school to publish *Deconstruction and Criticism*.

⁵⁷⁷ Waters, interview by Jones-Katz.

⁵⁷⁸ Ibid.

ways to answer the following questions: “What can we do? How can we have an impact on U.S. intellectual life?” They talked. They made notes about new books. Their solution was to take advantage of the situation at the UMin Press and start a book series, “The Theory and History of Literature.” And for the next six years, from 1978 to 1984, Schulte-Sasse, Godzich, and Waters helmed the series, eventually known simply as THL, negotiating what to do and how to work with one another, meeting every Wednesday in the comparative literature library on

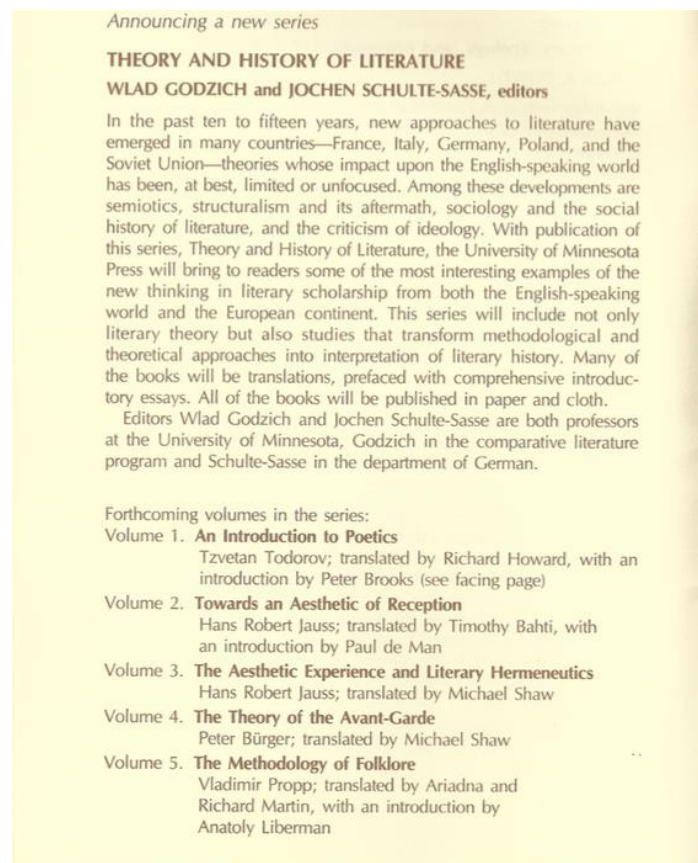


Figure 4.1 “With the publication of this series, Theory and History of Literature, the University of Minnesota Press will bring to readers some of the most interesting examples of the new thinking in literary scholarship from both the English-speaking world and the European continent. This series will include not only literary theory but also studies that transform methodological and theoretical approaches into interpretation of literary history.” Quoted from “Announcing New Series,” University of Minnesota Press Catalogue, Fall 1980.

Northrop Mall to “discuss books and new manuscripts that had been submitted to the Press or published in Europe.”⁵⁷⁹

The THL series took the North American academic community by storm. Offhandedly announced in the UMin 1978-1979 annual report, it became one of the staggering achievements of university publishing, creating intellectual possibilities for not only literary and cultural studies, but also

the “American humanities in the broadest sense.”⁵⁸⁰ By the printing of the

THL series’ 88th and final volume in

⁵⁷⁹ “A Conversation: Jochen Schulte-Sasse,”

⁵⁸⁰ Hall, 90-92; “Plans were made during the year for the establishment of the following series: Theory and the History of Literature, edited by Wlad Godzich and Jochen Schulte-Sasse (Press editor, Lindsay Waters).” See *Annual Report 1978-1979*, Archives and Special Collections, The University of Minnesota-Twin Cities, 62.

1998, it had established itself as a publishing milestone, one that catapulted the UMinn Press to the status of an “intellectual household word.” Broadly speaking, the THL series accomplished these goals by disseminating works that provoked dialogue among disciplines and intervened into important discussions occurring in the North America literary-critical community, such as debates about the compatibility of deconstruction and German reception theory, modernism and postmodernism.⁵⁸¹ The THL series also altered the idea that many North American literary critics had about what literary criticism could do, inspiring a generation not to explain a work of art, but perform a “reading.” Each “reading,” in turn, required the adoption and application of a deconstructive stance and style of interpretation. THL texts offered the tools to help into transform readers into deconstructive theorists. In this way, Schulte-Sasse, Godzich, and Waters’s work at the UMinn Press helped to construct the Age of Deconstruction.⁵⁸²

The University of Minnesota Press is happy to present its first catalog of new and recent books in literary and cultural studies. Taking our cue from the Sister Arts, and from Terry Eagleton’s call for a new and transformative cultural studies, we are trying to shape a list—and a catalog—that takes into account the social and political setting of literature and art, as well as the relations between them. In doing so, we hope in the long run to provide you with a list of books that stir up arguments, suggest new modes of understanding, and (not least) make you laugh; at the same time, we hope to topple some of the barriers that hold scholars within the narrow bounds of specialized knowledge.

Among our new books are three in the series Theory and History of Literature, Anatoly Liberman’s translation of Lermontov’s poems, studies that center on political and cultural issues in modern France and Britain—and the latest word on the Sister Arts. Recent backlist titles range from Hans Aarsleff’s essays on the history of linguistic theory to Karal Ann Marling’s story of New Deal mural art and its clamorous public; from books of and about American humor to titles on the legendary Freud and on that bourgeois exemplar and unwitting feminist, Samuel Richardson. When you’ve placed your own order, we hope you’ll recommend these books for library purchase too—and that you’ll pass this catalog on to a friend or colleague we may have missed.

Figure 4.2 In 1983, three years after being establishing as a new book series at the UMinn Press, Schulte-Sasse, Godzich, and Waters, along with several other editors, created their own catalog for the THL series. By having a catalog devoted exclusively to the THL series, Schulte-Sasse, Godzich, and Waters were able to garner additional attention and prestige for their venture.

Schulte-Sasse, Godzich, and

Waters achieved these aims partially by utilizing the UMinn Press’ new distribution strategies. Meetings of the Committee on the Press for example always discussed the financial picture of each publication project. The Committee’s agenda often had favorable projections regarding a

⁵⁸¹ See, for example, Fredric Jameson’s introduction to Jean-François Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984); and Wlad Godzich’s introduction to de Man’s *Blindness and Insight*. Godzich, “Introduction: Caution! Reader at Work!,” *Blindness and Insight*, 1-20.

⁵⁸² See Bruce Kuklick, *A History of Philosophy in America, 1720-2000* (London: Oxford University Press, 2001), 268. See also Kuklick, “American Philosophy and Its Lost Public,” in *Pragmatism: From Progressivism to Postmodernism* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 1999), 149-150.

project's return investment. They frequently noted that a publication—for instance volume 28 of the THL series *Postmodernism and Politics: New Directions in Literary and Cultural Criticism* (1984)—had a one hundred percent return beyond incremental costs.⁵⁸³ Significantly, Schulte-Sasse, Godzich, and Waters also used the Press' principle of market segmentation to target consumers of deconstructive theory. This marketing strategy was made feasible by the importation of structuralism to the U.S. during the 1960s and early 1970s, which had helped to produce a hunger—a market—for theory. And this hunger showed no sign of being sated.⁵⁸⁴ THL editors turned a burgeoning interest in theory to their advantage, aiming each text of the THL series at their growing readership, selecting and framing each work for these consumers of theory.⁵⁸⁵

THL published unavailable masterworks of the nineteenth- and twentieth-centuries, such as Erich Auerbach's *Scenes from the Drama of European Literature* (1984), Volume 9 of the THL series.⁵⁸⁶ Auerbach (1882-1957) was one of the most esteemed Romance philologists of the twentieth-century. Born in Berlin, he was a librarian in the Prussian State Library (1923-29), Professor of Literature at the University of Marburg (1929-1936), and—after fleeing Germany for Turkey—Professor of French Literature at Yale University until his death in 1957. Auerbach's most famous book, *Mimesis: The Representation of Reality in Western Literature*, is still considered to be one of the major twentieth-century interpretations of the sweep of Western

⁵⁸³ See, for example, Theodor Adorno, *Kierkegaard: Construction of the Aesthetic*, trans., ed., and with a foreword by Robert Hullot-Kentor (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1989); Jonathan Arac, *Postmodernism and Politics: New Directions in Literary and Cultural Criticism* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1986); Jay Caplan, *Frames Narratives: The Genealogy of the Beholder in Diderot* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1985).

⁵⁸⁴ Hoeveler Jr., 26.

⁵⁸⁵ Cohen, 316.

⁵⁸⁶ Hall, 90–92.

Literature.⁵⁸⁷ While his *Mimesis* had remained in print in the U.S., Auerbach's *Scenes*, a book of essays that collectively argued for the importance of seeing literature within a social context, was out of print since 1959.

And Schulte-Sasse, Godzich, and Waters wanted to change that. In a 1984 action report written for the Committee on the Press about Auerbach's *Scenes*, the THL editors openly targeted North American consumers of theory. They argued that a "considerable number of literary and humanities teachers will be helped if they can once again have [*Scenes*] available for their students," as the text was "lucid and far more accessible for undergraduates than, say, current high theory." Somewhat surprisingly, the "three men in a boat" considered *Scenes* to be a work that, because of its coherence and practicality, could instill deconstructive principles in readers, not in graduate seminars or on professors' shelves, but in undergraduate seminars or lecture halls. The THL editors specifically deemed Auerbach's "Figura" essay, which had never been reprinted elsewhere, to be "a crucial document." Schulte-Sasse, Godzich, and Waters believed that Auerbach's "Figura" could fundamentally alter students' understanding of prose and poetry. This essay, they believed, would help "students to understand Dante and indeed all literature produced by the Christian West."⁵⁸⁸ In "Figura," Auerbach argued that "all interpretation of Christian literature, as well as exact exegesis, depended on an assumed and traditional Christian doctrine that the New Testament is elaborately and fully an historical and typological fulfillment of the Old." While this interpretation was, Schulte-Sasse, and Godzich, Waters wrote, "well known to theologians," it had "never before been applied to Christian literature in the narrower or more aesthetic sense of the term." Auerbach thus made "a great leap of knowledge" and "bridged two disciplines"—theology and literature—by comprehending "an

⁵⁸⁷ "For Action, Erich Auerbach, *Scenes from the Drama of European Literature*," Archives and Special Collections, The University of Minnesota-Twin Cities, 1.

⁵⁸⁸ Lowry Nelson, Jr., "Erich Auerbach: Memoir of a Scholar," *Yale Review* 69 (1979–80), 315.

almost alien mode of thought in which depended much of Western literature: ‘figural interpretation.’”⁵⁸⁹

Schulte-Sasse, Godzich, and Waters observed that, because North American scholars and students since Auerbach used the term “[f]igural interpretation,” which for Auerbach “establishe[d] a connection between two events or persons, the first of which signifies not only itself, but also the second, while the second encompasses or fulfills the first,” access to its original formulation would clear up conceptual confusions and open new pathways for thought.⁵⁹⁰ In deconstructionist parlance, for example, “figural interpretation” was a catchall phrase that included the figure of speech of catachresis, which had become something of a core deconstructive principle about the language that grounds philosophical discourse. For Jacques Derrida, catachresis denoted the original incompleteness integral to all structures of meaning. Put differently, catachresis and more broadly “figural interpretation,” indicated for deconstructionists there was no timeless presence of meaning, that meaning, though part of a system, is always already disfigured. By reading and adopting conceptual tools from Auerbach’s *Scenes*, particularly from his “Figura” essay, North American readers could use “figural interpretation” in their interpretation of prose and poetry, or more broadly all discourse, thereby grooming their deconstructive comportment toward the self and others.

Auerbach’s *Scenes* was but one example of the wealth of unavailable works that the THL series put into circulation and that readers digested to help build the Leviathan of American Theory. A second example was Theodor Adorno’s *Kierkegaard: Construction of the*

⁵⁸⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁹⁰ Azade Seyham, “Allegory as the Trope of Memory: Registers of Cultural Time in Schlegel and Novalis,” in *Interpretation and Allegory: Antiquity to the Modern Period*, ed. Jon Whitman (Leiden: Boston, Cologne: Brill 2000), 439; “For Action, Erich Auerbach,” 1.

Aesthetic.⁵⁹¹ Adorno (1903-1969) was one of the major figures in German cultural studies. He trained in Germany, and taught there until he fled the Nazis in 1933. Adorno was also instrumental in developing both the Institut für Sozialforschung, a research organization for sociology and philosophy that became known as the institutional home of the Frankfurt School, an informal group of dissident Marxists, and Critical Theory, a school of thought that stressed the reflective assessment of critique of society and culture. Adorno's *Kierkegaard*, originally published in 1933, was a major statement about not only Danish philosopher Søren Kierkegaard (1813-1855), but also existentialism and the Frankfurt School's Critical Theory.

In the 1970s, Kierkegaard scholarship in North America had been confined to an elucidation of texts that provided overall interpretations of Kierkegaard's work. This reception, which glaringly lacked Adorno's contribution, was largely due, as Godzich noted in his 1979 reader's report to the Committee on the Press, to "Adorno's style," which "is at best challenging and demanding."⁵⁹² Though Adorno's style was difficult for readers, Godzich argued the time was ripe in the U.S. for *Kierkegaard* because of the "revival of interest in existentialism, and especially in the thought of Heidegger," whose account of authentic temporality in *Being and Time* was similar to the Danish philosopher's discussion of time in *The Concept of Anxiety*.⁵⁹³ And yet, despite this revival of interest in existentialism, Godzich maintained, "forms of historical thought have receded and have had considerable difficulty in identifying the ground from which to critique or even to view the development of this Heideggerian beachhead in our contemporary critical theory."⁵⁹⁴ For Godzich, Adorno's *Kierkegaard* would provide American

⁵⁹¹ Adorno, *Kierkegaard: Construction of the Aesthetic*.

⁵⁹² Wlad Godzich, "Reader's Report, Theodor Adorno *Kierkegaard*," Archives and Special Collections, The University of Minnesota-Twin Cities, 2.

⁵⁹³ See Harrison Hall, "Love and Death: Kierkegaard and Heidegger on Authentic and Inauthentic Human Existence," *Inquiry: An Interdisciplinary Journal of Philosophy* 27, nos. 2-3 (1984): 179.

⁵⁹⁴ *Ibid.*

readers with the tools to intervene into—to do battle on—the Heideggerian terrain. *Kierkegaard*, Godzich suggested, will have a “significant impact here in the Anglo-American world on those many people still grasping tightly to existentialist ideas[,] [and] should therefore take on the dimensions of a major event.”⁵⁹⁵

Godzich specifically argued that Adorno’s *Kierkegaard* could remedy the situation in the U.S. because, until its publication in 1933, no American had attempted to write a critical study of the Danish philosopher, one that related him in negative fashion to some of the developments in philosophy prior to his development. In *Kierkegaard*, however, Adorno defiantly read the Danish philosopher, whose star was then ascendant in 1930s Germany, as inaugurating a radical subjectivism that asserted the “self’s existence independent from any kind of social interaction.”⁵⁹⁶ Adorno critiqued what he considered to be Kierkegaard’s existential ontology of subjectivity, arguing it was a new form of idealism, in that Kierkegaard formulated a system of existence in which the subjective ego claims freedom from the world. But, Adorno maintained, Kierkegaard’s model of the self was self-contradictory. Kierkegaard overlooked the way in which consciousness was dependent upon objective factors, including economic, social, and cultural forces. According to Adorno, Kierkegaard’s existentialist self, his assertion that the self existed largely outside objective factors, amounted to an ontology in which the self “retreats from history into an abstract ‘nature.’”⁵⁹⁷ For Adorno, Kierkegaard ignored the paradoxical ways the self is both self-governing and supported by that which lies outside the self.

Adorno not only critiqued Kierkegaard’s ontology of the self for its withdrawal from history, however. He also criticized Kierkegaard for his “melancholic subjectivity.”

⁵⁹⁵ “For Action, Adorno,” 1. In internal documents, Godzich’s selling point was that “[t]he book [was] strongly endorsed by Paul de Man and Frederic Jameson of Yale University.”

⁵⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, 1.

⁵⁹⁷ Guy B. Hammond, “Tillich, Adorno, and the Debate about Existentialism,” *Laval theologique et philosophique* 47, no. 3 (1991): 344-355.

Kierkegaard's system of existence, Adorno argued, was not simply a mental retreat, but also an aesthetic withdrawal. This retreat into an abstract "nature" expressed Kierkegaard's longing for a once-had but yet-to-be-regained promised "wholeness: the 'original script of human existence.'"⁵⁹⁸ Kierkegaard, according to Adorno, constructed an ontology of the self in which the self was sovereign—in full control of itself and apart from the world—while at the same time was obliterated through unification with nature. In deconstructionist language, Kierkegaard loaded his ontology of the self with an aesthetic that longed for self-presence. From Adorno's perspective, Kierkegaard's system of existence did not simply prepare the ground for Heideggerian ontology, but set the stage for Heidegger's epistemological shortcomings, shortcomings, in turn, that explain his attraction to and participation in National Socialism. And for Godzich, Adorno's critique of Kierkegaard in *Kierkegaard*—a kind of deconstruction *avant la lettre*—provided weapons for North American readers to use while landing on the Heideggerian beachhead, landings that were features of intellectual life in the U.S. For Godzich, North American consumers of Adorno's theory were ready and more than willing to consume *Kierkegaard* to shape themselves into deconstructionists.

There was unquestionably a deeply personal aspect to the works the THL editors chose for publication. Schulte-Sasse, Godzich, and Waters had professional and intellectual alliances with their authors, such as Waters' and Godzich's friendships with members of the Yale School, above all Paul de Man, who cast a long shadow over the series. For example, in the first THL volume, Tzvetan Todorov's *Introduction to Poetics* (1981), Godzich's and Waters' connections with Yale faculty came in handy. Peter Brooks, Professor of French at Yale, wrote the introduction.⁵⁹⁹ By the early-1980s, Brooks would establish himself as leading theorist of

⁵⁹⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁹⁹ Tzvetan Todorov, *Introduction to Poetics* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1981).

narratology—the study of narrative and narrative structure—with the publication of *Reading for the Plot* (1984).⁶⁰⁰ Like the Auerbach and Adorno texts, the content of Todorov’s text, as Brooks points out in the first page of his introduction, did not originate solely in France. Todorov’s “importance,” Brooks wrote, “derives in part from his intellectual cosmopolitanism. Based in Paris, and owing much to the master of modern French criticism, Roland Barthes, Todorov also commands the Slavic tradition, Russian Formalism and the work of the Prague Linguistic Circle (he is Bulgarian by birth), and the Anglo-American New Criticism, as well as the seminal texts of German Romanticism. He stands as an important figure of transmission and integration.”⁶⁰¹ On the first page of the first text of the THL series, Brooks announced some of theory’s heterogeneous European intellectual origins.

Waters’ interest in poetics, established during his graduate studies at the University of Chicago and solidified after his meeting de Man, and Godzich’s interest in structuralist thought fittingly took center stage in the THL series’ first publication. In his introduction, Brooks noted that Todorov’s participation in the revival of poetics owed much to the larger movement of “structuralism,” specifically structuralist linguistics.⁶⁰² For Brooks, Todorov’s *Poetics* offered an intellectual program for a poetics that drew from structuralist thought, while it was in poetics that structuralist thought about literature found its suitable field of exercise. This program consisted of “three principal aspects of texts that any competent reader must, consciously or unconsciously, activate as templates of organization and meaning.”⁶⁰³ For Todorov, there was the semantic aspect, in which “the kinds of operations that allow signification and symbolization to take place,” the verbal aspect, which “concerns the ‘manner’ of presentation of verbal messages, and

⁶⁰⁰ Brooks, *Reading for the Plot: Design and Intention Narrative* (Cambridge, MA.: Harvard University Press, 1992).

⁶⁰¹ Brooks, Introduction to Todorov, *Introduction to Poetics*, vii.

⁶⁰² *Ibid.*, ix.

⁶⁰³ *Ibid.*, xiv, x.

covers such questions...as mode, time, perspective, [and] voice,” and lastly, the syntactic aspect, which “concerns textual structures, such as he “basic typologies of plot structure, temporal, and spatial ordering.”⁶⁰⁴ For Brooks, Todorov’s project in *Poetics* thus combined the insights of structuralist thought with the study of poetics into a hybrid, a kind of structuralist poetics.

Brooks also suggested that Todorov’s *Poetics* could help instill deconstructive interpretive techniques in North American readers. Todorov, Brooks stressed, ended *Poetics* by “facing the possibility that poetics cannot be an autonomous science because its object, literature, is not itself autonomous, but a special case of human discourse and symbolization.”⁶⁰⁵ For Brooks, readers could apply Todorov’s insights to not only literature, but also any discourse. The applications were limitless. And these possible applications, Brooks argued, were particularly relevant to the North American literary-critical community because Todorov’s endeavor served as a corrective to “shortcuts practiced by [American] critics calling themselves structuralists who offered abusive application of its lessons.”⁶⁰⁶ Such North American critics, Brooks claimed, “too easily” applied “the linguistic model,” specifically Ferdinand Saussure’s “notion of the ‘arbitrariness of the sign,’ by which he meant the conventional, unmotivated choice of a certain acoustic image to signify a certain concept,” “in wildly metaphorical ways to textual readings.”⁶⁰⁷ For Brooks, Todorov’s *Poetics* steered North American readers onto a methodological course between pure ahistorical structure and the “free play” of meaning. Todorov’s project bore most, according to Brooks, on those “literary critics [who] have...in recent years..., rather too glibly, announced the movement beyond structuralism, in various forms of ‘post-structuralism,’ of which the ‘deconstruction’ of Jacques Derrida has received the

⁶⁰⁴ Ibid.

⁶⁰⁵ Ibid., xvi.

⁶⁰⁶ Ibid., xvii.

⁶⁰⁷ Ibid.

greatest attention in this country.”⁶⁰⁸ But for Brooks, post-structuralism was largely a French phenomenon, having taken place in a context in which the contributions of structuralist thought were already accepted as solid achievements, whereas the then current popularity of some forms of post-structuralism in the U.S. seemed to him to be without context, indeed “simply the indulgence, under a new guise, of the traditional American penchant for exegesis and interpretation.” North American critics assimilated Saussurian linguistics and, more generally, the contributions of structuralist thought into already established American ways of reading.

For Brooks, few North American critics appeared to have actually absorbed the lessons of a structuralist poetics. “Some of them,” Brooks wrote, “have simply performed a shortcut back to interpretation, now flying post-structuralist banners.” According to Brooks, however, the proper application of Todorov’s project of structuralist poetics would need to not simply incorporate his undertaking, but begin to build a way of knowledge and being rooted in his endeavor.⁶⁰⁹ Indeed, by the end of the 1980s, the THL series had helped to construct the deconstructive culture of the 1980s precisely by grooming readers’ deconstructive comportment.

The Yale Critics: Deconstruction in America (1983)—Volume 6 of the THL series—was another of Schulte-Sasse, Godzich, and Waters’ important publication projects.⁶¹⁰ Waters in particular strongly advocated for this project. In his 1982 statement for the Committee on the Press, he wrote: “The last great movement in literary criticism, the “New Criticism,” had its heyday four decades ago. Deconstruction is a new intellectual movement which seems...most likely to succeed in providing a new grounding for advanced theory as well as elementary undergraduate education.” Waters expressed a common sentiment among literary scholars frustrated with the hegemony of the New Critical style of reading. But that was not all. Waters

⁶⁰⁸ Ibid., xvi.

⁶⁰⁹ Ibid., xvii.

⁶¹⁰ Arac, Godzich, and Martin, *The Yale Critics: Deconstruction in America*.

also portrayed deconstruction as a new intellectual movement that would supplant old interpretive fashions like the New Criticism. Waters' claims were important because *The Yale Critics* contained neither a contribution from any Yale School member nor from any of their students. And yet, according to Waters, "[t]he major proponents of the new theory are at Yale University. It is for this reason that the book of entirely original essays focuses on the so-called Gang of Four at Yale—Harold Bloom, Paul de Man, Geoffrey Hartman, and J. Hillis Miller. Despite the great brouhaha about deconstruction, despite the ridicule of many in the...profession, these Yale

Critics were winning adherents for their ideas."⁶¹¹ *The Yale Critics* helped construct the image in the American critical community that deconstruction emanated from Yale. Waters' statements also show that the project of *The Yale*

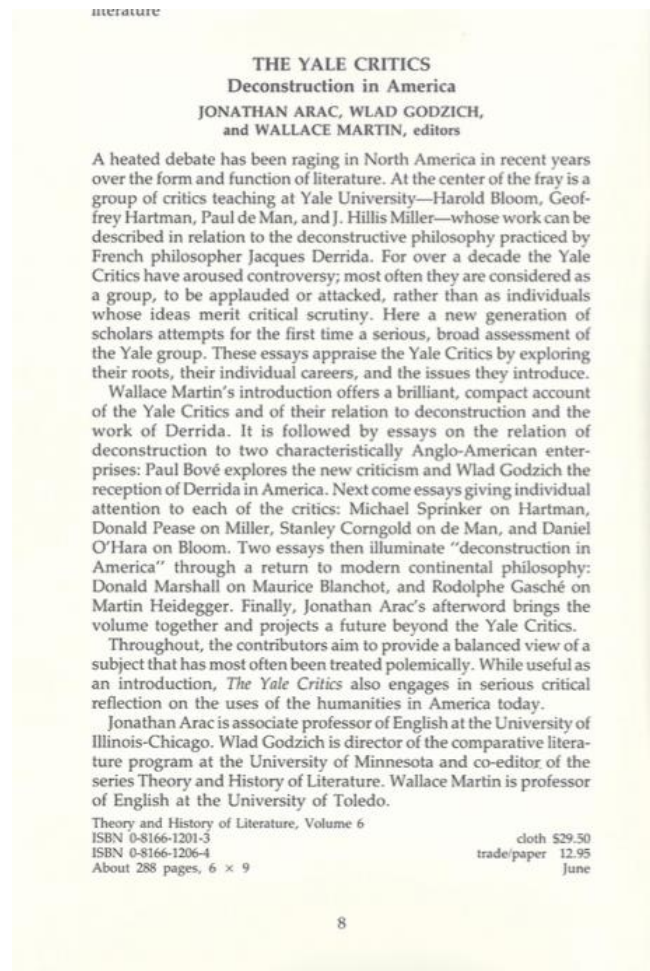


Figure 4. 3 "Here a new generation of scholars," this THL advertisement reads, "attempts for the first time a serious broad assessment of the Yale group....Throughout, the contributors aim to provide a balanced view of a subject that has most often been treated polemically. While useful as an introduction, *The Yale Critics* also engages in serious critical reflection on the uses of the humanities in America today." Clearly, the THL editors attempted to not only publish the first volume that assessed the Yale group but also link this assessment as well as the Yale group itself to the humanities in general. By doing so, the THL series highlighted the inter- and cross-disciplinary ways that literary critics and humanists more broadly had begun to apply deconstructive reading practices in their scholarly work.

⁶¹¹ Waters, "For Action: *The Yale Critics: Deconstruction in America*," Archives and Special Collections, The University of Minnesota-Twin Cities, 1. Ibid. Waters included a 1981 *Newsweek*, titled "A New Look at Literary Criticism," which dramatized the state of literary theory in America and the Yale Critics. See "A New Look at Lit Crit," *Newsweek*, June 22, 1981.

Critics was to groom, not only readers of high theory, but also graduate and undergraduate readers' deconstructive comporments.

Waters also stressed to the Committee on the Press (COP) that none of the internal UMinn readers took serious issue with the plan of *The Yale Critics*. This plan called for a "guiding introduction, two essays providing basic historical and philosophical background [the latter provided by Godzich], four essays on the four Yale Critics, a view toward the projects of deconstruction, a substantial summarizing afterword, and a complete bibliography."⁶¹² This proposal, which incorporated a philosophical and historical context for deconstruction as well as a close, detailed readings of the Bloom's, de Man's, Hartman's, and Miller's corpuses, were "found [by readers] to be generally excellent," Waters reported to the COP.⁶¹³ And yet, not all the volume's readers were content with *The Yale Critics*' aims or the quality of its contributions. The COP approved an advanced contract for the project in December 1980, but, unlike other volumes for the THL series, *The Yale Critics* went through several rounds of review, the first in December 1980, the second in August//September 1981, and the third in January 1982. The earliest versions of the volume's essays received scrutiny from readers; Jonathan Culler, according to Waters "one of the broadest minded of scholars who have written generally on literary theory and author of the very well received *Structuralist Poetics*," called for revisions, though he "said they were 'important but not absolutely essential.'"⁶¹⁴

But the central point of contention was *The Yale Critics*'s purpose: to introduce deconstructive reading practices to undergraduates, to be, in the words of Wallace Martin, author

⁶¹² Waters, "For Action: *The Yale Critics: Deconstruction in America*," 1.

⁶¹³ *Ibid.*, 2.

⁶¹⁴ *Ibid.*

of the volume's introduction, "appropriate reading for 'the bright college senior.'"⁶¹⁵ Marxist literary critic Frank Lentricchia, whom Waters explained to the COP "was a scholar who has been quite critical of the Yale critics and thus might be expected to be critical," expressed his serious reservations and argued against publication. For Lentricchia, the introduction of deconstruction to undergraduates would do more harm than good because of deconstruction's anti-historicism.⁶¹⁶ Lentricchia had expressed his misgivings about deconstruction a two years prior in his popular *After the New Criticism* (1980). In this work, Lentricchia argued that deconstruction was a "nominalist, relativist, isolationist, and escapist textual" theory of reading literature. Lentricchia took particular issue with de Man: "Literary discourse achieves the effect of a 'self-reflecting mirror': by pointing to its own fictional nature it separates itself from 'empirical reality.' This art of self-reflection, this unique self-deconstructive ability of literature to speak of its own fictionality or mediating character de Man believes 'characterizes the work of literature in its essence.'"⁶¹⁷ Though de Man received the most stinging criticism, the general lesson of Lentricchia's *After the New Criticism* was that deconstructive literary criticism had "cut itself off from reality: 'On the matter of history, the deconstructionist position—despite the awesome historical learning of its Yale proponents—appears equivalent to the position of the literary know-nothing, newly reinforced with a theory of discourse that reassures him that history-writing is bunk.'"⁶¹⁸ According to Lentricchia, readers were being all too easily taken in by the seductive rhetorical aerobics of the Yale Critics. For Lentricchia, vulnerable undergraduates should not be exposed to such harmful theories of interpretation.

⁶¹⁵ Martin to Waters, September 29 1981, Archives and Special Collections, The University of Minnesota-Twin Cities, 1.

⁶¹⁶ Waters, "For Action: *The Yale Critics: Deconstruction in America*," 2.

⁶¹⁷ Lentricchia, *After the New Criticism*, 302.

⁶¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 182.

There was considerable pushback to Lentricchia's report. Waters, for example, believed that "some of his [Lentricchia's] objections to *The Yale Critics* manuscript seemed unfair."⁶¹⁹ And in addition to Martin, who penned a rejoinder to Lentricchia in which he defended the volume's aim to be suitable reading for "the bright college senior," Tom Mitchell, Professor of English and Art History at the University of Chicago, stated in his reader's report to the UMin Press that *The Yale Critics*, above all Martin's introduction, was "brilliant, widely learned...., [and] subtle in its distinctions." Mitchell "found it more digestible, convincing, and astute in its judgments than much of Frank Lentricchia's."⁶²⁰ Despite this pushback, there was concern among members of the COP whether *The Yale Critics* was a viable project. Waters wrote to co-THL editors that, though "Lentricchia's opinion may have seemed too harsh in some ways[,] it lent support to Culler's call for revisions." Following the back-and-forth between Waters and Lentricchia, and after `revisions to the volume's afterword, Lentricchia, Waters reported to the COP, "declare[d] the manuscript to be satisfactory and recommend[ded] that publication proceed." In a "telephone conversation on June 21, 1982, Lentricchia said that he found the manuscript satisfactory and recommended publication."⁶²¹ From the switchboard of the THL offices in America's Heartland, *The Yale Critics* was launched out into the world. While the reception of the volume was mixed—Geoffrey Hartman himself took issue with how he was presented—*The Yale Critics* introduced deconstruction as an intellectual movement to American readers.

⁶¹⁹ Waters, "For Action: *The Yale Critics: Deconstruction in America*," 2.

⁶²⁰ Mitchell to Waters, "Reader's Report," Archives and Special Collections, The University of Minnesota-Twin Cities, 1.

⁶²¹ Waters, "For Action: *The Yale Critics: Deconstruction in America*," 2.

Consuming Deconstructive Theory

The Theory and History of Literature series had a long run. It ended after publishing eighty-eight books, the last in 1998. Though the series ran until 1998, Lindsay Waters left the UMinn press in 1984 for Harvard University Press. At the HUP, he published Greil Marcus's *Lipstick Traces* and various books of philosophy and feminist theory by authors from Paul Gilroy to Victoria Nelson. From Minnesota to Harvard, he always pursued questions of how to revive aesthetics and literary history. Jochem Schulte-Sasse and Wlad Godzich, however, remained at the University of Minnesota, soldiering on at the university's press. "The series famously was praised by critic Stanley Fish. He said that the THL series was the "only one for which he ever had a standing order." Schulte-Sasse reflected: "It was, I guess, a remarkable endorsement for our project. People have said that our series reshaped literary discourse in this country. It's not for me to say that, but a lot of people have said that...I guess I have to accept that. Several colleagues from other universities told me that they started their own series in direct imitation of ours."⁶²² Beyond introducing an American audience to French Theory, THL altered the basic idea of what criticism does and inspired a generation of North American critics to read texts in a new way, training them to adopt a deconstructive techniques of interpretation.

⁶²² Hall.

Undoing Patterns of Effacement: The “Female” School of Deconstruction and the Transformation of American Feminism

Introduction

“Like others of its type, the Yale School has always been a Male School.” So Barbara Johnson wittily observed in her talk “Gender Theory and the Yale School,” an ironic twist on the title and theme of the conference, “Contemporary Genre Theory and the Yale School,” held in Norman, Oklahoma from May 31 to June 1, 1984. As explored in Chapter Three, the “Yale School” was shorthand among academics and non-academics alike for a group of literary critics—De Man, Bloom, Hartman, and Miller—who practiced deconstructive criticism on the Old Campus in New Haven. Like Johnson alluded to in Norman, the “Yale School” was often portrayed as an exclusively male province. A 1981 *Newsweek* article praised these “formidable *men* of letters who have bent deconstruction to their own individual—and practical—purposes.” While *Newsweek* and other popular publications often ignored the accomplishments, indeed the very presence, of women in the Yale School, academia itself placed women at the margins of this territory. Jonathan Culler, whose *On Deconstruction* (1982) won successive generations of Anglophone readers, described Shoshana Felman’s book *La Folie et la chose littéraire* as “a wide-ranging collection of essays by a member of the ‘*école de Yale*’.” Felman—whose deconstructions of the hierarchical relationship between psychoanalytic thought and literature marked the emergence of the deconstructive project in North America—was perhaps a Yale daughter, or maybe, like Johnson remarked in her talk, a “member of the Yale School, but only in French.” To Johnson, Culler sidelined Felman for “no reason other than gender.”⁶²³

⁶²³ Barbara Johnson, “Gender Theory and the Yale School,” *Genre* 17, nos. 1-2 (1984): 101-112; *Newsweek*, June 22, 1981, 83. Emphasis added. See also Colin Campbell, “The Tyranny of the Yale Critics,” *New York Times*

A desire to deconstruct the gendered logic that controlled interpretation—a form of thought that compelled not only *Newsweek* but even Culler, himself a champion of the deconstructive cause, to marginalize women—motivated Johnson and several of her colleagues to imagine a response to the 1978 volume *Deconstruction and Criticism*. Titled “*Bride of Deconstruction and Criticism*,” the volume was to be a series of deconstructive readings that revealed the female and feminist presence at the heart of European Romanticism, a late eighteenth-century and early nineteenth-century artistic, literary, and intellectual movement, which, well into the 1970s, had been portrayed as strictly a male enterprise. It would have specifically “inscrib[ed] female deconstructive protest and affirmation centering not on Percy Bysshe Shelley’s [poem] ‘The Triumph of Life’ (as...[*Deconstruction and Criticism*] was originally slated to do) but on Mary Shelley’s *Frankenstein*.” Though the volume “never quite got off the ground,” Johnson and her colleagues’ choice to concentrate on Mary reflected their aim to show women and female achievements as central to Romanticism as well as unearth and change the implicit theory of relations between gender and literary criticism that characterized their profession.⁶²⁴

Though unrealized, the *Bride of Deconstruction and Criticism* hints at Johnson’s and other female scholars’ numerous deconstructive reading practices that aimed to undo what they considered a deeply established pattern of female effacement and marginalization in Western cultural texts. First at Yale and then at other campuses across the United States during the mid 1970s and 1980s, female critics’ deconstructions intervened into and reorganized the gendered

Magazine, February 9, 1986, 20ff; Culler, *On Deconstruction*, N.Y., 289. Johnson noted this about Culler in her essays, “Gender Theory and the Yale School.”

⁶²⁴ Johnson, “Gender Theory and the Yale School,” 102. This chapter subscribes to Laura Lee Downs’ view that, “[w]hile feminism is itself a contested word, and one whose meaning has, moreover, shifted over the course of the women’s rights movement, one can nonetheless establish a broad definition of the term, one that embraces all who find women’s subordinate status to be unjust, and who, furthermore, believe that there is nothing inevitable about this status: it is a product of human convention and can therefore be changed through human effort.” See Laura Lee Downs, *Writing Gender History* (Cambridge: Oxford University Press, 2004), 6-7 f. 2.

reasoning that structured canonical interpretations of literature. This deconstructive movement, which emerged as the social-structural approaches to feminism of the early 1970s receded, drew intellectual energy and institutional support from feminist curriculum and thought as well as the politics of the women's and gay liberation movement. And, in addition to Johnson, this feminist undertaking initially included Shoshana Felman, Mary Poovey, and Gayatri Spivak, and then Judith Butler, Eve Sedgwick, and others. While Johnson, Felman, Poovey and Spivak trained and worked alongside the members of the Male School in the 1970s, Butler, Sedgwick and others comprised a younger cohort, who, though educated at Yale, continued to practice and advocate for feminist acts of deconstruction elsewhere during the 1980s.

These luminaries—who comprised a “Female School of Deconstruction”—became central to fields of scholarly inquiry across North America, transforming Mary Shelley Studies, Romantic Studies, Lacanian Studies, and Subaltern Studies, and founding others, such as Trauma Studies, Queer Theory, and Gender Studies. They partly accomplished all this by moving deconstructive reading away from a concern with self-conscious interpretations of French and English prose and poetry—a type of deconstructive reading typified by the Male School, above all de Man and Miller—towards an outspoken interest in gender, race, psychoanalysis, and social justice in a wide range of texts. As the 1970s gave way to the 1980s, these female deconstructionists increasingly treated their close readings and curricula—like other radical feminists in other areas of North American intellectual and cultural life—as political acts, as efforts to liberate marginalized, subjugated, and otherwise excluded dimensions of language and life, as counter-movements against the gendered logic that (re)produced the pattern of female effacement. And often, female deconstructionists' acts of deconstruction developed from and

were enmeshed in their teaching, specifically their efforts during the 1970s and early 1980s to establish Yale's Women's Studies Program.

The history of this feminist project that emerged from Yale challenges common accounts of deconstruction and theory in America. These narratives—ironically enough—often repeat the very gendered logic into which deconstructionists so decisively intervened. Since the late 1980s, for example, North American conservative commentators have spilled a great deal of ink on their assessment that deconstructionists and proponents of cultural studies more broadly, from within the very ivory-covered walls that gave these scholars' sustenance, assaulted—perhaps even fatally wounded—“the classics of Western art and thought.” Meanwhile, the political left has hardly been silent on these matters. Rather than defend deconstructionists, however, this cluster of critics has frequently become strange bedfellows with commentators on the political right, as when leftists argue that reactionary European imports, exemplified for them by German philosopher Martin Heidegger, and the segmentation of the academic market gave rise to the obfuscations of theory and curriculum changes that precipitated the decline of the humanities and its political import, its ability to conjure coherent “communities” for change.

Often, theorists' so-called jargon came in first for leftists' derision, with theorists' careerism and political quietism coming in a close second. Still other scholars—of varying political commitments—have suggested that consumer capitalism co-opted theory and then sidetracked it into a watered down tool for academics' petty advancement of identity politics. There also remain the unresolved political, ethical, and historical issues that emerged for deconstructionists and their detractors following the 1987 discovery of Yale Critic Paul de Man's youthful writings for collaborationist journals in his native Belgium under Nazi occupation at the beginning of the Second World War. Layered on top of this body of scholarship is the fact that

strident critiques of deconstruction and theory in the United States have in some fashion and to some extent drawn their energy—indeed often their rhetoric—from the “culture wars” that embroiled the last two decades of the twentieth-century. From all corners, deconstruction and theory more generally have become epitaphs: signs of the broader “fracturing” of America, of its society, its culture, its intellectual life.⁶²⁵

What these epitaphs, of the Yale School or of deconstruction, or theory more generally, have blurred and in some cases nearly erased are female deconstructionists’ collective and critical contributions. A more capacious picture of deconstruction in America emerges—by looking past the male figureheads of the deconstructive movement and accounting for female deconstructionists’ reading practices, many of which were developed in New Haven, and their effects in and outside North American universities. By way of reconfiguring the gendered logic of texts, assembling and disassembling feminist curricula, and forming pedagogical and professional relationships, the “Female” School of Deconstruction helped engender a once-radical form of thought, an intellectual configuration, that today dominates and persists in U.S. intellectual, institutional, and cultural life. The following investigation is thus not a narrative of the breakdown of knowledge and ways of living during the last three decades of the twentieth-century, but a story of the rhizomatic formation and spread of deconstructive ways of life and knowledge. This story—which makes clear that female deconstructionists, far from a *supplément*

⁶²⁵ Daniel Rodgers assimilates female deconstructionists into his explanatory historical framework of an “age of Fracture,” the fragmentation of categories of women’s identity, experience-action, and agency. See Rodgers, 159. See Rodgers, 175; See, for example, Roger Kimball, *Tenured Radicals: How Politics Has Corrupted Our Higher Education* (Chicago: Ivan R. Dee, 1998 [1990]), 322, 309. For the former, see Richard Wolin, *The Seduction of Unreason: The Intellectual Romance with Fascism from Nietzsche to Postmodernism* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004); for the latter, see Bill Reading, *The University In Ruins* (Cambridge, MA.: Harvard University Press, 1997). In contrast to Wolin and Rappaport, Kerwin Lee Klein argues that that “earlier changes in the ways we talk about language, history, and culture prepared the ground.” Kerwin Lee Klein, *From History to Theory* (Berkeley: The University of California Press, 2011), 16. See, for example, Russell Jacoby, *The Last Intellectuals: American Culture in the Age of Academe* (New York: Basic Books, 1987); David Lehman, *Signs of the Times: Deconstruction and the Fall of Paul de Man* (New York: Poseidon, 1991).

to the Yale School, arguably *were* the Yale School—adds depth and breadth to history of deconstruction and theory in America.⁶²⁶

Women's Studies at Yale

During the early 1970s, academics' questioning of the conceptual structures, scholarly canons, and disciplinary hierarchies of the American university—a questioning stimulated by the women's rights, civil rights, antiwar, and student power movements of the 1960s—formed the backdrop for the emergence of women's studies programs. While there was little consensus about the topics or aims of women's studies' courses during the early 1970s, the efforts of faculty members, students, and local communities to find—or create—a feminist curriculum that expanded empirical knowledge through gathering documents, evaluated theory and literature, and formulated paradigms and organizing concepts, transformed women's studies courses from drops in the intellectual river—“one of the hottest new wrinkles in higher education” according to *Newsweek's* October 26, 1970 issue—into a deep and wide conduit for feminist knowledge by decade's end. In September 1970, an anthology of women's courses contained only 17 syllabi; by 1974, there had been a virtual explosion, with 4,658 women's courses at 885 colleges and universities. Women's studies programs followed a similar trajectory. The first was established at San Diego State College in 1970; five years later, there were 270 programs; a half-decade later, in 1981, there were 350 programs nationwide. The generally swift institutionalization of women's courses and women's studies programs helped—for the first time—focus resources to the projects of establishing that the human experience is as much female as male and identifying

⁶²⁶ This chapter does not focus on Jacques Derrida's treatment of “woman” and his feminist critics or those that build off of his work. See *Feminist Interpretations of Jacques Derrida*, ed. Nancy J. Holland (University Park, PA: Penn State University Press, 1997); *Derrida and Feminism: Recasting the Question of Woman*, ed. Ellen K. Feder et al. (London: Routledge, 1997). See, for example, Daphne Patai and Will H. Corral, eds., *Theory's Empire: An Anthology of Dissent* (New York: Columbia UP, 2005).

the sexual politics that ordered institutions and knowledge production in the American academy.⁶²⁷

The establishment of women's studies courses and programs as well as the growth of feminist scholarship overlapped with unrest and transformation in New Haven during the late 1960s and early 1970s. At the time, and as partly explored in Chapter Two, the Elm City underwent rapid deindustrialization and demographic change, with the African American population increasing and Italians, Jews, and Irish departing for the suburbs. In addition, the New Haven government partnered with Yale University to undertake redevelopment projects that resulted in razing several neighborhoods. On Yale's Old Campus—the principal residence of Yale College freshman and where the departments of Classics, English, Comparative Literature, and Philosophy were housed—change and challenge came to the school's "Old Blue" traditions. Following the Kent State shootings in May 1970, seniors organized a "'counter-commencement,' planning to... donate their \$8 cap-and-gown fees to a fund for the benefit of antiwar candidates"; and there was the 1970 trial of Black Panther Bobby Seale, which brought crowds to the green, from disaffected students to "dangerous foreigners" like Jean Genet, France's "Black Prince of Letters." The National Guard was called in, while Yale President Kingman Brewster controversially expressed doubts to faculty that a black revolutionary group could get a fair trial.

⁶²⁷ These courses initially could meet "women's needs, such as self-defense," addressed "traditional women's interests, such as child care," provided "coverage of women [as an] integral part of the topic, such as sex roles and the family," or simply were "about women only. See "Women's Studies," *Newsweek*, October 26 1970), 61. See Warren Breckman, "Intellectual History and the Interdisciplinary Ideal," in *Rethinking Modern European Intellectual History*, eds., Darrin M. McMahon and Samuel Moyn (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 274-293. For a study of the origins of Women's Studies, see Marilyn Jacoby Boxer, *When Women Ask the Questions* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University, 1998), 7-24; see also "Women's Studies as Women's History," *Women's Studies Quarterly* 30 (2002): 43-44; and Roberta Salper, "San Diego State 1970: The Initial year of the Nation's First Women's Studies Program," *Feminist Studies* 37, no. 3 (2011): 656-82. The development of Black Studies programs in the 1960s eased the way for the development of Women's Studies programs in the 1970s and 1980s. See Johnella E. Butler, "The Difficult Dialogue of Curriculum Transformation: Ethnic Studies and Women's Studies," in *Transforming the Curriculum: Ethnic Studies and Women's Studies*, Butler and Walter, eds. (New York: State University of New York Press, 1991), 1.

But perhaps most disruptive of all was Brewster's decision to admit 588 women—"the female versions of Nietzsche's *Uebermensch*" according to the *New York Times Magazine*—to the university's undergraduate ranks of over four thousand men. Alumni strongly resisted. And in a pamphlet titled "The Rape of Yale: How a Great University Went Wrong" circulated during the August 1969 matriculation ceremony and endorsed by William F. Buckley Jr., whose 1951 *God and Man at Yale* helped launch the modern conservative movement in America, Julian Dedman, Class of 1949, bemoaned how Brewster, "intellectually ravished by the sirens of 'Change,'" had "emasculated Yale's most time-honored tradition—its 267 years of maleness."⁶²⁸

To counter this resistance to "Change," a group of Yale scholars and administrators—led by Elga Wasserman, Brewster's Special Assistant on the education of women and chair of the newly minted

Committee on Coeducation—began to consider how to establish a Women's Studies Program. In contrast to a number of state-run institutions of higher education on the West Coast, however, the founding of such a program at Yale—a private establishment on the East Coast with almost three centuries of male-centered traditions—proved to be neither smooth nor quick. A feminist

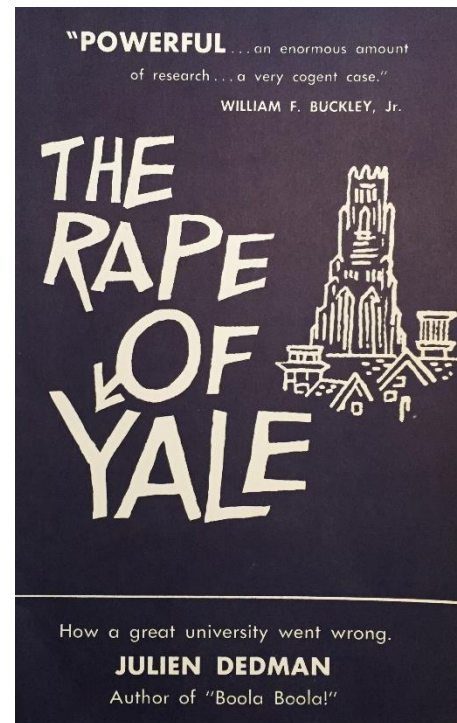


Figure 5.1 The cover of Julian Dedman's 1969 pamphlet in response to a changing Yale.

⁶²⁸ Jonathan Lear, "How Yale Selected Her First Coeds," *The New York Times Magazine*, April 13, 1969, 72, 76; University Committee on the Admission of Women, Mary Arnstein, Chair, "The Admission of Women to Yale College" ("Arnstein Report"), 1974. DeVane Lecture Document Collection, Manuscripts and Archives, Yale University; Joseph B. Treaster, "Brewster Doubts Fair Black Trials," *New York Times*, April 25, 1970; *Time*, "The War Against the War," May 18, 1970; Amy Vita Kesselman, "Women's Liberation and the Left in New Haven, Connecticut, 1968-1972," *Radical History Review* 81 (2001): 17. See also Nikolas Bowie, "Poison Ivy: The Problem of Tax Exemption in a Deindustrializing City, Yale and New Haven, 1967-1973," *Foundations* 3, no. 2 (2009): 61-90.

presence was indeed being cultivated in the student body in the early 1970s, but the university was slow to acclimate to “Change.” A 1971 internal report informed Brewster that Yale “obviously has a ‘male chauvinist’ image,” considered as it was “to be a school dominated by men of the Old Blue tradition where women are tolerated only.” “[A]t every step of the way,” the report continued, “from graduate student to professor, women desiring professional careers face pressures and obstacles that often defeat but the strongest and most determined.” These demands and difficulties—which included serving on more committees than male colleagues and an imprecise policy for maternity leave—were compounded by undergraduates’ attitude toward women and their achievements. According to a 1973-1974 Report of the President’s Advisory Committee on the Education of Women, “the majority of men (49%) and a significant minority of women (31%) [undergraduates] were unable to name...advocates of women’s rights prior to World War II.” Not only did female students have to live and learn alongside students ignorant of such historical information, but many were propositioned and even sexually assaulted by Yale faculty members. There was harassment in classrooms as well. In the Fall of 1976, a professor opened English 29—“a survey course, spanning the whole European literary tradition,” from Homer to Beckett, that is—with a slide of the Sphinx which portrayed a man about to be raped by the Sphinx for his attempt to enter Thebes. The professor turned to the class and commented: “All men face the same threat of a hungry, gaping vagina.” Such hostile discursive and physical acts (the term and concept of sexual harassment was still unfamiliar to many in the early 1970s; its first recorded use was in a 1974 report to the Chancellor of MIT) produced the androcentric and outright misogynist environment at Yale that woman scholars and students aimed to restructure.⁶²⁹

⁶²⁹ *Yale Course Critique 1977* (Yale University Press, Yale Daily News), 76; See Mary Rowe, “Saturn’s Rings: A Study of the Minutiae of Sexism Which Maintain Discrimination and Inhibit Affirmative Action Results in

While efforts to demarginalize women resulted in the expansion of the number and scope of women's studies courses during the first half of the 1970s—by the second year of coeducation Wasserman had organized eight courses focused on women—gaps in and the duplication of material covered in curriculum impeded the development of a Women's Studies Program. Professor of Political Science Celia Ussak for instance taught “Women in Politics” for the first time in the spring of 1972—an event that attracted attention in a *Yale Daily News* article, the author suggesting that politics and women remain separate, because “[i]f [a woman] tries to emulate the role playing of the politicians around her, she may succeed politically, but lose her humanity in the process.” Ussak swore never to offer her class again—not because of the *YDN* article, but because she was concerned that the content of her course overlapped with other classes and would be a “waste of time.” Despite Ussak's and others' concerns, the amount and choice of women's studies courses increased.

In the fall of 1974, Betty Friedan—star of Second Wave Feminism, whose supporters advocated altering laws and policies limiting women's sexual, familial, work, and reproductive rights—offered “The Sex-Role Revolution: Stage II.” In her course, which moved beyond her famous 1963 critique of the confinements and frustrations of women in *The Feminine Mystique*, Friedan argued that the first stage of feminism would soon end with the ratification of The Equal Rights Amendment (ERA) and feminism would enter a new phase in which women and men

Corporations and Non-Profit Institutions,” *Graduate and Professional Education of Women*, American Association of University Women, Washington DC, 1974, 1-9; “A Report to the President from the Committee on the Status of Professional Women at Yale” (May, 1971), Manuscripts and Archives, Yale University, 15, 3; “A Report To the President from the University Committee on the Status of Women, 1973-1973,” Manuscripts and Archives, Yale University, 19; “A Report to the Yale Corporation from the Yale Undergraduate Women's Caucus, March, 1977,” Manuscripts and Archives, Yale University, 4, 5; Barbara Deinhardt, Administrative Assistant to Elga Wasserman, note to Wasserman re: “Women's Studies,” 14 July 1972. WGSF; See also Tom Cavanagh, “Politics no place for a woman,” December 13, 1972, *Yale Daily News*, 2; “Sexist Headline,” *Yale Daily News*, December 14, 1972, 2; Kesselman, 17; Nan Robertson, “Betty Friedan Ushers in a ‘Second Stage,’” *The New York Times* October 19, 1981; Lodal, “Engendering an Intellectual Space: The Development of Women's Studies at Yale University, 1969-2001,” 12.

should work together to address the double enslavement of women—in the home and in the workplace. Radical feminists schooled in the crucible of civil rights and New Left movements saw Friedan as reactionary, charging her with abandoning political issues solely related to women. Those sympathetic to Friedan’s course however likely considered the class as pointing to what might lay beyond second wave feminism, beyond an aim of the National Organization for Women (which Friedan co-founded in 1966 and which eventually blossomed into the largest feminist organization in the U.S.) to “bring women into full participation in the mainstream of American society.” Regardless where Yalies stood on Friedan’s liberal feminism, however, Freidan’s course registered how the shifting focus of American feminists was brought into seminar rooms and lecture halls in the Elm City.⁶³⁰

Yale faculty and graduate students continued to extend radical and liberal feminists’ sexual politics, altering curriculum to cultivate a feminist atmosphere in New Haven. In November 1978, Catherine MacKinnon, a graduate student in political science who received her law degree from Yale in 1977 and from 1976-79 played a central role in the formation of Yale’s Women’s Studies program, declared: “A curriculum is a map of reality. It presents a categorical series of unities of life, world and thought divided by time, place and manner of investigation, and united into disciplines according to people’s experience of truth. As changes in disciplinary boundaries illustrate, the experience of truth is a social experience.” For MacKinnon and her allies, the questioning outside the academy of the logic that organized institutions and knowledge defined truth, and the university should communicate, decode, and assess this truth in and with its curriculum.

⁶³⁰ National Organization For Women (N.O.W.) Statement of Purpose, adopted at NOW’s first National Conference in Washington, D.C. on October 29, 1966. Freidan’s course served as a testing ground for her *The Second Stage* (Cambridge, MA.: Harvard University Press, 1981).

The trajectory of MacKinnon's Yale courses reflected her own understanding of this relationship. In the mid 1970s, MacKinnon's pupils sometimes questioned her commitment to feminism. For these students, MacKinnon's Fall 1976 Residential College Seminar "Socialism and/or Feminism" revolved too much around her interest in Marxism, focusing as it did on the experiences of women in China and Viet Nam. Significantly, MacKinnon taught this course shortly after the fall of Saigon on April 30, 1975, and thus when U.S. involvement in Indochina was fresh in Americans' minds. In contrast, MacKinnon's Fall 1977 American Studies class "Feminism and Humanism: An Introduction to Women's Studies (the inaugural semester of the multidisciplinary course that became a core requirement of Yale's Women's Studies Program) was devoted to feminist movements in America and the world. One can infer that it was not simply Yale's Women's Studies Task Force's headway in developing a formal Women's Studies Program during the mid to late 1970s, but also several States' reversal of their previous ratification of the ERA that provided the impetus for MacKinnon's course. In other words, the amount and kinds of feminist training students received in MacKinnon's courses varied according to the changing "map of reality," as MacKinnon put it in November 1978.⁶³¹

Other Yale professors and graduate students began to teach new courses in the mid to late 1970s that, by highlighting women's social experiences of truth, strove to reduce marginalization of women. In fact, during the 1978 Summer Term, which served as kind of experimental session for the Women's Studies Program, the Women's Studies Task Force was inundated with faculty course proposals, including Nancy Cott's "Women in the United States in the Twentieth

⁶³¹ Abbe Smith, *Lodal*, 17; Catherine MacKinnon, "Memo to the Committee on the Education of Women, re: 'Notes Toward an Argument for Women's Studies,'" November 1 1978, Box 16, Folder 6: Women's and Gender Studies Files (WGSF), Manuscripts and Archives, Yale University; MacKinnon's course was broken into seven sub-sections: (1) Introduction: The Approach; (2) The Biological Basis; (3) Acculturation; (4) Social Organization; (5) Production and Control of Resources; (6) Sexuality; (7) Feminism Around the World. Women's Studies Task Force, "Feminism and Humanism: An Introduction to Women's Studies," Original Proposal for Syllabus, 1976-1977. WGSF; MacKinnon, "Feminism and Humanism: An Introduction to Women's Studies, syllabus, Fall 1978," Box 16, Folder 6: Women's and Gender Studies Files (WGSF), Manuscripts and Archives, Yale University.

Century,” Faye Crosby’s “The Psychology of Women,” and Hesung Koh’s “Sex Roles in Cross-Cultural Perspective.” Assistant Professor of Classics Jack Winkler—himself a member of the Task Force—also submitted a proposal. Winkler, who, along with thirteen campus groups, organized Yale’s first Gay Rights Week on April 4-8, 1977 in support of gay liberation at Yale and the then-upcoming Connecticut Sexual Orientation Bill, a version of which eventually passed in 1991, was the only male and only faculty member to join a class-action lawsuit brought by three female undergraduates against the University for its tolerance of sexual harassment of students by faculty. He also—as early as 1978, the same year as the English translation of Michel Foucault’s *History of Sexuality Vol. 1* and thus less than a decade after the 1969 Stonewall riots in Manhattan—applied radical feminist reading practices to Greek and Latin cultural texts, for example seventh-century B.C Greek lyric poet Sappho. In a 1981 essay, Winkler advanced the openly lesbian-feminist thesis that a woman’s ability to produce poetry was enhanced by the fact that she wrote within the confines of a language constructed by men: “Because men define and exhibit their language and manners as *the* culture and segregate women’s language and manners as a subculture, inaccessible to and protected from extra-familial men, women are in the position of knowing two cultures where men only know one.” And for Winkler, Sappho’s familiarity with men’s and women’s languages and cultures granted her the power to reconceptualize sexual categories: “For [Sappho] the sexual is always something else.... Her sacred landscape of the body is at the same time a statement about a more complete consciousness, whether of myth, poetry, ritual or personal relationships.” By prohibiting the partitioning of the sexual from the emotional, Winkler’s Sappho used her poetry to birth a world in which women were not mere sex objects, but self-determining people who had definite senses of themselves and their friends.⁶³²

⁶³² “A Report to the Yale Corporation from the Yale Undergraduate Women’s Caucus, March, 1977,” Box 16,

Winkler's advancement of feminist and deconstructive positions in his 1980s scholarship developed in part out of his teaching, including the aforementioned 1978 summer course, "Sexual Politics in Literature." In the class's 1976 iteration, Winkler assigned texts such as *The World Split Open: Four Centuries of Women Poets in England and America* (1974)—the title taken from American poet Muriel Rukeyser's poem "Käthe Kollwitz" (1968), which asks the question "What would happen if one woman told the truth about her life?" and answers "The world would split open"—and *The Well of Loneliness* (1928)—Radclyffe Hall's semi-autobiographical lesbian literary work banned in Britain until 1959. Echoing the women's liberation movement's tactic of bringing awareness to how the mundane stuff of everyday life could repress women, Winkler's undergraduate course overturned the dominance of male voices in prose and poetry and exposed women as central to the enterprise of "Literature." Winkler's class moved the radical feminist struggle to the terrain of ancient Greek poetry—in contrast to a course like Freidan's 1974 class, which presented students with a realist understanding of politics, sex, and power. And in this regard, Winkler's Yale class joined the burgeoning number of courses across America that explored the sexual politics of literature, each class bolstering and bolstered by scholars' efforts to usher in a period—begun with Kate Millet's exploration of sexual relations in literature in *Sexual Politics* (1970) and Patricia Meyer Spacks' examination of the "female literary style" in *The Female Imagination* (1974)—of feminist literary criticism.⁶³³

Folder 7: Women's and Gender Studies Files (WGSF), Manuscripts and Archives, Yale University, 13; Jack Winkler, "Gardens of Nymphs: Public and Private in Sappho's Lyrics," *Women's Studies: An Inter-disciplinary Journal* 8 (1981): 71, 83; Other courses included: Mary Poovey's "Three Major Women Novelists: Austen, Eliot, Woolf," Faye Crosby's "The Psychology of Women," and Nancy Cott's "Women in the United States in the Twentieth Century." The 1978 Summer term had a total enrollment of 119 men and women; "Yale College summer term 28 may to 15 august: Plan Ahead," *Yale Daily News*, November 16, 1977, 19; *Yale Course Critique 1977* (Yale University: Yale Daily News), 130; Jason Friedman, "Gay alumni form organizations, plan GLAD panel," *Yale Daily News*, Wednesday, April, 1984, 3.

⁶³³ "A Report to the Yale Corporation from the Yale Undergraduate Women's Caucus, March, 1977," Box 16, Folder 6: Women's and Gender Studies Files (WGSF), Manuscripts and Archives, Yale University, 14; *Yale Course Critique 1976*, 15; see Patricia Meyer Spacks, *The Female Imagination: A Literary and Psychological Investigation*

Undergraduates embraced the feminist methods of Winkler's course—and wanted the Yale larger community to as well. In the 1977 *Yale Course Critique (YCC)*, an annual guide for undergraduates to class selection, students wrote that Winkler's course “constantly reevaluated the definition” of “sexual politics” as well as promoted feminist themes, including “literature as a patriarchal institution; male authors' versus female authors' conception of women; and the question of male and female literary style.” Yet, notwithstanding students' excitement over Winkler's class, undergraduates believed that “[m]embers of the course... were those least in need of education on a subject that is sadly neglected at Yale College.” For Winkler's pupils, it was members of the Yale community who most needed to adopt feminist techniques of reading. Indeed, an observation in an internal document suggests that more women's studies courses were required to rewrite Old Blue traditions, because, though “[s]tudents... realize[d] [in 1977] that ‘nigger’ jokes are not acceptable,... ‘faggot and dykes’ jokes are frequent. The assumption seem[ed] to be that of course all students are heterosexual.” Varieties of heteronormativity (to use an anachronism) even extended to the undergraduate editors of the 1976 *YCC*, who, though likely familiar with the feminist challenge to androcentric norms of language, stressed that their use of the gender-specific pronouns “he, him, and his... refer[ed] to both men and women” and left it at that.

Students' feminist goals were unsurprisingly, but significantly, supported by the educational activities of the Undergraduate Women's Caucus, an organization begun in 1974 that

of Women's Writing (New York, N.Y.: Knopf, 1974), 6; Elaine Showalter, “Literary Criticisms,” *Signs* 1, no. 4 (1975): 435-460; By the early 1980s, the shift in emphasis to women's writing also took place in European feminist criticism. For examples where women's writing was the central project of feminist literary studies, see Ellen Moer, *Literary Women: The Great Writers* (New York: Doubleday, 1976); Elaine Showalter, *A Literature of Their Own: British Women Novelists from Bronte to Lessing* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1977); Nina Baym, *Women's Fiction A Guide to Novels by and about Women in America, 1820-70* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1978); Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar, *The Madwomen in the Attic: The Woman Writer and the Nineteenth-Century Literary Imagination* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1979); Janet Todd, *Feminist Literary History* (New York: Routledge, 1988).

aimed to instill Yale College with ways to address women's issues and problems on the Old Campus. The Women's Caucus brought their educational activities into focus in 1977—the year that saw the ERA receiving 35 of the necessary 38 states ratifications, Yale's first Gay Rights Week, and student support for the development of a Women's Studies program at Yale continuing to grow, with women's studies seminar professors having receiving up to 200 applications for 20-person seminars. In a 1977 report to the Yale Corporation on the Status of Women at Yale—one contributor was “Judy Butler,” who “felt ‘extremely alienated’ as an undergraduate” but “found support in Yalesbians’ ‘Lesbian Rap’” as well as acceptance at the aforementioned Gay Rights Week rally at Yale on April 6, 1977—the Women's Caucus explained that their instructional programs included: panel discussions (“Must Women Sell Out to Succeed?,” Fall 1976; “Sexism at Yale,” Fall 1976), publications, such as *Freshwomen's Booklet* (Fall 1975) and *Women's Words*, a feminist journal (Spring 1976), and consciousness-raising groups. The Women's Caucus also created a “Women's Space” on the third floor of Hendrie Hall, continued to participate in the development of the women's studies major, and worked for a grievance procedure for sexual harassment. Significant support for feminist education on the Old Campus, especially during the second half of the 1970s, thus originated from not only above—from professors, graduate students, and administrators—but also below—from undergraduates. And yet, despite their own educational activities, and notwithstanding the Task Force's progress toward developing women's studies courses, the Women's Caucus's believed that “Yale's fulfillment of her own potential demands a confrontation with the question posed by the presence of women—which was just begun.” “Male Yale”—as many students still called it—had yet to institutionalize, in the form of a Women's Studies Program, the training it needed to fully acclimate to Dedman's “Change.”⁶³⁴

⁶³⁴ “1977 Report to the Yale Corporation,” Box 17, Folder 6: Women's and Gender Studies Files (WGSF),

“Female” Deconstructionists at Yale

The feminist schooling for which students yearned nevertheless continued to receive faculty backing. A striking shift in support of feminist stances and styles for example occurred in the Literature Major. But while students flocked to Literature classes, as early as 1973, the year in which the first women starting from freshman year graduated, they also protested the androcentrism of the major’s core course, first known as “Literature X,” then, by the mid 1970s, as “Man and His Fictions.” Alvin Kernan, one of the architects of Lit X, recalled: “The indignant letters [about the course’s textbook, also titled *Man and His Fictions*] poured in: ‘Where do you hegemonic males get off trying to claim fiction for the phallocracy?’ ‘Why are there so few women writers in this dreadful book?’” As students pointed out, *Man* included only one text by a woman: American poet Sylvia Plath’s “Lady Lazarus,” an exploration of the construction and twisting of modern femininity, and of suicide and resurrection.⁶³⁵

With the absence of women writers and feminist perspectives in “Man and His Fictions,” undergraduates could hardly have begun to embrace a feminist comportment toward and method of interpretation of literary texts—that is, until Barbara Johnson mounted her deconstructive critiques (Figure 4.1). Accompanying the first female undergraduates, Johnson arrived in New Haven as a graduate student in French literature in 1969, a year before the appointment of Paul de Man, who became Johnson’s dissertation supervisor. Johnson’s scholarship, teaching, and her advisor’s strong support propelled her into the position of Assistant Professor of French at Yale in 1977—the year of the Undergraduate Women’s Caucus members’ intensification of their

Manuscripts and Archives, Yale University, 12; Marcy Ressler, “Women’s Caucus sharpens focus,” *Yale Daily News* 38 November 9, 1977, 5; Dorothy Beattie, “Gay alumni discuss lives with students,” *Yale Daily News*, April 13, 1984, 1.

⁶³⁵ “A Report to the Yale Corporation from the Yale Undergraduate Women’s Caucus, March, 1977, 4. Indeed, by the late 1970s, as Janet Todd noted in the early 1980s, Yale could still hardly have been portrayed as a “feminist establishment.”; *Man*, 520-522; Kernan, *In Plato’s Cave*, 191.

educational efforts, a surge in students' demand for women's studies courses, and just two semesters before the 1978 Summer test run for the Women's Studies Program.

One of Johnson's feminist answers to pupils' criticisms of the androcentrism of "Man and His Fictions" was her deconstruction of the course's curriculum. In the 1978 iteration of "Man," team-taught by Peter Brooks, Barbara Guetti, and Joseph Halpern, newly-appointed Johnson lectured in the course's "Life Stories" section on Jean-Jacques Rousseau's *Confessions*. But, though Johnson delivered a guest lecture in the class, the 1978 and 1979 versions of "Man" continued to include only readings from and assignments on male writers' texts: Aristotle, the Brothers Grimm, Conrad, Freud, and Henry James. One "Man" exercise, assigned on November 7th 1979, asked pupils to examine the "similarities and differences in the relationship of the narrating "I" to the narrated "I" in [Rousseau's] *The Confessions* and [Dickens'] *Great Expectations*," and then discuss the "problems...raised by the[se] acts of writing one's self and writing oneself." Pupils' identification of the parallels and inconsistencies between storyteller and the stories they tell, and recognition of the complications in the genre of autobiography, instilled them with a deconstructive stance and style of reading. Notably, however, the deconstructive compartment and interpretive technique that students were trained to embrace did not include consideration of female presence or feminist affirmation in literature.⁶³⁶

When Johnson team-taught "Man" alongside David Marshall and Yale School member J. Hillis Miller, however, she redirected the course's deconstructive method of reading back on itself, fashioning a feminist path for herself and students through this central artery of the Literature Major. Likely because of Johnson, the Fall 1980 version of "Man and His Fictions"

⁶³⁶ "Syllabus Fall 1979 Box 31 Folder 6 Literature 120a Narrative Forms 1979-1984," J. Hillis Papers, The Critical Theory Archive, The University of California-Irvine, 1; "Literature 120," Paper Topics, Syllabus Fall 1979 Box 31 Folder 6 Literature 120a Narrative Forms 1979-1984, J. Hillis Miller Papers, The Critical Theory Archive, The University of California-Irvine, 1.

was retitled to the gender-neutral “Narrative Forms,” and the course included a lecture on Mary Shelley’s *Frankenstein* (which Johnson again delivered) in the section “Life Stories,” and held a seminar discussion devoted to the comparison of *Frankenstein* and *The Confessions*. In a November 5, 1980 exercise, instructors asked students to write a 4-5 page essay that investigates—first—how “the narrative[s]” of “*Frankenstein*, Rousseau’s *Confessions*, and [Dickens’s] *Great Expectations*... [are] implicitly or explicitly addressed to a listener/reader,” and—second—how this “affect[ed] the narration.” In the Fall 1980 Narrative Forms—unlike the previous two years’ iterations—pupils cared for Mary Shelley as an equal to Dickens and Rousseau. A feminist perspective, thanks to Johnson, thus partly fashioned a share of Narrative Forms’ students’ deconstructive stance and style.⁶³⁷

Johnson’s deconstruction of “Man and His Fictions” accompanied scholars’ efforts—at Yale and in the larger Anglo-American literary-critical community—to not only reinstate and critically analyze Shelley’s achievements, a task begun in earnest in the mid 1970s with revolutionary feminist readings of *Frankenstein*, but also to rewrite the canon of European Romantic literature, usually depicted as an artistic, literary, and intellectual movement undertaken by men. In her Yale 1978 dissertation, directed by Male School member J. Hillis Miller, Margaret Homans explored the ways Dorothy Wordsworth, Emily Brontë, and Emily Dickinson, “textually conscious of their femininity, responded to a literary tradition that depended on and reinforced the masculine orientation of language of the poet.” Wordsworth’s

⁶³⁷ “Literature 120,” “Paper Topics,” November 5, 1980; “Literature 120,” “Paper Topics,” November 5, 1980”; The Fall 1979 syllabus for “Man and His Fictions” included Grimm’s Fairy Tales, Aristotle, Conrad, Henry James, Sigmund Freud, Jean-Jacques Rousseau, Charles Dickens, and Roland Barthes. Box 31, Folder 6 Literature 120a Narrative Forms 1979-1984; Fall 1980 syllabus of “Narrative Forms,” in Box 31, Folder 8 Literature 120a Narrative Forms 1979-1984, J. Hillis Miller Papers, The Critical Theory Archive, The University of California-Irvine. And in the fall of 1982 version of “Narrative Forms,” a 4-5 page paper assignment treated *Frankenstein* as a equal alongside David Copperfield’s *Great Expectation* and Rousseau’s *Confessions*. See “Narrative Forms 1982,” Box 31, Folder 9 Literature 120a Narrative Forms 1979-1984, J. Hills Miller Papers, The Critical Theory Archive, The University of California-Irvine.

awareness of her femininity, Homans argued, resulted in a division of poetic identity, while Brontë's response was to portray poetic power as a masculine figure who is only partially integrated into her own identity. But for Homans it was Dickinson, by using her eccentric position outside the masculine tradition, who "discover[ed] that all language is figurative, and therefore that the traditions of Romantic writing that hinder[ed] Wordsworth and Brontë need not be taken as necessary truths." The masculine habits of Romantic writing could be broken, rewritten.

Homans's feminist conclusions were strikingly opposed to the androcentric ones of Yale Professor of English Harold Bloom—member of the Male School, towering scholar of English Romanticism, and all around academic superstar in the 1970s. Bloom remarked in 1965 that it was strictly because *Frankenstein* "lacks the sophistication and imaginative complexity of such works" like William Blake's *Book of Urizen* and Lord Byron's *Manfred* that it "affords a unique introduction to the archetypal world of the Romantics." Bloom's belittling of Shelley overlapped with his elitist and misogynist disdain of Yale's acclimation to "Change." In a 1975 letter to Miller, Bloom grumbled about the future of Yale's English Department: "I don't believe the level[ing]-down process *can* be halted, at Yale or elsewhere. A majority of the voting members in the Yale Eng. Dept., 5-7 years hence, will be made up of a coalition between housekeeping women (younger + already on the scene) and safe professional men (older + to be brought in from outside starting now)." Scholars' view that Shelley was a supplement—or at most an introduction—to her husband, English Romantic poet *Percy Bysshe Shelley*, and other male Romantics was grafted onto an institutional and departmental tradition in New Haven that impeded women's advancement and discounted their achievements.⁶³⁸

⁶³⁸ Bloom to Miller, letter, August 27, 1974, Box 31, Folder 26, J. Hillis Miller Papers, The Critical Theory Archive, The University of California-Irvine, 4; Students were also treated to a lecture on Virginia Woolf's *To The*

Meanwhile, Yale Professor of English Mary Poovey—who, though she earned her Ph.D. from the University of Virginia in 1976, began teaching alongside Bloom in 1974—also aimed to (re)write Shelley’s place. Using her training at Virginia and Yale—Poovey received a “second graduate degree” by auditing classes taught by members of the Male School and taught “Three Major Women Novelists: Austen, Eliot, Woolf” during the 1978 Summer Term test run for the Women’s Studies Program—Poovey offered her own radical feminist reading of *Frankenstein* in a 1980 *PMLA* essay. Poovey’s Shelley was not, like Bloom’s, merely a primer for her more complex male counterparts. Rather, Poovey’s Shelley “feminize[d]...Percy’s version of the Romantic aesthetic,” deconstructing the Romantics’ dream of self-assertion and self-sovereignty from within the tradition out of which she emerged. For Poovey, in contrast to Percy’s faith in the “comprehensiveness and power” of the symbol, Shelley’s “symbol” accommodated “different, even contradictory meanings.” While Shelley portrayed Dr. Frankenstein’s monster as the fulfillment of Dr. Frankenstein’s imagination—and in this regard supported Romantics’ wish of self-creation—she also rendered the monster mute, incapable of pursuing his own creative endeavors. Poovey’s Shelley sympathized with Dr. Frankenstein’s Romantic undertaking, but also implicitly chastised his Romantic dream of self-assertion.⁶³⁹

Lighthouse on Wednesday, November 5 and seminar meetings on this text on Monday, November 10. Ellen Moers’s discussion of *Frankenstein* in *The New York Review of Books* in 1973 and her *Literary Women* (1976), which included her reading of the novel as an instance of “Female Gothic,” a “phantasmagoria of the nursery,” helped to change Mary Shelley’s status. See Ellen Moers, “Female Gothic,” in *Literary Women*, p. 93. This essay first appeared in *The New York Review of Books* on March 21, 1974; Marc A. Rubenstein’s “‘My Accursed Origin’: The Search for the Mother in *Frankenstein*,” *Studies in Romanticism* 15, no. 2 (1976): 165-94. 1978 saw Sandra Gilbert’s article “Horror’s Twin: Mary Shelley’s Monstrous Eve,” which identified the monster, though created male, as a “female in disguise,” a figure for the author’s sense of namelessness and deformity. Sandra M. Gilbert, “Horror’s Twin: Mary Shelley’s Monstrous Eve,” *Feminist Studies* 4, no. 2 (1978): 48-73; Harold Bloom, *Mary Shelley’s Frankenstein* (New York and New Haven: Chelsea House Publishers, 1987), 4, 215.

⁶³⁹ Poovey also taught *Frankenstein*, George Eliot’s *Middlemarch*, and Virginia Woolf’s *The Waves* alongside Thomas Hardy’s *Tess of the d’Urbervilles* and Dicken’s *Oliver Twist* in her 1976 class, “Studies In Fiction.” *Yale Course Critique* 1977, 86; see also Poovey, “My Hideous Progeny: Mary Shelley and the Feminization of Romanticism,” *PMLA* 95 (1980): 332, 338; and Mary Poovey, Interview by Caitlin Zaloom, *Public Culture* 23, accessed November 28, 2015, <http://publicculture.org/articles/view/24/1/mary-poovey-interviewed-by-caitlin-zaloom>

The publication of Poovey's *Frankenstein* essay (Spring 1980) roughly coincided with both Johnson's deconstructive incision into "Man and His Fictions" (Fall 1980) and the delivery of her paper, "Le dernier homme," (July-August 1980), at a colloquium held in Cerisy, France, organized around Jacques Derrida's 1968 essay "Les fins de l'homme." Johnson's Cerisy paper, in addition to marking her first publication in the field of women's studies and in feminist theory and criticism, also recorded her first deconstructive critique of the universal pretensions of Western humanism and Romanticism—all achieved by way of Mary Shelley. While Derrida's "The Ends of Man" uncovered the ethnocentrism at the heart of humanism, Johnson's "The Last Man" focused on how *Frankenstein* exposed the humanist project as a destructive male fantasy: "[T]o speak of Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* is immediately to approach the question of *man* indirectly through what has always been at once excluded and comprehended by its definition, namely, the *woman* and the *monster*." With his monster, Johnson's Dr. Frankenstein aimed to fulfill Enlightenment philosophes' humanist project—a human being at once Western, rational, and masculine. Because his ostensibly universal "Man" was gendered, however, Dr. Frankenstein—the humanist-creator par excellence—was unable to construct a female monster equal to his male. Dr. Frankenstein could conceive, but not realize, his plan for a female monster, of which a frightful vision of a new Eve led him to obliterate his rough draft.⁶⁴⁰

Johnson's Cerisy presentation helped establish her as an equal among her Male School colleagues (and Shelley among hers), joined the growing chorus of anti-humanist voices in U.S. humanities departments, and supported the acclimation of deconstructive reading in America to a feminist stance and style in the 1980s. Johnson's deconstructive essay also helped school readers in Shelley's gender politics. By 1989, the feminist interventions disseminating from the Elm

⁶⁴⁰ Johnson, "Le Dernier Homme," in *Les Fins de l'homme*, ed. Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe and Jean-Luc Nancy (Paris: *Galilée*, 1981), 259, 265.

City—Johnson’s and Poovey’s efforts were eventually joined by Homans’s, who earned tenure in Yale’s English department in 1986, the same year that she argued that *Frankenstein*’s central psychosocial predicament is a masculine fantasy, that of giving birth without the mother and the physical embodiment that the relation to her implies—helped others’ attempts to instill readers with Shelley’s gender politics in over half of Romanticism courses at three hundred North American universities.⁶⁴¹

These late 1970s and early 1980s assays to overturn the androcentric portrayals of Romanticism and “Man” overlapped with the Old Campus’ institutionalization of feminists’ tactic of “consciousness-raising,” of inculcating an awareness of women’s repression in the activities of daily life. In May 1979, Yale College faculty approved the establishment of a Women’s Studies Program—with the “Core Faculty Committee” including Johnson, Poovey, Homans, and the aforementioned Catharine MacKinnon. However, just prior to this institutionalization, “Feminism and Humanism,” the new program’s central course and feminist core, underwent disassembly and reformation—deconstruction, one might say. Two years before the program’s inaugural term in Fall 1980, MacKinnon introduced divergent feminist perspectives into the class, employing three “approaches to feminism—liberal, radical, and left”—to each of the class’ seven sections. While members of the Task Force, particularly Nancy Cott, were dismayed at MacKinnon’s changes, undergraduates considered the class as providing much-needed schooling in feminist stances and styles of interpretation, writing in the 1980 *YCC*

⁶⁴¹ See the volume *The Other Mary Shelley: Beyond Frankenstein*, eds. Audrey A. Fisch, Anne K. Mellor, and Esther H. Schor (New York: New York University Press, 1993); Margaret Homan, ed. Henry Louis Gates, Jr., *Bearing the Word: Language and Female Experience in Nineteenth-Century Women’s Writings* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1986), 100; Harriet Kramer Linkin, “The Current Canon in British Romantic Studies,” *College English* 53 (1991): 548-570. In 1985, for example, Spivak argued that *Frankenstein* was a text that challenges “the axiomatics of imperialism,” “a text of nascent feminism that remains cryptic... simply because it does not speak the same language of feminist individualism which we have come to hail as the language of high feminism within English literature.” See Spivak, “Three Women’s Texts and a Critique of Imperialism,” *Race, Writing, and Difference* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1986), 273.

that it was “well worth taking for stretching your mind, a “fascinating” and thought-provoking” endeavor about a “subject that many have not hitherto explored.” MacKinnon’s class—which, like her earlier courses of the 1970s, reflected the changing “map of reality”—participated in and facilitated the shift in feminist scholarship and curricula across America to the deconstruction of the categories and foundations of feminism, to the question and questioning of “gender” and “feminism” themselves.⁶⁴²

Though many supporters pointed to the institutionalization of the Women’s Studies Program as a sign of the new discipline’s vitality, a triumph for feminisms of any stripe, Yale’s mainstreaming of Dedman’s “Change” struck a dissonant chord when juxtaposed with social conservatives’, antifeminists’, and neo-conservatives’ efforts to neutralize feminists’ public policy agenda. The New Right’s and Family Values proponents’ efforts were emboldened by newly elected President Reagan, whose stress on tradition opposed many feminists’ concentration on social change, emphasis on individual initiative clashed with various feminists’ belief that women’s opportunities remained limited due to the absence of concerted antidiscrimination measures, and stress on deregulation opposed a number of feminists’ claim of a positive role for government. However, the conflict between Reagan’s politics and U.S. feminisms—not to mention economic cutbacks and their concomitant manifestations on the Old Campus—did not halt Yale’s further institutionalization of “Change.” In the fall of 1981, Women’s Studies put forth a proposal for an undergraduate major. Though recollections differ as to the initial inevitability of this proposal’s adoption, the distribution of a memo to the mailboxes of the all faculty members satirizing Women’s Studies’ application three days before the November 5 meeting of the Faculty—the memo was ostensibly from “the **C**ommittee for the **R**uination of **A**cademic **P**rograms,” which proposed a major in “Grossness” be deliberated—

⁶⁴² Lodal, 36.

provided the final push. Appalled at CRAP's Grossness, Yale faculty from across the disciplines united in support of the Women's Studies proposal, which passed by wide margins. With that, twelve years after admitting its first female undergraduates, Yale approved a B.A. degree in Women's Studies, the second in the Ivy League. Nevertheless, this mainstreaming of Women's Studies at Yale, which, according to *Newsweek*, helped bring the discipline "out of the academic ghetto," stood in stark contrast to the successful agenda advanced by New Right and Family Values' proponents—Yale's new major first ran in the spring term of 1982, just as the ERA's ratification deadline passed, and "feminism's broadest common plank gave way."⁶⁴³

Notwithstanding the Women's Task Force's success, and the general mood on the Old Campus towards the discipline and feminism—students in the 1982 *YCC* wrote that "[t]he professors in the Women'[s] Studies department present a good impression and good point of view to their students. None possessed the attitude of 'downtrodden masses' or the undertone of belligerence that are sometimes associated with Women's Studies"—institutional inertia continued to inhibit feminist training in New Haven. A year earlier, in the spring of 1981, Yale's Women's Studies Program had made its first hire: Hélène Wenzel. But Wenzel, who previously

⁶⁴³ Kellie Bean, *Post-Backlash Feminism: Women and the Media Since Reagan-Bush* (Jefferson, N.C.: McFarland & Co., 2007), 18; See for example Margaret Covvini, "MacKinnon decries harassment," *Yale Daily News* April 2, 1979, 4; Lodal, 17. Women's Studies Task Force, "Feminism and Humanism: An Introduction to Women's Studies," Original Proposal for Syllabus, 1976-1977, Box 16, Folder 6: Women's and Gender Studies Files (WGSF), Manuscripts and Archives, Yale University; MacKinnon, "Feminism and Humanism: An Introduction to Women's Studies, syllabus, Fall 1978, WGSF. Judith Berman Brandenburg, quoted in "Yale to Offer B.A. in Women's Studies: Becomes 2nd Ivy League School to Offer a Major—Will Begin in 1982," *The New York Times*, 22 November 1981; *Yale Course Critique*, 240; Catherine R. Stimpson, "Women's Studies: An Overview," *University of Michigan Papers in Women's Studies*, May 1978, 14-26; Dennis Williams with Marsha Zabarsky and Dianne H. McDonald, "Out of the Academic Ghetto," *Newsweek*, October 31, 1983; In 1982, students wrote: "The professors in the Women's Studies department...[n]one possessed the attitude of the 'downtrodden masses' or the undertone of belligerence that are sometimes associated with Women's Studies." *Yale Course Critique 1982* (Yale University Press: Yale Daily News), 82; Rodgers, 153; On the growth of organized antifeminism, see Pamela Johnston Conover and Virginia Gray, *Feminism and the New Right: Conflict over the American Family* (New York, N.Y.: Praeger, 1983); Rebecca Klatch, *Women of the New Right* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1987); and Andrea Dworkin, *Right-Wing Women* (New York: Perigee Books, 1983); Sylvia Bashevkin, "Facing a Renewed Right: American Feminism and the Reagan/Bush Challenge," *Canadian Journal of Political Science* 27, no. 4 (1994): 680, 698.

worked in San Francisco State University's Women's Studies Program, remained the major's only tenure-track appointment for several years. Despite President Brewster's and then President A. Bartlett Giamatti's ostensible support of women faculty and more generally affirmative action, the lack of permanent women faculty was an acute problem at Yale throughout the 1970s, only made worse after 1978, when a loss of energy in increasing the number of women faculty coincided with a phase of readjustment in the financial planning following the 1975 recession. From 1975-1979, though the number of tenure-track positions in Arts and Sciences increased to 322, women held only 5—or 1.6 percent—of them.

One of these five was Shoshana Felman, who, after earning her Ph.D. at the University of Grenoble, was hired by Yale's French department in 1970—the same year as de Man's arrival, and a year after Johnson' began her graduate training. In 1973, the year of Miller's appointment to the English department, and while the near total absence of senior female faculty members was producing anxiety for women students and younger faculty alike, Felman achieved tenure on the strengths of her teaching, scholarship, and the backing of de Man, who championed her against “objections to his departmental colleagues.” She was the first woman to receive tenure in Yale's French department.⁶⁴⁴

Felman was similar to her Yale colleagues—Johnson also in French, Poovey in English, and Winkler in Classics—in that she crafted a feminist stance and style of deconstructive reading. By the mid 1970s, Felman had garnered an international reputation as a key interpreter

⁶⁴⁴ *Yale Course Critique* 1982, 82; Hélène Wenzel, “The Tide Cannot Be Reversed,” *The Journal of Educational Thought (JET)/ Revue de la Pensée Éducative* 17 (1983): 92. SFSU began in 1976; Wenzel's appointment was split, between Women's Studies and French; “A Report to the Yale Corporation from the Yale Undergraduate Women's Caucus, March, 1977,” 8-9; “A Report to the President from the Committee on the Status of Professional Women at Yale,” Thomas M. Greene, Chairman, May 1971. Quoted in Lodal, 11. According to Hillis Miller, Felman's (as well as Johnson's) appointment was “primarily the work of Paul de Man,” who “made these appointments in the teeth of objections from his departmental colleagues.” See Miller, “Tales Out of (the Yale) School,” 5; Shoshana Felman, *La Folie dans l'oeuvre Romanesque de Stendhal* (Paris: José Corti, 1970); De Man, “Letter of Recommendation,” October 11, 1982, The Paul de Man Papers, The Critical Theory Archive, The University of California-Irvine, 2.

of French psychoanalyst and psychiatrist Jacques Lacan—whom she and de Man helped bring to Yale—with her 1975 review essay, “Women and Madness: The Critical Phallacy,” published in *Diacritics*, a cutting-edge forum for rethinking the aims and methods of the humanities. In this feminist essay, Felman advanced a deconstructive thesis about the women’s place in contemporary American and European critical discourse and Western culture’s gendered imposition of madness. Felman accomplished these goals by way of evaluating American second wave feminist and psychotherapist Phyllis Chesler’s 1972 *Women and Madness*—which argued



Figure 5.2 Felman with de Man, her colleague in Yale’s French Department, and French psychoanalyst Jacques Lacan in November 1975. Lacan, invited by Felman and de Man, gave a talk in Geoffrey Hartman’s Comparative Literature seminar. According to Hartman, Lacan, highly anticipated, was not well received.

that women are pathologized because society is sexist (Chesler, as it happens, also taught one of the first Women’s Studies classes)—and French feminist philosopher and psychoanalyst Luce Irigaray’s *Speculum de L’Autre Femme* (1973)—a Derridean-inspired critique of women’s exclusion in philosophy and psychoanalytic theory (specifically Lacan). For

Felman, Chesler’s and Irigaray’s texts revealed that, “[i]f, in our culture, the woman is by definition associated with madness [and thus marginalized], her

problem is how to break out of this (cultural) imposition of madness *without* taking up the critical and therapeutic positions of [masculine] reason: how to avoid speaking both as *mad* and as *not mad*.” The woman’s challenge is not to adopt the governing position of rationality, but to transcend and weave between the opposition between madness (woman) and reason (man). Such a task, Felman concluded, is “to speak not only against, but outside of the specular phallogocentric structure, to establish a discourse the status of which would no longer be defined

by the phallacy of masculine meaning.” A precursor of queer theorists’ emphasis on sexuality’s indeterminate boundaries and contradictions, Felman’s “woman” not only rejected the kinds of essentialism common in Anglo-American feminism at the time. Putting a deconstructive twist on Lacan, five years before the first widely available English translation of his feminist revisers, Felman’s deconstructive “woman”—at once inside and outside tradition, radical and conservative—also helped move deconstructive criticism to complications of sexual difference, and did so while her male colleagues de Man and Miller were still conducting painstakingly self-conscious deconstructive readings of prose and poetry.⁶⁴⁵

In the early to mid 1970s at Yale, a number of female graduate students, in addition to Johnson in French and Homans in English, and drawn there by the strength of its growing reputation in literary theory, adopted and adapted deconstructive reading techniques for feminist aims. Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, initially instilled with a mixture of deconstruction and New Critical reading at Cornell University during the late 1960s, entered Yale’s Ph.D. program in English literature in 1971. In New Haven, Sedgwick was trained by de Man and Miller, the latter serving as her doctoral advisor. Though unhappy in New Haven and disconnected from the slow feminist inroads at Male Yale—Sedgwick recounted that “there was no feminism” during her time there—her 1975 dissertation “The Coherence of Gothic Conventions” provided some of the schooling and focus for her later foundational scholarship in gender studies and queer theory. Another share came after Sedgwick landed her first appointment at the previously all-male Hamilton College in 1978, where, hired to satisfy the college’s new responsibility of educating

⁶⁴⁵ Eugenio Donato first introduced Lacan’s texts at The Johns Hopkins University in the 1960s. And according to de Man, Felman’s work, by the early 1980s, was being “very well received by psychologists as well as by literary scholars and she achieved international recognition.” De Man, “Letter of Recommendation,” October 11, 1982, 1. For a review of Felman’s *Madness and the Literary Thing* and the *Scandal of the Speaking Body*, see Robert C. Carroll of *La Folie et la chose littéraire* and *Le Scandale du corps parlant*, *MLN* 96, no. 4 (1981): 897–905; Felman, “Women and Madness: The Critical Fallacy,” *Diacritics* 5, no. 4 (1975): 10.

women, she joined other women faculty in their shared struggle improve the situation of women at Hamilton.⁶⁴⁶

Sedgwick's feminist education at Hamilton, coupled with her literary training at Yale, reshaped her scholarship. In the 1980 revision of her dissertation, Sedgwick deconstructed the trope of the veil—often worn by women in Gothic novels—arguing that it had the “function of spreading, of extending by contiguity, a particular chain of attributes among the novel's characters.” Rather than concealing and giving depth to the body over which it is draped, Sedgwick's veil was the exposed surface where the body is scripted, the node through which exterior and interior may be substituted for each other. “When the flesh assumes the veil's ‘dazzling whiteness,’” she explained, “the veil in turn can, like flesh, become suffused with blood.” Sedgwick amplified her argument in an important 1981 *PLMA* article, arguing that Gothic facades, such as the blood-soaked sheets in the bandit's house in Mathew Gregory Lewis' *The Monk*, functioned as a deconstructive symbol between a “distinct and comparable past (what happened to the last guest) and present/future (what will happen to this one).” Sedgwick's Gothic façade or veil—the bandit's bloody sheets for instance—constituted and exercised character, and, as such, was a statement that “individual identity, including sexual identity, is social and relational rather than original or private.” Instead of suppressing either a self or aspects of a self and thus in distinction to contemporary American psychoanalytic literary criticism, and rather than a kind of essentialism like that advanced by American feminists, Sedgwick's Gothic veil was public as well as derivative.⁶⁴⁷

⁶⁴⁶ “Sedgwick Sense and Sensibility: An Interview with Eve Sedgwick,” accessed May 10, 2015, <http://www.smpcollege.com/litlinks/critical/sedgwick/htm> ; Rodgers, 159; <http://evekosofskysedgwick.net/biography/biography.html> Eve Sedgwick, “The Coherence of Gothic Conventions,” Ph.D. diss., Yale University, 1975.

⁶⁴⁷ Sedgwick, 149; *Ibid.*, 146; “The Character in the Veil: Imagery of the Surface in the Gothic Novel,” *PMLA* 96, no. 2 (1981): 259; *Ibid.*, 256; Diana Lynn Postlethwaite, “The Novelist As A Women of Science: George Eliot and

Feminist Deconstructions throughout the North American Academy

Sedgwick's 1981 *PLMA* article was propelled by the momentum throughout the North American academy—a fair amount of which emerged from or at the very least was affiliated with Yale's Women's Studies—to inscribe female deconstructive protest and affirmation from within prestigious publications into the hearts of fields of study, such as the aforementioned Shelley Studies, Romanticism Studies, and Lacanian Studies. Nevertheless, this inscription of female deconstructive dissent sometimes occurred simply because of a lack of opposition to feminism. For example, the *PLMA*—the flagship journal of the Modern Language Association of America—published Sedgwick's 1981 paper, she believed, because of "its newly implemented policy of sending out articles for review without identifying the name or the institution of the author, hindering the functioning of the 'old-boys' club that had dominated its pages." But while the *PLMA*, by default, opened its gates to women, *Yale French Studies*, the oldest English-language journal in the U.S. devoted to French and Francophone literature and culture, published "a collaborative project"—edited by "a seven-headed monster [seven faculty women, that is] from Dartmouth" (the school went co-ed in 1972) whose "gender is feminine," "training...academic," and "orientation...feminist"—on the scholarship being done by American feminists trained in the field of French studies; Felman, Homans, and their colleague Margaret Ferguson (a Yale 1974 Ph.D. in Comparative Literature who taught at Yale and was a member of the Women's Studies Task Force) helped organize the 1981 issue. *Critical Inquiry* published a feminist 1981 issue as well; the "Editor's Introduction" in fact began with a quote from Johnson's *The Critical Difference* (1981): "If human beings were not divided into two biological sexes, there would probably be no need for literature. And if literature could truly say what the

Contemporary Psychology" (Ph.D. diss., Yale University, 1975); Ellen Burt, "Le Portrait D'un Autre Homme: Les Hypotheses de "Rousseau Juge de Jean Jacques" (Ph.D. diss., Yale University, 1978).

relations between the sexes are, we would doubtless not need much of it then, either... It is not the life of sexuality that literature cannot capture; it is literature that inhabits the very heart of what makes sexuality problematic for us speaking animals. Literature is not only a thwarted investigator but also an incorrigible perpetrator of the problem of sexuality.” The *CI* issue’s essays took up Johnson’s challenge, focusing on ways that the complications of sexual difference, hitherto limited to the margins of literary-critical debate, were inescapably engrained in our culture. And not just *YFS* or *CI*, but *Diacritics* as well. Their 1982 feminist issue again included Johnson’s presence, this time her essay “My Monster/My Self,” a review of popular American author Nancy Friday’s *My Mother/My Self* (1977) and American feminist academic Dorothy Dinnerstein’s *The Mermaid and the Minotaur* (1976) by way of *Frankenstein*. Though informal and admittedly divided, the feminist front issuing forth from prestigious academic journals intervened into and reconfigured the gendered logic of a wide variety of texts inside the North American universities during the early 1980s.⁶⁴⁸

Not just scholars at Yale itself, but academics within the university’s intellectual orbit were also members of the “Female” School of Deconstruction. For example, an important contributor to *Yale French Studies*’ and *Critical Inquiry*’s 1981 feminist issues was Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, professor of English and Comparative Literature at the University of Texas-Austin. Years before her colleagues, Spivak was adapting deconstructive reading practices to decode and reorder the textual connections between gender and colonial violence. Her *Yale*

⁶⁴⁸ See Shoshana Felman, “Rereading Femininity,” *Yale French Studies* 62 (1981): 19-44; Spivak, “French Feminism in an International Frame,” *Yale French Studies* 62 (1981): 154-184; Margaret Homans, “Eliot, Wordsworth, and the Scenes of the Sisters’ Instruction,” *Critical Inquiry* 8, no. 2 (1981): 223-242. Sedgwick believed that “the historical links between the emergence of queer theory and the emergency of AIDS are very close.” See Sedgwick, *Between Men: English Literature and Male Homosocial Desire* (New York, N.Y.: Columbia University Press, 1993), 12; Mark Kerr and Kristin O’Rourke; Elaine Marks and Isabelle de Courtivron, eds., *New French Feminisms: An Anthology* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1980); Johnson, “My Monster/My Self,” *Diacritics* 12, no. 2 (1992): 7, 9, 10; Johnson, *The Critical Difference: Essays in the Contemporary Rhetoric of Reading* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1980), 13.

French Studies contribution, a translation of and introduction to a short story by Indian writer Mahasveta Devia, examined the story's villain Senanayak, an educated male army officer who captured and degraded the main character, the tribal woman Draupadi. Spivak argued that *Senanayak's* inability to understand Draupadi's tribal song marked not simply the limit but the "place of that other that can be neither excluded nor recuperated." Spivak's Draupadi constructed and deconstructed Senanayak, and vice-versa. The next year, in 1983, Spivak extended her feminist-deconstructive approach in her groundbreaking "Can the Subaltern Speak?," arguing that postcolonial critics (like Senanayak, whom Spivak viewed as a metaphor of the First World scholar in search of the Third World) executed "epistemic violence" on the "remotely orchestrated, far-flung, and heterogeneous project [in order] to constitute the colonial subject as Other." Rather than the Romanticized and static "Other" of many leftist postcolonial critics, Spivak suggested, a person's or groups' identity is relational, a function of deconstruction, of its shifting place in a system of historical and discursive differences.⁶⁴⁹

Though Spivak rose to national prominence in the 1980s, however, she received training for her later feminist-deconstructions during the 1960s. After graduating in 1959 from the University of Calcutta, Spivak earned her Ph.D. in Comparative Literature at Cornell University in 1967 under de Man. At first glance a conventional description of Yeats' life, poetry, and his reinvention of Celtic mythology, Spivak's 1974 book—a revision of her dissertation—positioned Yeats' poetic achievement in terms of the history of British colonialism in Ireland, and therefore implicitly embraced a critical stance toward the imposition of foreign values upon indigenous cultures. But Spivak's attunement to the deconstructive effects of colonization is slightly more decipherable in her 1976 translation of, and eighty-page introduction to, Jacques Derrida's *De la grammatologie*. In her "Translator's Preface," Spivak alluded to conducting her translation from

⁶⁴⁹ Spivak, "'Draupadi' by Mahasveta Devi," *Critical Inquiry* 8, no. 2 (1981): 382-383.

1970-1975 in “Iowa City, (New Delhi—Dacca [sic]—Calcutta), Boston, Nice, Providence, Iowa City.” In January 1973, Spivak had traveled to Dhaka, the capital city of Bangladesh, where she and her mother saw and photographed some of the two to four hundred thousand Bangladeshi women raped by members of the Pakistani military during the 1971 Bangladesh Liberation War. Spivak’s Dhaka experience was, she later recalled, a “secret starting point” of her *De la grammatologie* translation, undertaken in the “shared austere hotel room, in rickshaws,” and in the “notebooks, now lost, with soft cardboard covers.” Her Dhaka experience also formed a basis for her later deconstructions of Subaltern Studies—the Bangladesh Liberation War was partly a legacy of the British Raj and 1947 Partition of India, in that members of the colonized (Pakistani military) adopted the colonizers’ (British) tools and dehumanizing perspectives against fellow colonized (Bengalis).

Spivak’s training and background also shaped the ways her *Of Grammatology* conditioned the American reception of Derrida’s work. Spivak’s project was ambitious, and not only because merely a handful of Derrida’s writings had been translated into English by the mid 1970s. In a letter of support, de Man endorsed “Mrs. Spivak,” who “would be very well qualified” to deal with “Derrida’s style,” even if she must “strengthen her knowledge of linguistics and philosophy.” For de Man, Spivak, as a literary scholar, could appreciate Derrida’s panache, though she should improve her grasp of linguistics and philosophy. Whatever de Man’s views and whatever Spivak’s scholarly shortcomings, however, Spivak’s translation of Derrida’s statement in *Of Grammatology* “*il n’y a pas de hors-texte*” into “there is nothing outside of the text” helped generate the view among critics that Derrida’s textuality simply “played” language games. Many an academic career in America during the 1970s and 1980s was made arguing against the ostensible and obvious apolitical and ahistorical nature of Derrida’s project. For

Spivak, however, female deconstructive affirmation and protest, not simply literature, or even philosophy, was at stake in Derrida's work—overturning and reinscribing thousands of years of Western tradition, the philosopher in her preface was a “she.”⁶⁵⁰

During the first half of the 1980s, in Reagan's America, feminist theory—in considerable part due to the “Female” School of Deconstructions' physical, social, and textual interventions—electrified the atmosphere and shaped the interpretive methods employed in lecture halls, seminar rooms, journals, and monographs throughout the American academy. In New Haven, feminist education received further credence and credibility, with Yale's Women's Studies being awarded two NEH grants—the first enabled the Program to invite collaborations with colleagues across the disciplines; the second supported guest lecturers for a Lunchtime Series; both grants helped direct Women's Studies' transformation of the institution's broader mission. Following Nancy Cott, Homans was made acting chair in 1985, and oversaw the Program's hiring of its second tenure-track faculty, Micaela di Leonardo, whose joint appointment in Anthropology extended Women's Studies' reach, its feminist stances and styles of interpretation, which were up until then largely employed in humanities departments, into the social sciences. But, by the time of Leonardo's hire and then Yale's 1985 official commitment to double the number of tenured faculty women by 1990, the opportune moment for Johnson, Spivak, Felman, and Ferguson's potential scholarly interventions into Mary Shelley Studies and Romanticism Studies

⁶⁵⁰ Derrida's only book in English before *Of Grammatology* was David Allison's 1973 translation of *Speech and Phenomena*, which included the articles “Form and Meaning” and “*Différance*.” See Jacques Derrida, *Speech and Phenomena*; de Man, “Confidential Report on Candidate for Fellowship,” Box 12, Folder 3 John Simon Guggenheim Memorial Foundation, December 1975, The Paul de Man Papers, The Critical Theory Archive, The University of California-Irvine, 1; Spivak, “Reading De La Grammatologie,” xxx; Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, 158; See Jonathan Culler, “Text: Its Vicissitudes,” in *The Literary in Theory* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2007), 110-113. The JHU Press placed *Of Grammatology* under the “Literature” section in bookshops, the text was separated from its central philosophical and historical underpinnings. *Of Grammatology* may have launched “a thousand careers in English studies,” but it could have—and did not—just as well launched a thousand careers in philosophy, or perhaps even history; Spivak, “Deconstruction, Feminism, and Marxism: Theory and Practice in the Humanities,” 1. The general situation between deconstructivists and Marxist aestheticians and social theorists was one of hostility and mistrust. See, for example, Terry Eagleton's review of *Aesthetics and Politics*, *NLR* 107 (1978); and John Brenkman, “Deconstruction and the Social Text,” *Social Text* I (1979): 186-188.

with their imagined *Bride of Deconstruction* may have seemed like it had passed. “Female” School members continued to practice and develop acts of deconstructive reading that cultivated a feminist atmosphere on and off the Old Campus, though other institutional and intellectual focal points for feminist—though not necessarily deconstructionist—thought emerged, including The Boston area Colloquium on Feminist Theory (BACFT), first organized by Evelyn Fox Keller at Northeastern University in the spring of 1982, and which from its first sessions drew overflow crowds, not only university scholars, including Johnson and Butler, but many unaffiliated scholars and artists as well.⁶⁵¹

By the mid 1980s, “Female” School members’ sense of a collective deconstructive program dispersed, partly to institutional and intellectual changes at Yale. After a 1982-1983 Fellowship at The Mary Ingraham Bunting Institute of Radcliffe College, an institute for non-tenured faculty and which required residence in the Boston area, Johnson left for Harvard. In Boston, Johnson, among other scholarly and pedagogical accomplishments, such as publishing “Metaphor, Metonymy and Voice in Zora Neale Hurston’s *Their Eyes Were Watching God*” and teaching “Black Women Writers,” her first course at Harvard in the fall of 1983, helped establish Harvard’s program in Women’s Studies.⁶⁵² Unlike Johnson, however, Felman, Homans, and Ferguson all remained at Yale—Homans’ tenure in 1986 overlapped with Miller’s leaving for the University of California-Irvine, a move that followed the death of de Man in 1983. When Derrida was also lured to UCI in 1986, the Male School effectively ended. In New Haven, Felman joined with Yale Cathy Caruth, whose 1988 book was “motivated by the teaching of the late Paul de Man.”

⁶⁵¹ “Boston Area Colloquium On Feminist Theory,” 1, accessed November 10, <http://jwa.org/sites/jwa.org/files/jwa041a.pdf>

⁶⁵² De Man, “The Mary Ingraham Bunting Institute of Radcliffe College, Non-Tenured Women Faculty Fellowship Program, 1981-1983,” MS-C4, Correspondence, 1980, August-October, Box 20, Folder 2, The Paul de Man Papers, The Critical Theory Archive, The University of California-Irvine, 1.

With these scholarly and pedagogical changes at Yale, and the relocation of several key deconstructionists, by the late 1980s, the “Female” School of Deconstruction was no longer working primarily within the walls of Yale University. Despite, or perhaps because of this, their deconstructive mission continued to change and expand, becoming instrumental in the further deconstructions of the categories of “women” and “sex,” deconstructions that led for instance to the establishment of Queer Studies. Eve Sedgwick, who became Professor of English at Boston University from 1980-1984, came to view the Gothic not as limited to a genre of late eighteenth-century writings, but as concretizing a view of modern gender and modern homophobia. In *Between Men: English Literature and Male Homosocial Desire* (1985), Sedgwick argued that the breakdown of systems of symbolic exchange between men about women in the Gothic novel “crystallized for English audiences the terms of a dialectic between male homosexuality and homophobia.” For Sedgwick, “male traffic in women” made homosocial bonds—male friendship, mentorship, entitlement, rivalry and hetero- and homosexuality—cohere. *Between Men*, though motivated by a negotiation between feminist and antihomophobic aims, helped Queer Studies coalesce and became one of the most influential texts in the vanguard research programs of Gender Studies, Men’s Studies, and Gay Studies (The Gay and Lesbian Studies Center at Yale emerged in 1986, establishing space for sexuality studies at the University and providing Women’s Studies a productive intellectual partnership).

Sedgwick’s agenda setting scholarship was joined by Yale philosophy Ph.D. Judith Butler’s. In New Haven, Butler had dipped into Derrida and audited de Man’s courses; she also “discovered” Foucault in a Women’s Studies Faculty seminar. And her not-so-widely read 1987 *Subjects of Desire*, a revision of her 1984 dissertation, examined the influence of German philosopher G. W. F. Hegel on twentieth-century French philosophers, notably Foucault and

Derrida—the former providing insight into subject-formation as a process within particular historical and discursive frameworks, the latter offering insight into how meaning is an “event” that occurs on a citational sequence with neither origin nor end. Though *Subjects of Desire* exhibited little explicit concern about the construction of the subject within sexed and gendered power structures, it, along with several articles, one in *Yale French Studies* in which Butler argued that French feminist philosopher Simone de Beauvoir “radical[ly] challenge[d]” the “cultural status quo” with her vision that “[t]o ‘choose’ a gender” is to understand the body as “a mode of enacting and reenacting received gender norms which surface as so many styles of flesh,” prepared Butler for her pioneering *Gender Trouble*. In this text, Butler deconstructed feminism’s insistence that “women” were a group with shared characteristics and interests and the notion that gender identity, rather than a performance or “event,” rests behind expressions of gender. Butler’s argument contributed to forming the dominant method of interpreting gender not only inside the academy but also for queer activists and as a way of living for many in last two decades of the twentieth-century.⁶⁵³

Female deconstructionists eventually even penetrated and subverted “high theory,” applying their feminist stances and style of reading to alter the atmosphere of high theory. The institutionalization of the influence of the “Female School” was for example indexed by the presence of feminist deconstructive theory during the 1980s and 1990s at the School of Criticism and Theory (SCT), a six-week long summer program in social science and literature for graduates students and scholars founded in 1976 by Murray Krieger and Hazard Adams at the University of California-Irvine, and which became the leading such program to disseminate

⁶⁵³ Sedgwick, *Between Men*, 1; Friedman, “Gay alumni form organizations, plan GLAD panel”; Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (New York and London: Routledge, 1990), 25; Butler, “Sex and Gender in Simone de Beauvoir’s *Second Sex*,” *Yale French Studies* 72 (1986), 35-49, 48.

“literary-critical-cultural ‘theory’” in the U.S.⁶⁵⁴ Female deconstructionists’ penetration into and subversion of “high theory” was cause for concern among some in the highest echelons. In a March 12, 1992 letter to Krieger, Geoffrey Hartman, Male School member (at least during the 1970s), noted that during the six years of stewardship of the SCT, from 1986 to 1992, “advanced criticism began to be accepted into the universities in the form of courses or teachers who had formally studied its history and theory,” and “[a]t the same time new contestations began their vigorous, invigorating! Questioning: Feminism, in particular.” For Hartman, feminism had increased “some suspicion, initially, some distance between the sexes.” If feminist theory rattled the Old (Male) Guard, however, this certainly did not show in the SCT’s offerings. Elaine Showalter—a founder of feminist literary criticism in the U.S.—offered in 1986 the course, “The 1880’s and 1890’s: Gender, Creativity and Theory at the Fin de Siècle,” at the SCT. Johnson taught a 1987 SCT summer course, “The Politics of Poetry,” which included discussions of works by *Phillis* Wheatley (the first published African-American female poet), Adrienne Rich, and Gwendolyn Brooks (the first black person to win a Pulitzer prize) alongside Stéphane Mallarmé, André Breton, and Robert Bly. In 1992 at the SCT, Richard Rorty explored whether “either pragmatism or post-structuralism” was “of any use to feminist politics” in his course “Pragmatism Deconstruction, and Feminism”; in addition to Wittgenstein and Derrida, Rorty’s students read MacKinnon’s *Feminism Unmodified* and Butler’s *Gender Trouble*. That same year, Sedgwick’s SCT offering was “Queer Performativity: Across Genres, Across ‘Previsions,’” a class that responded to Butler’s “invitation to ‘consider gender...as...an ‘act’” and built “on Paul de Man’s demonstration of a ‘radical estrangement between meaning and the performance of any

⁶⁵⁴ Vincent B. Leitch, *American Literary Criticism Since the 1930s* (London and New York: Routledge, 2009), 42-43.

text.”⁶⁵⁵ If the “academic superstar” was coded as male during the 1970s, the “Female” School upended this tradition, as they too became luminaries, as partly catalogued by their effects on “high theory” by the early 1990s.

Conclusion

Maya Lin’s *Women’s Table*, dedicated in 1993 on Rose Walk at the heart of the Yale campus, is a massive green granite circle with a timeline of female enrollment from each year inscribed in an inward spiral that increases along the way towards the center.⁶⁵⁶ By tracing the history of women’s emergence at Yale, Lin’s memorial challenges the university’s male-centric history and American memorial culture in general. The *Women’s Table* can also be understood as a belated response to Johnson’s question in her 1984 talk: “Would it have been possible for there to have been a female presence in the Yale School [of Deconstruction]?”⁶⁵⁷ While the *Women’s Table* gives an affirmative reply, gender undoubtedly played a role in the failure to recognize the centrality of female deconstructive protest and affirmation in the larger deconstructive project in North America. Pulling intellectual vitality and institutional support from feminist education and thought as well as the women’s and gay liberation movements at Yale and across America, the “Female” School’s deconstructions questioned and destabilized the categories of women, gender, sex, and sexuality. Beyond that, however, Female School members

⁶⁵⁵ Geoffrey Hartman to Murray Krieger, “Letter,” Box 70, Folder 7: Brochures and Publicity, 1986-1992, Dartmouth, Murray Krieger Papers, The Critical Theory Archive, The University of California-Irvine, 1; “History of the SCT at Dartmouth College,” Box 70, Folder 7, Murray Krieger Papers, Brochures and Publicity, 1986-1992, Dartmouth, The Critical Theory Archive, The University of California-Irvine, 1; “The Summer of ’87,” Box 70, Folder 7, Murray Krieger Papers, Brochures and Publicity, 1986-1992, Dartmouth, The Critical Theory Archive, The University of California-Irvine, 1; “The SCT Newsletter,” Box 70, Folder 7, Murray Krieger Papers, Brochures and Publicity, 1986-1992, Dartmouth, The Critical Theory Archive, The University of California-Irvine, 3; Ibid.

⁶⁵⁶ Erika Doss, *Memorial Mania: Public Feeling in America*, (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2010), 340.

⁶⁵⁷ Mimi G. Sommer, “Connecticut Q&A: Maya Lin’s Human Proportions on a Heroic Scale,” *New York Times*, April 17, 1994, accessed May 15, 2015, <http://www.nytimes.com/1994/04/17/nyregion/connecticut-q-a-maya-lin-human-proportions-on-a-heroic-scale.html>.

used an increasingly diverse array of feminist acts of deconstruction that engendered a form of thought in which the imperative to reconfigure the gendered logic of texts, curricula, and pedagogical and professional relationships was paramount—for political, ethical, and historical reasons.

What was radical in the mid to late 1970s had by the late 1980s become increasingly routinized inside the American academy. Feminist acts of deconstruction fashioned a fair share of the stance and style of interpretation that motivated and informed the research and teaching programs in American humanities departments during the last three decades of the twentieth-century. By decade's end, with the debate between "women" and "gender" having largely been decided in favor of the latter, many Women's Studies programs changed their names and often their mission statements to acknowledge the growing need for Women's Studies to embrace the study of sexuality, gender, and non-white middle class women's experiences. Yale, always deliberate with such changes, renamed Women's Studies to Women's and Gender Studies in 1998.⁶⁵⁸ And though centers for female deconstructive protest and affirmation had rapidly multiplied by the early 1980s, this transformation of techniques of reading—primarily developed in the 1970s at Yale—shaped the background for what was later called third-wave feminism. The tiny informal collective of the "Female" School, trained at Yale, a relatively small private institution, exploded outward and permeated the North American academy and eventually American culture at large.

⁶⁵⁸ Lodal, 56.

6

Deconstruction to Theory, Yale to IrvineIntroduction

That deconstruction, and theory more generally, found an intellectual and institutional home during the 1970s and 1980s at the University of California-Irvine must have come as a bit of a surprise to most American academics, especially those not tuned in to the cutting-edge methodological developments in United States humanities departments. Compared to private Yale and its storied, nearly three hundred year, history, public UCI was but a newborn, established in 1965 as part of the California Master Plan for Higher Education to build new University of California campuses. The new UC campuses were to address the increase in college-bound World War II veterans and in enrollment due to the post-war baby boom. At its opening, UCI did not yet have a fully functioning campus—the university was essentially founded in the middle of nowhere, on a section of Irvine Ranch, an area of agricultural land in Orange County. Not even the City of Irvine existed (it was incorporated in 1971).

Such modest beginnings, almost suggesting UCI was created *ex nihilo* as it were, meant that, besides lacking Yale's institutional history to draw strength and support from, the university had only new buildings, many with futurist designs—sweeping arches, expressionist forms, and components of California architecture such as red-tiled roofs and clay-tiled walkways. There were even white railings on walkways and bridges, suggesting, if one took an imaginative leap, that one strolled the deck of an ocean liner rather than a college campus.⁶⁵⁹ The University's landscape was quite the opposite of Yale's Collegiate Gothic style of architecture embodied by the foreboding Harkness Tower. But if Yale had the power of historical roots, then UCI had the

⁶⁵⁹ *Birth of a Campus/a KNBC Public Affairs presentation*, produced by Bob Wright, Dave Bell (California, Irvine: ITC, 2003), Langson Library Special Collections University Archives, DVD.

power of the future. And this future looked, quite literally, bright and clear: Irvine, situated in a Mediterranean climate zone, had breezy and sunny days, and had them all year round. Indeed, UCI may have seemed to possess the potential and atmosphere, especially with the State of California pouring capital into his higher education system, to become an academic's promised land.

UCI's fresh face, adventurous atmosphere, and of course generous funding (at least until the late-1970s) did in fact encourage faculty who sought to develop and establish innovative curriculum. This was certainly the case regarding the study of literature and literary theory. Murray Krieger and Hazard Adams for example were both behind the theoretical thrust of the Department of English and Comparative Literature at UCI. Krieger received his Ph.D. from Ohio State University in 1952 and was appointed to the first American-chaired professorship in literary criticism at the University of Iowa, which he held from 1963 to 1966 (and where Geoffrey Hartman was his colleague). In 1967, UCI Professor of English and Comparative Literature Hazard Adams recruited Krieger to join Irvine's faculty. Like Krieger, who at that point had been on a thirty-year long battle to have the literary theory accepted by departments of English and literature, Adams had earlier fought at the University of Michigan for the recognition of literary theory as a legitimate scholarly pursuit. Together at UCI, Krieger and Adams worked to make literary criticism and literary theory as the Department of English and Comparative Literature's emphasis. They had considerable and considerably quick success. By the early-1970s, UCI's English and Comparative Literature department had achieved visibility and respectability among literary scholars and humanists across the U.S., largely because its

members did something that other universities refused to do—they acknowledged literary theory.⁶⁶⁰

Through Krieger and Adams' work in the English and Comparative Literature department, and of course other faculty members' interests in the theoretical and methodological advancements in literary study, an intellectual and administrative culture developed at UCI that was openly welcoming and encouraging to literary scholars' and more broadly humanists' new speculative turns. The most important place in and avenue through which students and scholars were trained in literary theory was Krieger's and Adams' brainchild: The School of Criticism and Theory (SCT), founded in 1976, and which held a six-week long summer program for graduates students and scholars as well as colloquia and conferences year-round. In the span of a few years, the interactions among SCT teachers, all of whom were at the vanguard of critical movements in America and abroad, as well as the interactions between these teachers and SCT graduate and postdoctoral students, made the SCT into the central forum in the U.S. for not simply the discussion, production, and dissemination of literary theories. The range and type of work done at the SCT moved well beyond literature proper towards grander and more speculative methods of interpretation, each applicable, or so the SCT architects hoped, to scholarly efforts across the humanities. At their most ambitious, Krieger and Adams expected the SCT and the work done there to offer a unifying conception of the humanities and humanistic discourse, a conception grounded in literary theory that simultaneously sought to address and solve the broader crisis in the humanities, which began in the mid-1970s and, many felt, was brought on by the lack of cohesion and sense of purpose for humanistic study.

⁶⁶⁰ Judith Olson, "Literary Theory More Critical," Box 70, Folder 1 Brochures and Publicity (1976), The Murray Krieger Papers, The Critical Theory Archives, The University of California-Irvine, 1.

The SCT aimed to serve as a unifying force for the disparate fields grouped under the heading of the humanities because the work done at the SCT largely assumed that *criticism*, rather than aesthetic appreciation or enjoyment, formed the core of humanistic study. Nevertheless, the content of the SCT's unifying vision was and could not have been based on a stable foundation—the SCT assumed no central ideological commitment. Rather, the SCT's unified vision for the nature of literary study in particular and of the humanities in general was to emerge from the “theoretical” compartment and way of thinking in the North American academy, a collection of stances and styles of interpretation that assigned concealed causes and unconscious processes to “texts,” to the arguments of others. And Krieger and Adams hoped that this theoretical framework of criticism with literary theories offered by the SCT could challenge the Continental philosophic and intellectual movements, such as phenomenology, structuralism and reader-response theory, that, from Krieger and Adams' perspective, had come to dominate the humanities during the 1960 and early-1970s. Thus, in addition to aiming to provide a unified conception of the humanities, this unified conception formulated at the SCT was to be, not so much an outgrowth of, but an indigenous pushback against the invasion of European thought.

Krieger and Adams' SCT and the critical theories that SCT scholars and students practiced were very much a North American creation. While historians such as François Cusset have suggested that North Americans co-opted “French Theory” in the 1980s and 1990s, often for their pursuits of identity politics, the history of the SCT shows that, from its beginnings and above all because of its pedagogical aim to broaden the humanistic relevance of literature as it was presented in the classroom, “theory” was not only an invention by North Americans and for North Americans in the mid-1970s, but was a product of North American institutions of the 1970s as well.

The two sections of the following chapter—the first devoted to the establishment and first several years of the SCT; the second devoted to how the SCT helped attract members of the Yale School to UCI and then facilitated deconstructive endeavors during the last three decades of the twentieth-century—offer insights into the history of theory and deconstruction that recent studies, such as Kerwin Lee Klein’s or Marc Redfield’s or Andrew Cole’s, have overlooked.⁶⁶¹ Instead of focusing on the textual traces of theory and deconstruction, in the manner of a Klein or a Redfield or a Cole, the following examines how and why specific material and financial support, pedagogical techniques and programs, as well as discursive and interpersonal networks aided the institutionalization of theory and deconstruction at UCI and then across the United States. All this activity, ultimately, contributed to the construction of the Age of Deconstruction, a way of thinking and acting embodied in the critical theorist, above all the literary theorist, a scholarly personae whose duty was to counter the Western metaphysics of presence, an intellectual-cultural construct that controlled interpretation by advancing claims of naturalness, originality, primordialness, and authenticity. As a result of their institutional and intellectual standing, the respect they commanded from colleagues and reputation they garnered among the uninitiated, the persona of the literary-critical theorist came to represent the most innovative, insightful, and rigorous of scholars in North American humanities departments during the last three decades of the twentieth-century.

On the Margins: A Center for American Theory; The School of Criticism and Theory

With the proliferation of theoretical approaches to the study of literature and texts more broadly, the mid-1970s were heady times in U.S. humanities departments. But these years were also a period of financial cutbacks, for example at Yale University, causing hiring to freeze and a

⁶⁶¹ See this dissertation’s introduction for an overview of this scholarly work. See also *Theory’s Empire: An Anthology of Dissent*.

widespread anxiety about the relevance of the humanities, above all literature and language studies. This situation and its pressures stood in contrast—at least in the early and middle years of the 1970s—to that at UCI, where funds were available and flexibility still encouraged. Krieger and Adams for instance secured support to establish a national school of literary criticism, which they named The School of Criticism and Theory (SCT). Krieger and Adams secured funding for the SCT from UCI Chancellor Daniel E. Aldrich—UCI’s founding chancellor and who took an active and personal interest in developing the university—and the National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH), which awarded a \$244,991 grant, one of the largest awards given to an institution for a one-year period under the NEH and private foundations.⁶⁶² The first session—six-weeks long—of the SCT was held in the summer of 1976.

The overall goal of the activity at the SCT was to train junior faculty and students to become critical theorists, scholars sensitive to the stances and styles of interpretation that identified hidden motives and unconscious processes at work in “texts.” Krieger and Adams explained in their 1977 NEH renewal application, was to provide a conducive space in which “junior faculty and graduate students” not only “explore[d] systematically methods and perspectives...neglected in most doctoral programs,” but also became “self-conscious about their methods, aware of the nature of the whole range of theoretical thinking, and sensitive to the premises behind methods.”⁶⁶³ And, though relatively muted when compared to later, more ambitious goals of the late-1970s sessions of the SCT, Krieger and Adams considered the transformation of SCT scholars and students into critical theorists as a transformation to be

⁶⁶² Wood, August 26, 1975, “Public Information Office, University of California, Irvine, Literary Criticism Grant,” 1, Box 70, Folder 1 Brochures and Publicity (1976), The Murray Krieger Papers, The Critical Theory Archives, The University of California-Irvine, 1.

⁶⁶³ Krieger and Adams, “Renewal NEH Application,” Box 65 Folder 6 NEH Sit Visit Agenda and Documents (July 1976), 2.

undertaken by humanists in general. “The primary responsibility of humanists,” they wrote, “is seen as a broad and theoretical one.”⁶⁶⁴

From its inception, Krieger and Adams’ mission to convert SCT scholars and students into critical theorists was supported by the SCT’s governing board of senior fellows, which always included leading critical theorists in literature and the humanities. In 1976, its first year, board members came from nine major universities in the U.S. and Canada, including Geoffrey Hartman, Professor of English and Comparative Literature at Yale, Edward Said, Professor of English and Comparative Literature at Columbia University, and Hayden White, Director of the Center of the Humanities at Wesleyan University. This illustrious roster helped shape the orientation of SCT participants towards the most pressing and most recent theoretical and methodological developments in the study of literature and in North American humanities departments in general.⁶⁶⁵

Though it may have appeared so from the outside, Krieger and Adams did not come quickly to their funding, nor did they easily establish an atmosphere receptive to and supportive of their school. They invested a great deal of time and energy into planning the national rollout of the SCT and generating support at Irvine, where their school of critical theorists would initially thrive. Krieger and Adams for example gathered the board members for a closed meeting at Irvine on May 12, 1975. At the meeting, the board members reflected on and debated “the objectives of [the] School in light of the situation in modern theory,” offered possible pedagogical strategies to be implemented at the SCT, and suggested policies to attract pupils, whom, board members ambitiously hoped, would come from a “broad spectrum from theory specialists to literature students in need of theory to literature students interested in

⁶⁶⁴ Ibid.

⁶⁶⁵ “A School for Critics: Grant Sets up National Literary Program,” 1.

interdisciplinary studies to non-literary students in the other arts of humanistic areas.”⁶⁶⁶ The day after this private meeting, on May 13, 1975, there was a public colloquium titled “Reflections on the Apparent State of Criticism,” during which the core goals of the SCT were situated within the larger North American literary-critical community and presented to the Irvine community.⁶⁶⁷

To cultivate the theoretical disposition at Irvine, Krieger and Adams also identified a shared need among North American critics for a place where new, innovative interpretive theories could be discussed, debated, and disseminated—and they sold the SCT to this market. To do so, they placed advertisements for the SCT in high-profile academic journals, including *Critical Inquiry* and *New Literary History*, both of which were, though relatively new, with *CI* established in 1974 and *NLH* in 1969, important for authors and readers interested in soaking up the recent theoretical advancements in the American humanities and emerging from abroad. In addition to the these adverts, Krieger and Adams held an exhibition at the 1975 December Modern Language Association’s Annual Convention in San Francisco, placed a full-page ad for the SCT in the *Program* issue of the PMLA (the flagship journal for the Modern Language Association of America), and even discussed the SCT with the education editors of *Time* and *Newsweek* in July 1976.⁶⁶⁸ Though attuned to the growing desire for theory among North

⁶⁶⁶ Murray Krieger, January 22, 1975 letter to Abrams, Adams, Freedman, Girard, Hartman, Meyer, Said, White, Box 63, Folder 1 Krieger to Board (1975-1982), The Murray Krieger Papers, The Critical Theory Archive, The University of California-Irvine, 1; “The School of Criticism and Theory, Minutes of Spring Meeting 1975,” Box 62, Folder 31 Board Meeting (May 12-13, 1975), The Murray Krieger Papers, The Critical Theory Archive, The University of California-Irvine, 1.

⁶⁶⁷ “An Invitation,” Box 62, Folder 31 Board Meeting (May 12-13, 1975), The Murray Krieger Papers, The Critical Theory Archive, The University of California-Irvine, 1.

⁶⁶⁸ “Invitation to Exhibit: MLA Annual Convention, San Francisco, California 26-29 December 1965,” Box 70, Folder 1 Brochures and Publicity (1976), The Murray Krieger Papers, The Critical Theory Archives, The University of California-Irvine, 1.; Betty Terrell, Secretary School of Criticism and Theory, to Mr. Jeff Howitt, Promotion and Production Manager, Modern Language Association, July 21, 1976, Box 70, Folder 1 Brochures and Publicity (1976), The Murray Krieger Papers, The Critical Theory Archives, The University of California-Irvine, 1; E. Scott Wood to Dr. Krieger, “Update on School of Criticism and Theory,” 6/23/76 Box 70, Folder 1 Brochures and Publicity (1976), The Murray Krieger Papers, The Critical Theory Archives, The University of California-Irvine, 1; Letter, Hazard Adams to Barbara B. Smith, August 2, 1976, Box 70, Folder 2 Brochures and Publicity (1977), The Murray Krieger Papers, The Critical Theory Archives, The University of California-Irvine, 1.

American academics in general, Krieger and Adam's publicity efforts clearly targeted literature and language graduate students and professors. It was this consumer and hopefully user of theory—the budding literary-critical theorist—to whom Krieger and Adams sought to sell their product: the SCT.

Krieger also reached out to colleagues in oftentimes-personalized letters to build support for the SCT. By spreading the word about the school, he hoped to drum up excitement for his and Adams' creation. But, though there were a number of ways Krieger sought to accomplish this goal, he primarily did so by pitching the SCT as a timely solution to the need that the North American literary-critical community had for a national school where the issues of the day in literary theory and the criticism and theory of the other arts can be debated by faculty and students drawn from all over the country. Krieger also, again, specifically targeted his colleagues in literature and language departments. In his early 1976 letter to fellow literary scholars, Krieger explained that they all lacked a place like the then-defunct “Kenyon School of English”—a summer program in the 1940s and 1950s at Kenyon College in Ohio where students studied literature in the New Critical mode of reading.⁶⁶⁹ By self-consciously assuming the mantle of the Kenyon School—in an August 5, 1974 letter to Geoffrey Hartman, a friend and former colleague at the University of Iowa, Krieger suggested that “the Kenyon School of Letters of a couple of decades ago” was the “organizational model for” the SCT⁶⁷⁰—Krieger certainly stacked the rhetorical deck in his favor. Indeed, how could any of his letter-recipients, each aware of the growing desire for theory and their profession's lack of an institution like the Kenyon School, resist supporting Krieger and Adams' endeavor? Krieger for instance even proposed in his

⁶⁶⁹ Adams and Krieger, Letter to Colleagues, “The School of Criticism and Theory,” Box 70, Folder 1 Brochures and Publicity (1976), The Murray Krieger Papers, The Critical Theory Archives, The University of California-Irvine, 1.

⁶⁷⁰ Krieger, August 5 1974 letter to Hartman, Box 62, Folder 15 Geoffrey Hartman, The Murray Krieger Papers, The Critical Theory Archives, The University of California-Irvine, 1.

early 1976 letter that the SCT would facilitate a pedagogical program and that this program served a greater national purpose. The interaction among the SCT teachers as well as between teachers and students, Krieger suggested, would produce an “American theoretical capability that can challenge the Continental movements that have dominated theory and criticism in the Humanities during the last decade.”⁶⁷¹

Colleagues’—both established and up-and-coming—responses to Krieger’s proposal for a national school where scholars could be concerted into critical theorists were enthusiastic and positive. Rex Pemberton, a young assistant professor at the University of Arizona, thought that the SCT “sound[ed] fantastic.”⁶⁷² Pemberton reported that his “main access to the dialogue of critical theories [came] only through academic journals and discussions with a few colleagues in the university.” But, he continued, “direct contact with such leading thinkers as the teachers who will operate the school... produces the desire to share exciting ideas with other teachers and students.”⁶⁷³ As Pemberton correctly imagined, his and others’ participation at the SCT helped, not simply the School’s reputation, but also cultivate various stances and styles of interpretation in the North American academy that collectively became known as theory. This latter result was produced by, as Pemberton noted, the sharing of exciting ideas with teachers and students alike.

Accompanying the SCT architects’ efforts at Irvine, their advertising in academic journals, their interviews with national new magazines, and their letters to colleagues, was Krieger and Adams’ carefully designed first brochure for their school (Figure 5.1). In this pamphlet, Krieger and Adams explicitly portrayed the SCT as a place where students and

⁶⁷¹ June 28, 1976, “Draft on School of Criticism and Theory for Helen Johnson, Public Information Officer,” Box 70, Folder 1 Brochures and Publicity (1976), The Murray Krieger Papers, The Critical Theory Archives, The University of California-Irvine, 1.

⁶⁷² Rex Pemberton, October 6, 1974 letter to Murray Krieger, Box 65, Folder 8 Correspondence (1974), The Murray Krieger Papers, The Critical Theory Archives, The University of California-Irvine, 1.

⁶⁷³ *Ibid.*

teachers would be trained to become critical theorists—that is, scholars who used theory to examine, evaluate, and then discover the concealed intentions at work in texts. Krieger and Adams also—rather surprisingly—implied that the work at the School would be in line with and further the North American traditions of pluralism and pragmatism.⁶⁷⁴ “In the last decade or so,” Krieger and Adams wrote, “there has been a burgeoning of interest in theory and a multiplicity of critical schools... Yet the recent variety of theory has not been situated, investigated, and assessed. Nor have the competitive relations among all the theoretical approaches been clearly enunciated since a continuing forum for dialogue does not exist. The School was created to provide such a forum.”⁶⁷⁵ However, the SCT would not only become a forum for the discussion of and debate about theory. As Krieger suggested in his letter to colleagues, the SCT brochure advanced the idea that the school, in line with the North American tradition of pluralism, would lack a central intellectual program and would thus be pluralist in its theoretical commitments: “[A] range of voices... is indispensable if the parochialism that only defends one partisan line against its competitors is to be avoided. The School intends that its Board and annual faculty reflected this range so that no one of the embattled theoretical alternatives may be given an advantage over its numerous rivals.” “What should emerge,” the brochure continued, “is continuing institutional arrangement devoted to the specialized developments of an interdisciplinary study which, through its philosophic obligations and its avoidance of partisanship, is a discipline itself.”⁶⁷⁶ (Or, as Krieger wrote in his August 5 1974 letter to

⁶⁷⁴ “Two Lecture Series, offered in conjunction with The School of Criticism and Theory,” 1 Box 70, Folder 1 Brochures and Publicity (1976), The Murray Krieger Papers, The Critical Theory Archives, The University of California-Irvine, 1

⁶⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 1-2.

⁶⁷⁶ “Announcing A National Program: The School of Criticism and Theory at the University of California, Irvine beginning Summer 1976, Box 70, Folder 1 Brochures and Publicity (1976), The Murray Krieger Papers, The Critical Theory Archives, The University of California-Irvine, 2.

Hartman, the SCT would have “no ideological model, since the current situation requires that we have a broad range of theories represented.”⁶⁷⁷)

Krieger and Adams advertised the SCT as aiming to construct a new, unnamed discipline—theory—albeit a discipline with scholars that were, from an institutional standpoint, paradoxically interdisciplinary and pluralist. And, significantly, Krieger and Adams’ new discipline did not float in the ether. Their discipline had a practical—a disciplining—purpose: renovating teaching methods, or at the very least offering pedagogical tools for the study of literature. What’s more, and what found them at their most ambitious, Krieger and Adams pitched the SCT as a place where the transformation of the nature of literary study vis-à-vis other humanistic endeavors could address the crisis in literary studies. The SCT, Krieger and Adams wrote, sought “to encourage change in the nature of literary study by emphasizing its interdisciplinary concern with the cultures and languages of man, thus broadening the humanistic relevance of literature as it is presented in the classroom.” Here, one can see that, contrary to its popular and academic reception, a reception in which “French Theory” is often thought of as having been co-opted by North Americans in the 1980s and 1990s and which ostensibly led to the destruction of the humanities, theory was very much designed and proliferated by North American academics in the 1970s. And Krieger and Adams’ SCT critical theorists were supposed to lead this “theoretical” revolution.

Approximately two months after the May 1976 public and private forums at Irvine about the soon-to-be-opened School of Criticism and Theory, Krieger and Adam’s brainchild was launched. Its first session, from June 21 to July 30, was comprised of six courses for sixty postdoctoral and graduate students drawn from every corner of the U.S. and even from some other countries. In addition to the SCT’s six courses, which struck a balance between literary

⁶⁷⁷ Krieger to Hartman, August 5 1974 letter, 1.

theory and humanistic theory, there were weekly colloquia and forums that addressed the state of theory and criticism in literature, the arts, and the humanities. By all accounts, the school was a success, intellectually and institutionally. Contrary to the positive and affirming tone of the SCT brochure, however, a mood of skepticism and anxiety loomed at the SCT's inaugural session about the recent questioning of standards of humanistic study, the relationship between the most theoretically advanced literary critics and their less forward-thinking colleagues, and the precise way to teach literary theory at the university level. SCT critical theorists' questions not simply registered the appearance and proliferation of theory in North America, but their apprehension about whether, and if so how, to use these theories in the classroom. Changes were afoot, and SCT scholars and students were grappling with how to practically adjust to the new "theoretical" atmosphere.

Take the example of Gregory L. Ulmer, Professor of English at the University of Florida. Ulmer wondered if "theoreticians (those in touch with the most advanced views on how meaning functions) [should] usurp the writing and publishing of textbooks for the lower grades from their colleagues in departments of education."⁶⁷⁸ If critical theorists, trained as they were in theory, such as those gathered at the SCT, were the scholars who best understood the production and operations of meaning, then ought not these theoreticians, rather than less advanced teachers, take over the reigns of writing and publishing texts? SCT critical theorists debated the appropriation of departments of education, even if these takeovers would surely be resisted. In a manner similar to undergraduates at Yale University in the Literature Major, Ulmer also asked whether there existed stable grounds for—or assumptions of—literary study, specifically if there were specific benefits and drawbacks of offering students a canon and a coherent philosophical

⁶⁷⁸ Gregory L. Ulmer, Box 70 ,Folder 8 Colloquia 1976, The Murray Krieger Papers, The Critical Theory Archives, The University of California-Irvine, 1.

program for literary study, or, rather, whether teachers should embrace, as the SCT's founder advocated, a changing catalogue of texts and numerous methods.

Ulmer's question thus touched on the part of the SCT's core mission linked to the North American tradition of pluralism. "Is," Ulmer asked, "there something like a traditional set of classic texts and a lucid writing style that is the *sine qua non* of higher education? Or is it desirable to provide the student with a methodological training uncommitted to any single tradition or mode of thought (if that is possible)?"⁶⁷⁹ Lastly, Ulmer questioned the place of theory in the classroom, and his question echoed—and prefigured—many of the concerns about "theory" voiced in the 1980s and 1990s and anxieties about the threats that budget cuts posed to literature and language programs across the U.S.: "In what ways can the study of critical theory be brought into the undergraduate classroom as contributing the greater understanding of literary texts, or is does the contemporary criticism that obliterates the idea of literature, and if so, what are we all doing to be doing in English and other such departments?"⁶⁸⁰ Ulmer's and other SCT participants' probing questions about the critical theorist's role in society met Krieger and Adams' challenge to treat the SCT experience as pedagogical, as a sort of course of study that would instill participating junior faculty and students with the "theoretical" comportment.

If SCT students and scholars debated the theoretical turns in general terms occurring in the classroom and in scholarship throughout the North American academy, then it was during "The Last Forum," a kind of freewheeling discussion at end of the 1976 SCT summer session devoted to summarizing the achievements of the school and pondering future work, where SCT participants focused, albeit implicitly, on the deconstructive trends in contemporary literary theory. Many participants believed these deconstructive trends might have negative implications

⁶⁷⁹ Ibid.

⁶⁸⁰ Ibid.

for the teaching of literature. In what ways and to what effects, SCT critical theorists wondered, could one inculcate students with deconstructive vigilance against metaphysical claims of primordialness and of authenticity, of “presence.” Yet again, the school also served as a forum to discuss and change literary education. In order to stimulate conversation, Krieger circulated a collection of SCT participants’ questions, concerns, and reflections, each of which danced around the issues raised by deconstructive modes of reading but never named it as such: “the attention to writing as against or in addition to literature”; “the grounding of writing as a writing against some alternative in relation to previous writing”; “the increasing respectability or rhetoric in both its traditional aspects: the typology of tropes and the situational nature of discourse”; “the many and various new understandings of what reading is and why it happens, most of these being reactions against reading as simply the devouring of high culture”; and “the skepticism about the kind of romantic subjectivity which encourages a teacher to ask his students to express themselves directly and spontaneously.”⁶⁸¹ Though the “Yale School” had made its first appearance only a year earlier, in 1975, its presence on the North American literary-critical scene is legible in these SCT critical theorists’ comments and questions.

And yet, while Krieger’s circulated questions that only implicitly addressed how deconstructive reading practices affected classroom instruction, several SCT participants explicitly questioned if deconstructive interpretive techniques potentially undermined the very teaching of literature. One SCT critical theorist wondered about “[t]he issues dealt with in theoretical discourse, for example Derrida’s devaluation of logic in argument” with what “would seem to call into question the teaching of literature as a valid enterprise.”⁶⁸² Another SCT scholar

⁶⁸¹ “For the last forum,” 1976 Box 70, Folder 8 Colloquia (1976), The Murray Krieger Papers, The Critical Theory Archive, The University of California-Irvine, 1.

⁶⁸² “Some Questions for ‘The Last Forum,’” Box 70, Folder 8 Colloquia (1976), The Murray Krieger Papers, The Critical Theory Archives, The University of California-Irvine 1.

referred to Yale Critic Harold Bloom's work and the anxiety it produced for teachers: "Why is it so disturbing when Harold Bloom crosses the line, blurring the distinction between imaginative writing and criticism?"⁶⁸³ And, foreshadowing the negative ink in the late-1970s, 1980s, and 1990s about how deconstructive criticism was nihilistic and unconcerned with ethical or historical matters, Ronald Faust commented that it seemed "*all* the work and conversation here this summer has centered on the formal or technical aspects of literature and theory. There has been *NO* consideration of the *ethical* dimension of teaching criticism (with the exception of a lone and very brief comment by a student in a recent forum). Why?"⁶⁸⁴ And for Faust, it was Yale Critic Paul de Man in particular whose work, with its extreme emphasis on the technical aspects of reading, that dominated the SCT sessions. Not only Faust, but Adams as well also tried "to counter the emphasis of Paul de Man by insist[ing] on the utter creativity of language and its dominance over our cultural world," as Krieger reported in a letter to SCT faculty that summarized the 1976 SCT summer session.⁶⁸⁵ In implicit and explicit ways, SCT critical theorists thus devoted a significant amount of attention to deconstructive reading practices and the ways in which this mode of interpretation affected the teaching of literature.

It did not take long before Krieger and Adams expanded the scholarly and pedagogical scope and objectives of their SCT. By 1977, only its second year, Krieger, in one internal document, suggested that the SCT "was created in the belief that a unifying conception of the humanities and humanistic discourse that can be grounded in literary theory. A major reason for the *crisis in the humanities* today is that such a conception does not now flourish in our intellectual communities. Thus, in its summer and year-around phases, the School is intended to

⁶⁸³ Ibid.

⁶⁸⁴ Ronald Frost, "Questions to be considered by the members of the final forum," Box 70, Folder 8 Colloquia 1976, The Murray Krieger Papers, The Critical Theory Archives, The University of California-Irvine, 1.

⁶⁸⁵ Krieger, Revised Overview of 1976, letter to faculty, Box 70, Folder 8 Colloquia Papers 1976, The Murray Krieger Papers, The Critical Theory Archives, The University of California-Irvine, 1.

contribute to a long-term change in the nature of literary study in particular and of the humanities in general.”⁶⁸⁶ Rather than merely replace the Kenyon School of English, Krieger and Adams now hoped that the SCT and its critical theorists would debate and use literary theories to build a unifying conception of the humanities that would, in turn, solve the—in their words—“crisis of the humanities.” In Krieger and Adams’ formulation, literary theories thus not only remained the most innovative humanities methods for interpreting prose and poetry to be studied at the SCT, but also had the potential to save the humanities from irrelevancy. Such confident faith in the promise of literary theories stood in marked contrast to the destruction that members of the Left and Right so often portrayed literary theory, or simply, theory, as enacting in the 1980s and 1990s. In fact, excitement about theoretical turns at the SCT came from not only Krieger and Adams, but from the American literary-critical community as well. In a message to senior fellows, Krieger reported that “[l]etters we are now receiving from people who have come into contact with those who were here during the summer make it clear that word about the School has got around, and that word obviously is an exhilarated one.”⁶⁸⁷ This exhilaration put the SCT in high demand. The governing board underestimated the number of applicants for the 1977 Summer session, which lasted from June 20 to July 29, and ended up admitted 80 rather than the previous year’s 60 students.

Though the number of admitted applicants was unexpectedly large and to some extent cumbersomely so, however, the SCT remained committed to its larger, more ambitious, goal to transform scholars into critical theorists that used literary theories to get to the bottom of the “crisis of the humanities.” For example, as in 1976, courses in the 1977 summer session were

⁶⁸⁶ Krieger and Adams, untitled paper, Box 70, Folder 2 Brochures and Publicity (1977), The Murray Krieger Papers, The Critical Theory Archives, The University of California-Irvine, 1. Emphasis added.

⁶⁸⁷ Krieger, undated letter to senior fellows, Box 63, Folder 1 Krieger to Board (1975-1982), The Murray Krieger Papers, The Critical Theory Archives, The University of California-Irvine, 1.

divided into three groups. Junior critical theorists were still expected to choose not more than one course from any of the three groups, while fellowship students would still enroll in two courses. However, the work done at the 1977 Summer session courses showed an increasing tendency of SCT scholars and students to conflate and cross-pollinate literary theory and humanities disciplines. The first group of courses, titled “The Languages of the Plastic Arts and of Literature in Literary Criticism: A Historical Survey” taught by Krieger, emphasized the history of theory and was required for SCT fellows who had not had formal courses work in the history of literary criticism. In his course, Krieger’s presented the paper, “Literature vs. *Écriture*: Constructions and Deconstructions in Recent Critical Theory,” which explored the “theoretical conflicts currently animating our academic literary criticism.” For Krieger, “a number of contenders” had over the past two decades “arisen to claim the place of primary influence” after the “dominance of American criticism by the so-called New Criticism” in the 1940s and 1950s.⁶⁸⁸

After briefly surveying recent literary-theoretical approaches to the study of literature, including Northrop Frye’s myth criticism of the 1950s, the critics of consciousness of the Geneva School of the 1950s and 1960s, and the more recent reader-response theories of the 1960s and 1970s, Krieger centered on deconstruction, “a movement with the spread and attempted dominance to match the New Criticism’s.” For Krieger, deconstruction’s “power...rests on totally new and revolutionary grounds that would destroy the basis of all traditional criticism which it would replace as it deconstructs,” for example removing the “distinction between critic and the poem which is its object” and consigning them into the “common realm of *écriture*,” in which “the world is reduced utterly to language, a now-empty

⁶⁸⁸ Krieger, “Literature vs. *Ecriture*: Constructions and Deconstructions in Recent Critical Theory,” Box 70, Folder 14 Colloquia Papers (1977), The Murray Krieger Papers, The Critical Theory Archives, The University of California-Irvine, 1.

world of language defined as the disposition of signifiers alone.”⁶⁸⁹ According to Krieger, deconstructive reading practices, which were by 1977 threatening to become as hegemonic as the New Criticism had been during its heyday in the mid-twentieth century, collapsed the difference between author and reader, criticism and poem, transforming any and all texts into *écriture*, the deferral and differentiation of meaning. Specifically, Krieger saw Derridean and de Manian deconstruction, which had a large “following among younger scholars,” as threatening to “become” hegemonic, as spreading “well beyond the precincts of literary study.”⁶⁹⁰ And yet, while Krieger negatively portrayed deconstruction—he in fact authored a 1979 book *Poetic Presence and Illusion* that, among other things, targeted Derrida’s and de Man’s interpretive excesses—one should observe that Krieger also seemed to acknowledge that deconstructive literary criticism was accomplishing two of the central aims of the SCT: play a pedagogical role similar to that of the Kenyon School of English, and alter humanistic study, the latter being achieved because deconstruction had a massive following that, for better or for worse (for worse according to Krieger), was on the verge of spreading deconstructive reading techniques far beyond literature departments.⁶⁹¹

If, like Krieger, the first group of 1977 SCT Summer courses oriented critical theorists toward the deconstructive ethos and the ways in which it altered literary study and humanistic inquiry more generally, then the second and third groups of 1977 SCT Summer courses generally instilled students and scholars with various “theoretical” stances and styles of reading that could address the “crisis of the humanities.” The second course grouping, though titled Literary Theory, and which the SCT brochure advertised as more advanced and specialized in topics than

⁶⁸⁹ Ibid., 2, 4.

⁶⁹⁰ Ibid., 4.

⁶⁹¹ Krieger, “Poetic Presence and Illusion: Renaissance Theory and the Duplicity of Metaphor,” *Critical Inquiry* 5 (1979): 597-619.

the first grouping, for instance offered “Theories of Reading in Relation to Strategies of Interpretation” taught by Stanley Fish, then known for his theoretical concept of an “interpretive community,” a theory of reading with which the critical theorist focused on each reader’s reading techniques in relation to an interpretive community that gives the said reader a particular technique with which to read a text.⁶⁹² This third course grouping, titled “Programs in Style Criticism and Style History” and “Constitutive Aspects of the Text” and taught by Leonard Meyer and Edward Said respectively, emphasized exploring humanistic problems as they pertained to literature and the other arts.

The three groups of 1977 SCT Summer courses—broader in scope than the 1976 session—fulfilled Krieger and Adam’s comprehensive aim to use literary theories as the philosophic support and methodological framework to restructure the purpose of the humanities. This restructuring, Krieger and Adams hoped, would also hopefully yield answers to questions about the relevance of humanistic study. And, as in 1977, the 1978 and 1979 SCT programs followed a similar trajectory in the schooling of critical theorists, in that these summer sessions had almost identical course groupings, though these years differed in that they contained a larger contingent of Yale School members. In 1978, for instance, the second course grouping—still titled Literary Theory—included “Modern Literature Criticism,” taught by Geoffrey Hartman, and “The Historical Sub-Text, or, Walter Benjamin and the Problem of Literary Historiography,” taught by Fredric Jameson, then also at Yale and whom had been hired by de Man. In 1979, the courses in the Literary Theory section had a class taught by Hillis Miller, “Theory of Narrative,”

⁶⁹² “Prospectus and Application for The School of Criticism and Theory, University of California, Irvine,” Box 70, Folder 2 Brochures and Publicity (1977), The Murray Krieger Papers, The Critical Theory Archives, The University of California-Irvine, 3.

and a course taught by his former adversary in the 1976 *Critical Inquiry* debate Wayne Booth, “The Ethics of Fiction.”⁶⁹³

Debates about deconstructive reading techniques and the seeming threats they posed to literary study and teaching, or at the very least the appreciation of literature, became something of a SCT tradition during its late 1970s sessions. These debates reflected an anxiety among North American humanists about the perceived decline in status of prose and poetry in the broader North American culture, and the accompanying loss of power and prestige of the literary critic and theorist, a loss, one should note, which threatened to occur just as the new discipline of theory, with the literary critic as its most advanced practitioner, began to receive intellectual and institutional support and legitimacy. It was, in other words, a threshold moment of sorts. For example, like at the 1977 SCT Summer session, SCT critical theorists’ discussion about deconstruction dominated “The Last Forum” of the 1978 Summer session, though for the occasion the discussion was as anxious as it was eager about further deconstructive turns. On July 27 at 2 p.m., though Krieger had distributed several topics to stimulate discussion, SCT students and scholars focused on the “broad attraction Derrida has been having on recent Anglo-American scholars and critics,” “[s]pecifically...the extent to which this popularity is indicative of an anti-humanistic tendency to stop viewing literature as a ‘criticism of life’ and whether this is why so many of us find deconstruction exciting rather than threatening.”

Not only did SCT participants consider whether Anglo-American scholars and critics’ attraction to Derrida was related to the growing anti-humanistic predisposition to reject viewing literature as life-enhancing, however. By focusing on the anti-humanistic drift of Derridean

⁶⁹³ “Prospectus and Application for The School of Criticism and Theory, University of California, Irvine,” Box 70, Folder 3 Brochures and Publicity (1978), The Murray Krieger Papers, The Critical Theory Archives, The University of California-Irvine, 3; Prospectus and Application for The School of Criticism and Theory, University of California, Irvine,” Box 70, Folder 4 Brochures and Publicity (1979), The Murray Krieger Papers, The Critical Theory Archives, The University of California-Irvine, 3.

deconstruction, an anti-humanistic tendency that still required, *à la* the deconstructive principles of duality, the co-existence of a humanistic tendency, SCT critical theorists paradoxically advanced Krieger and Adams' ambition to have the SCT serve as a forum for using literary theory to support a unified vision of the humanities. Derridean deconstruction, SCT critical theorists seemed to recognize, required its opposite: humanism.⁶⁹⁴

The vigorous debates and innovative work merging either indirectly or directly due to the SCT, helped spread word of the SCT beyond the academy, and, in so doing, helped produce the image and the allure of the “literary-critical theorist” in the North American imagination, or, at the very least, in the imagination of North American journalists. In the August 13, 1978 *Los Angeles Times* article, “Epistemological Endeavors at ‘Mecca’: Esoteric Studies Lure Literati to UCI,” journalist Patt Morrison suggested that the SCT was similar to Studio 54, then the world’s most famous New York nightclub, of summer programs—admission to the school was, she wrote, “as zealously sought and jealously coveted by young academicians as boogie space at the New York nightclub is by marginal celebrities.”⁶⁹⁵ As Morrison pointed out and as the title of her article implied, critical theorists were sexy and chic. And layered on top of this sexiness was a religious or spiritual dimension to SCT critical theorists’ lives and works, as these literati returned each year to the SCT, not only to tango with their new “theoretical” partners, but also to exercise the newest interpretive theories. Indeed, with the right dance moves a marginal critical theorist could parlay an appearance at the SCT into a prestigious job or an article in a highly-respected academic journal.

⁶⁹⁴ Krieger, “Issues for Final Meeting, August 2, 1978,” Box 70, Folder 10 Colloquium (1978), The Murray Krieger Papers, The Critical Theory Archives, The University of California-Irvine, 1.

⁶⁹⁵ Patt Morrison, “Epistemological Endeavors at ‘Mecca’: Esoteric Studies Lure Literati to UCI,” *Los Angeles Times*, August 13, 1978, 4.

Part of the image of the academic literati as the most innovative and edgiest of academics was undeniably due to their fervent hope to not simply change, say, the literary canon or the standard interpretation of *Macbeth*, but the very way humanists thought, the manner in which humanists apprehended the things of the world. In her *LA Times* article, Morrison explained that, according to Krieger, “the humanities had been, until recently, taught along Germanic lines established in the 19th century: one era at a time, one country at a time.” But, Krieger suggested to Morrison, the SCT wished to break out of this temporal and spatial straightjacket and transform the teaching of the humanities with new “thinking techniques,” which taught “people how to think all over again.” And, Krieger made clear to Morrison, the collective implementation of these “thinking techniques”—these stances and styles of reading, which did not have a set content but which oriented the mind and mood of the user—could help introduce an interdisciplinary model of interpretation free of temporal and spatial restrictions of the old Germanic model. Such an innovative model, as much a disposition as an assemblage of interpretive practices for a range of disciplines, could, Krieger suggested, “save the humanities from extinction.”⁶⁹⁶ With Morrison’s and the *LA Times*’s help, Krieger certainly portrayed his SCT in the best and most ambitious light possible for his national readership.⁶⁹⁷ Krieger’s SCT, he implied, was to aid North American humanists to usher in, though he did not use these words a new Enlightenment of sorts.

Despite the SCT’s noticeable and noted success, and despite its growing reputation and influence inside and outside the academy, the school had to eventually relocate. This move was largely due to unexpected changes in its financial support. Notwithstanding their efforts, Krieger and Adams could not persuade the NEH to review their grant for the 1978 SCT summer session.

⁶⁹⁶ Ibid.

⁶⁹⁷ Ibid.

And, while UCI had put up enough funds to support the 1978 and 1979 sessions, the passing of Proposition 13, which limited the tax rate for real estate, in June 6th, 1978 by the State of California, affected the state financing of public schools. UCI's budget was cut, and the university's administration withdrew some of its funding. As a result, some of the "theoretical" atmosphere at UCI evaporated—not only was SCT's 1980 Summer session cancelled, but the SCT eventually left UCI for Northwestern University, with the school's 1981 Summer session held from June 22nd to Jul 31st. Though it changed its institutional home, however, the SCT retained Krieger and Adam's program to train critical theorists to use literary theories to produce a unified conception of the humanities, even if this conception was partly anti-humanistic, focusing, as it did, on relentlessly critiquing and uncovering the very assumptions of what one meant by the word and concept "human."

For example, during the 1981 session, deconstructive reading techniques were not only—again—a topic of debate and discussion, but were also a topic of debate and discussion in relation to the teaching of literature. In his pamphlet "Questions Submitted For Final Colloquium," Krieger implored SCT faculty and students to discuss the relationships between recent theory and the profession of teaching language and literature. Many of Krieger's questions revolved around how various applications of deconstructive reading practices affected or perhaps even could replace outmoded pedagogical exercises. Krieger's questions included: "What are the consequences of literature in the classroom of recent claims about textual instabilities and undecidables?"; "How does recent theory affect the classroom treatment of naïve or out-of-bound student interpretations (if any can still be declared out of bounds)?"; "Are we ready to take the pedagogical consequences of recent tendencies in theory to equalize all writing?"; "Shall we alter the principles on which we create syllabi of courses in literature?"; and "Is there no

longer to be any privileged roll-call of literary works to be taught?”⁶⁹⁸ Without naming deconstruction or the work of a Yale School member, these questions touched on if, and, if so, how, deconstructive reading techniques affected the teaching of literature. They also registered the continued anxiety and eagerness to develop a way to help students adopt deconstructive principles for the interpretation of prose and poetry.

What was earlier often implied during the SCT final forums, however, was made explicit in 1982. That year, Geoffrey Hartman, who had served on the SCT’s governing board of senior fellows since the School’s inception and was also a confidant of Krieger’s in the early stages of planning the school, succeeded Krieger as the SCT’s Director. Like Krieger, Hartman was hardly a figurehead. Hartman for example helped arrange his close friend de Man’s much-anticipated 1982 SCT colloquium “Rhetoric, Aesthetics, and Ideology” (Krieger had for several years tried and failed to bring de Man to teach at the SCT). De Man’s 1982 SCT colloquium offered “close readings of a series of literary, philosophical, and critical texts from the 16th century to the present dealing with the tensions between the linguistic and the aesthetic components of texts as well as with the ideological consequences of these tensions.”⁶⁹⁹ By explicitly addressing the political and historical aspects of literature, something which his critics, especially those on the Marxist left, had long accused him of willfully ignoring, de Man’s colloquium participated in moving critical theory—in his specific case, deconstructive or “rhetorical” reading—to more general humanistic concerns.

Such a shift in emphasis in fact was discernable once the SCT moved to Northwestern. While the literary critic thus remained central to reimagining the humanities, SCT critical

⁶⁹⁸ Krieger, “Questions Submitted For Final Colloquium,” Box 70, Folder 12 Colloquia (1981), The Murray Krieger Papers, The Critical Theory Archives, The University of California-Irvine, 1-2.

⁶⁹⁹ “Prospectus and Application, Summer 1982,” Box 70, Folder 6 Brochures and Publicity: Northwestern (1982-1985), The Murray Krieger Papers, The Critical Theory Archives, The University of California-Irvine, 1

theorists, of which the literary theorist was a subset, more readily and more often, after the school's move to NU, discussed "fundamental issues as the nature of human communication and of human creativity in the arts and sciences, the relation between the arts and technology, and the role of the arts in maintain an open society."⁷⁰⁰ For example, a goal of the May 8 and 9, 1981 symposium, "A Controversy of Critics," which celebrated the reopening of the SCT, was to "see how the humanities, and literary critic in particular, can challenge the way people think about social, political, and historical matters," according to Lawrence Lipking, one of the symposium's moderators and Professor of Humanities at Northwestern.⁷⁰¹ By 1984, the SCT, then in its ninth year, had transformed over 400 teachers and 100 advanced graduate students into critical theorists, instilling them with various modes of thinking about literature and the humanities.⁷⁰²

Though the SCT moved to Northwestern in 1982, an atmosphere conducive to theory and the critical theorist had been cultivated and institutionalized at UCI in several other significant ways. Partly thanks to the SCT, which gave the campus international visibility, and due to its innovations in the areas of criticism and theory, UCI's Department of English and Comparative Literature achieved a place of national prominence.⁷⁰³ Theory at UCI also grew alongside Krieger and Adams' creation. In 1975, only a year after the first percolations of his and Adams' ideas for the SCT, Krieger helped establish a Ph.D. Concentration in Critical Theory, the first of

⁷⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, 2.

⁷⁰¹ "School of Criticism and Theory to Hold Symposium at NU, May 8-9," *Northwestern University News*, April 13, 1981, Box 70, Folder 5 Brochures and Publicity (1981), The Murray Krieger Papers, The Critical Theory Archives, The University of California-Irvine, 1.

⁷⁰² Hartman, "Statement on the School of Criticism and Theory," September 20, 1984, Box 70, Folder 5 Brochures and Publicity (1981), The Murray Krieger Papers, The Critical Theory Archives, The University of California-Irvine, 1.

⁷⁰³ "Overview of the School of Humanities," Box 70, Folder 2 Brochures and Publicity (1977), The Murray Krieger Papers, The Critical Theory Archives, The University of California-Irvine, 1.

its kind in the U.S. and in fact the entire world, and which served as one of the inspirations for the School of Criticism and Theory.⁷⁰⁴

The groundwork for the development of this unique graduate concentration emerged from the Critical Theory Group, a group of professors from across humanities departments at UCI—English, French and Italian, Classics, Spanish Portuguese, Comparative Literature, Drama, German, History, and Philosophy. Like the SCT, the Critical Theory Group was interdisciplinary and materialized from the practical context of teaching. Though serving pragmatic and pedagogical aims, however, Krieger noted that the ability for a Ph.D. in theory could obtain an academic teaching post remained largely “theoretical.” In a June 17, 1975 letter to Donald Heiney, Director of Graduate Studies, Krieger wrote: “[I]t is clear that only a limited number of Ph.D. theorists can hope to be absorbed by the job market within a short period of time. It is also true that this remains a somewhat exotic specialty, and that a student has to be rather more spectacular in his performance and his support than he would have to be within the more conventional designations that characterize more Ph.D.’s.”⁷⁰⁵ Though a position for a Ph.D. in theory remained largely hypothetical, UCI and its SCT, over the course of the last three decades of the twentieth-century, helped create and meet, on a national scale, the need for such “theoretical” scholars.

Despite the ostensibly interdisciplinary nature of UCI’s graduate program in Critical Theory, however, students in fact, at least in the mid- to late-1970s, took courses that centered on literary criticism and literary theory. In other words UCI’s program in Critical Theory advanced the notion and trained students to accede to the view that the literary critic and theorist was the

⁷⁰⁴ Krieger and Adams, “Proposed letter to list of Universities and Colleges,” Box 70, Folder 2 Brochures and Publicity (1977), The Murray Krieger Papers, The Critical Theory Archives, The University of California-Irvine, 1.

⁷⁰⁵ Murray Krieger to Donald Heiney, Director of Graduate Studies, Box 76, Folder 19 Critical Theory Program, 1974-1978, The Murray Krieger Papers, The Critical Theory Archives, The University of California-Irvine, 1.

most advanced scholar in the humanities. Budding critical theorists in the Critical Theory Concentration for example enrolled in a course on the “general introduction to the problems of literary theory and its methods” and a class on the “history of the problems of theory (the first quarter concentrating on mimetic theory and the second on expressive and contemporary theory).”⁷⁰⁶

But it was students’ Comprehensive Exams, administered prior to the dissertation, that truly revealed the extent to which UCI’s program in Critical Theory trained scholars, not simply to implement theory, but adapt and adopt “theoretical” stances and styles of reading that were largely produced by and for the literary critic and theorist. The exam’s first two sections for instance had the student “select two specific problems in theory and create for each a syllabus of critics who have been concerned with it through many periods,” while the third section had the student “select a generic, topological, or tropological [methods for the figurative interpretation of texts] principle of inclusion and create a syllabus of primary works of many periods.”⁷⁰⁷ To ensure that the student performed principles of literary theory, the exam required the pupil to, “whenever possible,” apply “the theoretical problem treated in part one.” By passing through UCI’s program in Critical Theory, graduate students were disciplined more or less in the literary theory and criticism, reinforcing the dominance of literary critic and theorists at the vanguard of the “theoretical” revolution.

An indirect effect of the SCT at UCI—whether at Irvine or Northwestern (and then Dartmouth)—was on the growth of the above-mentioned graduate program in Critical Theory at UCI. Krieger and Adams made the SCT’s presence at UCI known by continually mentioning the SCT in their program brochures, listing the famous and important senior fellows and making

⁷⁰⁶ Krieger, “Description of graduate program in Critical Theory,” Box 76 Folder 19 Critical Theory Program, 1974-1978, The Murray Krieger Papers, The Critical Theory Archives, The University of California-Irvine, 1.

⁷⁰⁷ Ibid.

clear that the SCT's summer programs were available to selected theory students at UCI. This profiling had a striking and long-lasting effect on the number and quality of applicants for the Critical Theory program as well as the breadth of the geographical draw of its students.⁷⁰⁸ In order to ensure the national and international character of the School, Krieger was particularly careful to keep the SCT's staff, objectives, and program separate from any influence by the Humanities departments at UCI and thus prevent any suspicion that the School's mission might be distorted to serve a local interest. In consequence, the SCT very much served the local interests. In addition, the postdoctoral students who attended and were trained at the SCT went on to identify themselves with UCI as well as sent their undergraduates to UCI graduate programs. All of these small but important connections helped establish a network and create receptivity to theory at institutions in the North American academy.

The SCT also contributed to the success of the UCI program in Critical Theory by creating two SCT Fellowships for entering graduate students in theory and advertised them as a national competition. As Krieger and Adams advertised them, their SCT courses were part of their program of graduate coursework. This, in effect, enlarged for them the graduate faculty in critical theory, bringing in SCT Fellows and teachers. Lastly, the SCT contributed to the success of the Critical Theory program by arranging for SCT Fellows or teachers to serve on Ph.D. dissertation committees if the student could enlist the excitement of the visitor about the student's promise. But beyond supplementing the faculty, the SCT faculty exposed their student-colleagues to the most sophisticated and innovative critical theories quality during summer programs. This was, as Krieger noted, "a colleague-ship well beyond anything the grad. student

⁷⁰⁸ Krieger, July 1981 letter to Northwestern University, Box 70 Folder 12 Colloquia (1981), The Murray Krieger Papers, The Critical Theory Archives, The University of California-Irvine, 1.

normally might expect, another reason a sympathetic theory program where SCT thrives can't miss."⁷⁰⁹ In all these ways, the SCT helped institutionalize theory at UCI.

Deconstruction to Irvine

By the early-1980s, despite the groundbreaking, indeed from critical theorists' perspectives visionary, work being done at the SCT, the literary theories debated about and practiced at the SCT and elsewhere began to receive a great deal of negative press. In a series of articles—*Harvard Magazine*, *The New York Review of Books*, and *The Times Literary Supplement*, among others—journalists—or, more often professors writing as journalists—charged theoretically-inclined literary critics, above all deconstructive literary critics, with undermining, with destroying, literary studies and the humanities more generally. In his December 31, 1982 opinion piece “The Shattered Humanities” in the *Wall Street Journal*, no less than the Chairman of the National Endowment of the Humanities William J. Bennett (appointed by President Reagan) argued that threats to humanistic study came from humanists who rejected “intellectual refinement and spiritual elevation,” which occurred from introducing and immersing themselves and students in “the best that has been thought and known,” in, in other words, the Western canon.

Instead of using Great Works as moral guides, Bennett argued, humanities professors relentlessly critiqued the very humanistic standards of truth and moral probity that literature taught readers. Bennett's humanists embraced a professional anti-humanism, and did so, he argued, with nihilistic aims, because they only cared for the creation of sub-disciplines where they could develop and practice hyper technical jargons. For Bennett, academics' anti-humanism disintegrated the ostensibly once-holistic mission of the humanities. “We can,” Bennett

⁷⁰⁹ Ibid.

lamented, “see the symptoms of fragmentation of the humanities everywhere.” And, significantly, criticism like Bennett was not limited to the political right, as evidenced by Kingsley Porter University Professor at Harvard W. Jackson Bate’s 1982 *Harvard Magazine* article “The Crisis in English Studies.” There, Bate argued that professors in the humanities, ““through progressive stages of specialization[,]’ . . . have squandered their Renaissance heritage” which addressed ‘the whole experience of life.’”⁷¹⁰

Though Bennett focused on literary theories in general, he specifically targeted a “popular movement in literary criticism called ‘deconstruction.’” For Bennett, “deconstruction” was a major cause of the absence of intellectual refinement and spiritual elevation in American humanities departments. Bennett’s “deconstruction” achieved such a fantastic number of assassinations, of Great Works, he suggested, because it “denies that there are texts at all.” And, “[i]f there are not texts, there are no great texts, and no argument for reading.”⁷¹¹ A far cry from the deconstructive reading techniques of a de Man, a Derrida or a Miller, Bennett’s deconstruction seemed to eliminate literature altogether. Indeed, an uninformed reader of the *Wall Street Journal* in Reagan’s America could have reasonably assumed that deconstructive readings of prose and poetry were equivalent to destructions of prose and poetry. Indeed, if, after being deconstructed, being pulled part and torn asunder, texts did not exist, how could students learn the morals taught by literature, as Bennett put it?

Though persuasive to the ill-informed—and there were many who willingly bought this argument about deconstruction—Bennett and others ignored how and why, at least for the SCT’s architects, critical theorists’ adoption and adaption of “theoretical” stances and styles of reading was actually to unify the humanities. As explored above, Krieger and his fellow travelers saw the

⁷¹⁰ Walter Jackson Bate, “The Crisis in English Studies,” *Harvard Magazine* 85 (1985): 46.

⁷¹¹ William J. Bennett, “The Shattered Humanities,” *The Wall Street Journal*, December 31, 1982, 10.

use of literary theories as hardly destructive but aimed to solve “the crisis in the humanities,” to answer the—increasingly shrill—questions of relevance and charges of irrelevancy. It is also important to note that historians who have employed the lens of a culture war between conservatives and liberals to understand the history of theory and deconstruction in America fall into a similar trap as Bennett. They overlook the intellectual project and institutional building of, the ways in which ways of thinking and acting were advanced by, the SCT.

These cross-purposes and (sometimes willful) misunderstandings between members of the North American literary-critical community and their critics have also obscured the intellectual and institutional alliances between the critical theorists at UCI and the Yale School during the early and mid-1980s. These relationships led to the deconstructive community being, to a degree, subsumed under the larger UCI project to transform, restore, and unify the humanities, albeit this unification was to be at the same time achieved by way of the deconstructive principles of differentiation and dispersal. Though, as explored in this chapter’s first section, these alliances between UCI and various Yale School members were initially established in the 1970s, they received a renewed impetus—and, critically, financial, intellectual, and institutional support—by the mid-1980s. These deepened connections also facilitated the conflation, especially in the popular press, of theory and deconstruction, with the two regularly used interchangeable, both representing to critics on the Right and the Left the excesses of critical theorists’ needlessly politically-biased subjectivism.

Just as it must have surprised North American academics—especially those not paying attention to the intellectual developments in U.S. humanities departments—that theory found a home at UCI in the 1970s, the institutional and intellectual residence where so many deconstructive reading techniques were textually produced and imparted to pupils unexpectedly

also moved to the West Coast, and also to UCI, in the mid-1980s. While the connections between UCI faculty and the Yale School had already been established, a series of events precipitated this shift. One of the most important was Yale Critic Paul de Man's death from cancer on December 21, 1983 at the age of 64. At the January 1984 memorial service held in de Man's honor at Yale's Art Gallery, the disconnect between critics such as Bennett and critical theorists like Krieger or deconstructive literary critics like Miller was clearly discernable, as de Man's friends, colleagues and students' outpourings of sorrow registered the loss of the informal leader of their shared deconstructive mission.⁷¹² In contrast to Bennett's accusations of fragmentation and disintegration, de Man and his fellow deconstructors noticeably felt themselves—with de Man as their moral guide—to have built a movement, a school at which students internalized, adopted and adjusted, to deconstructive values of textual irresolution, contradiction, and duality.

For example, at the service, Professor of French Shoshana Felman honored his “generosity” and claimed that “through him, through his work and through his person, something extraordinary spoke”;⁷¹³ Ellen Burt, de Man's former graduate student, testified to de Man's “moral trait[s],” qualities she considered to include the “complete detachment from the claims of subjectivity or individual personality”⁷¹⁴; still others commented on a paradox of de Man's career, that, though he would have not ‘wanted to be... a moral and pedagogical example for generations of students and colleagues,” he in fact “became the Yoda figure” during the “space war of the theorists.”⁷¹⁵ It was from de Man, observed Geoffrey Hartman, de Man's colleague and intellectual partner-in-crime at Yale, that so many—even his esteemed colleagues—sought

⁷¹² See for example the already-nostalgic piece: “Yale Still Feeling Loss of Revered Professor,” *New York Times*, February 25, 1984.

⁷¹³ Shoshana Felman, in *Ibid.*, 9, 8.

⁷¹⁴ E.S. Burt, in *Ibid.*, 11.

⁷¹⁵ Barbara Johnson, in *Ibid.*, 10.

wisdom, advice, and training.⁷¹⁶ But perhaps most moving and most indicative of the deconstructive ideals that de Man embodied for his colleagues was Professor of French and Comparative Literature at Harvard University Barbara Johnson's self-conscious use of the rhetoric of authenticity to praise her former mentor. Johnson's speech included the "very words that [de Man] was most suspicious of—words like integrity, honesty, authenticity, generosity, even seductiveness": "In a profession full of fakeness," Johnson professed, "he was real; in a world full of takers, he let others take; in a crowd of self-seekers, he sought the truth, and distrusted it."⁷¹⁷ One recognizes in these testimonies, not simply that de Man was held in the highest esteem, but that the Yale deconstructive community had lost the standard against which they judged, they organized, their deconstructive scholarship and teaching. With their anchor gone, the community was a lost at sea.

Still, the atmosphere favorable to the development and implementation of deconstructive reading practices at Yale had already somewhat dissipated even before the death of de Man. His passing did not necessarily trigger the disintegration of the Yale School. That dissolution, really a withering away and transformation, began several years earlier. By the end of the 1970s, Geoffrey Hartman and Harold Bloom, central members of the Yale Group, though, as Hartman wrote in their non-manifesto *Deconstruction and Criticism*, they occasionally wrote against deconstruction, had moved on to different types of intellectual projects.⁷¹⁸ By 1980, Hartman was investing himself in Yale's Fortunoff Video Archive for Holocaust Testimonies, the project, not necessarily his work in the 1970s, which he suggested in 2013 that he was most proud. Born in Frankfurt and brought by a Kindertransport to England before moving to New York City to attend Queens College, and then graduate studies in Comparative Literature at Yale from 1949 to

⁷¹⁶ Geoffrey Hartman, in *Ibid.*, 6.

⁷¹⁷ Barbara Johnson, in *Ibid.*, 9-10.

⁷¹⁸ Hartman, "Preface," in *Deconstruction and Criticism*, viii.

1953, Hartman's involvement was both personal and scholarly.⁷¹⁹ He first came upon the Holocaust Survivors Film project (the forerunner of the Fortunoff Video Archive) through his wife, Renée, one of the first survivors taped. Hartman quickly understood the educational and research potential of these video documents, and subsequently agreed to write a funding request to the New Haven Foundation. After the funding request's approval in 1980, videotaping of Holocaust survivors and witnesses began in New Haven, Connecticut; a year later, the original collection of testimonies was deposited at Yale.⁷²⁰ Hartman's devotion to the Fortunoff Video Archive for Holocaust Testimonies and, one should recall, his appointment as director of the SCT in 1982, left little time or energy to pursue the kinds of deconstructive readings he performed in the mid- to late-1970s, such as his influential 1975 reading of Derrida's *Glas*.⁷²¹

Like Hartman, Bloom was never a "boa-deconstructor" and, by the early-1980s, like Hartman, had given up struggling with the "rhetorical readings" of his Yale colleagues de Man. And after de Man's death, Bloom's engagements with de Manian deconstructive reading techniques dwindled almost to nothing. Witness Bloom's 1983 *Agon: Towards a Theory of Revisionism*, which was the last application and elaboration of Bloom's Freudian-Nietzschean model of poetic influence that resisted the claims of de Man's "rhetorical deconstruction" before Bloom reinvented himself as the arbiter of great literature, shunning his fellow academics for the attention of and the opportunity to educate the North American reading public.⁷²² Thus, two-fifths of the Yale School had, by the early-1980s, for all intents and purposes left the Yale School, though other members, Miller, Derrida, and younger faculty, such as Andrzej Warminski and Ellen Burt, as well as their graduate students, continued to produce deconstructive readings

⁷¹⁹ Hartman, interview by Gregory Jones-Katz, June 14, 2013.

⁷²⁰ "A Yale University and New Haven Community project: From Local to Global," 3.

⁷²¹ Hartman did however manage to publish important collections of essays, including his 1980 *Criticism in the Wilderness: The Study of Literature Today* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2007).

⁷²² Bloom, *Agon: Towards a Theory of Revisionism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1983).

and instill students with the principles of deconstructive reading techniques. Nevertheless, Miller recognized after de Man's death that Yale would "be less exciting intellectually," "not only because of the loss of his presence but also because of his unparalleled ability to get brilliant junior appointments made that we wanted," which included Burt, Johnson, and Warminski.⁷²³ But, Miller has reflected, "a page had been turned. The attack on what we represented was getting fiercer the whole time. We could no longer ensure that any of our colleagues got tenure... I sensed that the next few year would be much less pleasant and interesting than those we had just lived through."⁷²⁴ Without de Man's skillful maneuvering in department meetings, without his own astute handling of the Yale bureaucracy, putting in a word here or sending a recommendation to the right person at the right time there, the Yale School itself was not only intellectually, but also institutionally vulnerable.

Vulnerability as well as sadness also touched Derrida after de Man's death. De Man's passing was not simply upsetting because Derrida lost his closest friend in American intellectual life. Along with Miller, de Man was responsible for arranging Derrida's fall visits to Yale. Without de Man clout, Derrida's connection to Yale was weakened, albeit not completely gone. And Derrida came to realize, like Miller, that the university was not as favorable to deconstructive enterprises as it had been when de Man was still around. It was also not as exciting, as Derrida himself viewed de Man as an authority, not simply on Romantic poets, but on the operations of deconstructive reading itself. Derrida had in fact let de Man's 1971 reading of Derrida's reading of Rousseau stand as their first and last instance of friendly disagreement—he responded to de Man's earlier claim that Derrida remained blind to the rhetoricity of

⁷²³ Jones-Katz, "Constantly Contingent," 64.

⁷²⁴ Interview with J. Hillis Miller, quoted in Peeters, 371.

Rousseau's text only in 1998, fifteen years after de Man's death.⁷²⁵ By the early- to mid-1980s, whether de Man or Derrida wanted it to or not, de Man's deconstructive reading of Derrida received a great deal of attention, coming to represent, especially for sympathetic and professional invested readers, an unresolved tension in the North American deconstructive community, centered of course at Yale, between Derrida's more philosophic interpretive techniques, inspired by German philosophers Edmund Husserl and Martin Heidegger among so many others, and de Man's more technical-rhetorical variety of reading, which, though deeply philosophical and also claiming Husserl and Heidegger as inspirations, equally emerged from New Critical reading techniques.⁷²⁶

Derrida came to publicly express his grief and offer his reflections on what he saw as the meaning of de Man's project, to Derrida himself as well as others, but above all those in the North American literary-critical community, in three lectures, written between January and February 1984 and thus directly in the aftermath of de Man's death. But Derrida's lectures not only spoke to these two concerns—Derrida's sadness and the relevance of de Man's project to “deconstruction in America.” Derrida's lectures also, though neither he nor his colleagues knew beforehand, helped pave the way for the *move* of several of the most prominent Yale deconstructionists, including Derrida and Miller, from New Haven to Irvine. First delivered in French, at Yale in March 1984, Derrida's lectures were, a few weeks later, presented as part of the *René Wellek Library Lectures* (Krieger was one of Wellek's graduate students at Yale in the 1950s), a series of talks at UCI's Critical Theory Institute that encouraged an internationally

⁷²⁵ Derrida, “Typewriter Ribbon: Limited Ink (2),” in *Without Alibi*, trans. Peggy Kamuf (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2002), 71, 160.

⁷²⁶ Suzanne Gearhart, “Philosophy *Before* Literature: Deconstruction, Historicity, and the Work of Paul de Man,” *Diacritics* 13, no. 4 (1983): 63-81; Rodolphe Gasché, “Setzing and Übersetzung: Notes on Paul de Man,” *Diacritics* 11 (1981): 36-57.

distinguished critical theorist (in this case Derrida) to deliver a three lectures in which they developed their critical position *vis-à-vis* the contemporary theoretical scene.

At UCI, Suzanne Gearhart and David Carroll—two American literary critics favorable to the deconstructive cause—greatly encouraged Derrida to seize the moment. Gearhart and Carroll noted that de Man and his style of deconstructive reading had come for many to epitomize deconstructive literary criticism in North America. In order to clarify the relationship between de Man’s and Derrida’s work, Gearhart and Carroll urged Derrida to “analyze the different modes in which [Derrida] perceived, experienced, and interpreted...“Deconstruction in America.””⁷²⁷ Instead of directly addressing this topic, however, Derrida adopted his deconstructive stance and style of interpretation, a bearing and interpretive technique that transformed meaning into webs of differed and different meanings, and suggested that his or indeed any “narrative account for a phenomenon in progress,” a narrative of so-called deconstruction in America, would always proceed “like a set of narratives which could have no closure.”⁷²⁸

While Derrida did not deny that such narratives could be told, he claimed that “one cannot and should not attempt to survey or totalize the meaning of an ongoing process.” “To do so,” Derrida states, “would be to assign it limits which are not its own; to weaken it, to date it, to slow it down. For the moment, I do not care to do this. To make ‘deconstruction in America’ a theme or the object of an exhaustive definition is precisely, by definition, what defines the enemy of deconstruction... You can well understand that in this matter I am not the one in the greatest hurry.”⁷²⁹ Strictly adhering to his deconstructive method of reading, Derrida believed that for him, of all people, to narrate a history of “deconstruction in America” would provide a stable definition to the opponents of deconstruction and would, in turn, halt all those—varied and

⁷²⁷ Arac, Godzich, Martin eds., *The Yale Critics*.

⁷²⁸ Derrida, “Mnemosyne,” in *Memoires for Paul de Man*, 13-14.

⁷²⁹ *Ibid.*, 17.

different—deconstructive activities breaking down and transforming hierarchies of meaning across the humanities and social sciences.

Rather than provide a narrative of deconstruction in America, then, Derrida did the next thing for such a sad occasion. Derrida chose to interpret the work of his friend de Man, who had been so important for “deconstruction in America.” Nevertheless, much like how his deconstructive stance and style of reading necessitated that he refused to narrate “deconstruction in America,” Derrida assimilated de Man’s idiosyncratic project to his Derrida’s own undertaking. Derrida refused “to discuss the entire oeuvre of Paul de Man,” and instead “follow[ed]... a single thread,” that of “‘memories’ in memory of Paul de Man.” This thread in de Man’s work, Derrida believed, was a “place...of original, continuing reflection, yet still generally hidden...from [de Man’s] readers.” Written before the 1987 discovery of de Man’s wartime writings, Derrida chosen theme was unknowingly appropriate. According to Derrida, this thread “would intersect in a modest, limited way with the thread of ‘deconstruction in America.’”⁷³⁰ All in all, Derrida’s refusal to weave a story of “deconstruction in America” or of de Man’s oeuvre—Derrida opened his lectures with the statement: “I have never known how to tell a story”—surely advanced Derrida’s project, but left sympathetic and hostile critics alike still yearning for simple clarity from a “father of deconstruction” about “deconstruction in America.” Derrida however did not and would not, because of devotion to his deconstructive bearing and approach to interpretation, provide such a straightforward narrative.⁷³¹

Though storm clouds gathered back on the East Coast, the mood at UCI could not have been brighter to theory and deconstruction. And Irvine’s sunny days and sandy beaches looked increasingly appealing to those in the Yale camp hunger who hoped to continue to exercise of

⁷³⁰ Ibid., 48.

⁷³¹ Ibid., 3.

their deconstructive muscles. In fact, a year after Derrida's three lectures on and for de Man, UCI brought Miller in to give a series of René Wellek Library Lectures for the Critical Theory Institute's "The States of Theory" research project. Miller's lectures—later published in 1986 as *Ethics of Reading*—were, like the attitude at UCI, forward-looking and devoted to a topic that critics of deconstructive reading would have surely found surprising: the ethical issues that arose in connection with the reading and teaching of literature.⁷³² While Derrida avoided responding to attacks on "deconstruction" in his 1984 UCI lectures, Millet, drawing upon novels by George Eliot, Henry James, and Anthony Trollope as well as the work of Walter Benjamin, Paul de Man, and Immanuel Kant, explicitly wrote Miller's UCI lectures partly as a rejoinder to the by-then frequent charges that deconstructive criticism permitted the reader to willfully manipulate the meaning of a text and "is immoral because it annihilates the traditional use of the great texts of our culture from Homer and the Bible on down as the foundation and embodiment, the means of preserving and transmitting, the basic humanistic values of our culture."⁷³³

Donning his deconstructive persona, an equally de Manian as it was Derridean character, Miller argued that these charges—that deconstruction destroyed humanistic values—were blatant misreadings of what Derrida and de Man argued about "the relation of reader to text." According to Miller, de Man and Derrida stressed that the text itself made meaning rather than the reader made the meaning of the text. Unquestionably unexpected to deconstruction's critics, Miller, throughout his UCI lecture, claimed that, if, like Miller, one implemented deconstructive reading techniques, one would discern that his authors' texts—Eliot, James, Trollope, Benjamin, de Man,

⁷³² Miller, November 8, 1984 letter to Murray Krieger, Box 24, Folder 29 Irvine Offer 1985-1986, J. Hillis Miller Papers, The Critical Theory Archive, The University of California-Irvine, 1.

⁷³³ Derrida, "Mnemosyne," in *Memoires for Paul de Man*, 41-43 5f; Derrida largely relegated his response to footnotes in the published version of his talks, though he did respond to the charge of "nihilism" as manifested by conservative attacks on "deconstruction" in a 1983 *diacritics* essay. See Derrida, "The Principle of Reason: The University in the Eyes of Its Pupils," Catherine Porter and Edward P. Morris, trs. *Diacritics* 10, no. 1 (1983): 5-29 Miller, *The Ethics of Reading: Kant, de Man, Eliot, Trollope, James, and Benjamin* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1987), 9.

and Kant—contained and conveyed ethical moments, though of course his definition of an “ethical moment” was by no means a moral lesson that one could definitively define. Rather, Miller’s ethical moment was the deconstruction of presence, or what de Man called a “textual undecidable” in his rhetorical readings of the late-1970s: “By ‘the ethics of reading,’” Miller stated, “I mean that aspect of the act of reading in which there is a response to the text that is both necessitated, in the sense that it is a response to an irresistible demand, and free, in the sense that I must take responsibility for my response and for the further effects, ‘interpersonal,’ institutional, social, political, or historical, of my act of reading, for example as that act takes the form of teaching or of published commentary on a given text.”⁷³⁴ Though de Man, Derrida, and Miller’s critics would have been staggered by Miller’s notion of the “ethics of reading”—indeed, deconstruction to them was ostensibly and obviously nihilist and unconcerned with ethics, not to mention interpersonal, institutional, social, political, or historical effects—what transpired at Irvine was no less than a rather explicit and forceful shift in the focus of deconstructive literary criticism in North America.

Following Derrida’s 1984 and Miller’s 1985 Wellek lectures, not only did the Yale School extend its antennae to UCI, but UCI scholars and administrators in turn began to court Miller and Derrida. These scholars and administrators hoped, not to simply sponge off some of the deconstructive mood to Irvine, but to convince Miller and Derrida that Irvine, with its heady atmosphere, its intellectual and institutional support, would be the logical future home for the production, dissemination, and teaching of deconstructive reading practices in the United States. And, in the summer of 1985, several months after Miller’s three lectures on the “Ethics of Reading” at UCI’s Critical Theory Institute, Murray Krieger and William Lillyman—the former, as we know, a founder of the SCT, the latter, a conservative German scholar from Australia who,

⁷³⁴ Miller, *The Ethics of Reading*, 11, 15, 43.

Miller recalled in 2014, was “an administrator of genius,” as he, along with Krieger, “had much to do with making Irvine a center for theory”—began to actively court Miller.⁷³⁵ Besides his scholarly connections to UCI—Krieger and Miller for example both partook in Ehrmann’s 1965 Yale Colloquium—Miller saw UCI as a highly attractive place to work because it boasted the best diverse concentration of critical theorists in North America (and the world). Miller himself was also aware that critical theory was institutionalized at UCI in a way it never was at Yale. Specifically, there was the Critical Theory Institute where Miller and Derrida gave their Wellek lectures and the Critical Theory Ph.D. concentration, which required undergraduate and graduate courses in theory, as well as theory section obligatory in graduate qualifying exam. Though deconstruction was institutionalized at Yale in the Literature Major, above all the XYZ sequence, in the Yale graduate program in English a student could still get a Ph.D. without ever having taken a theory course or being examined on it in one’s qualifying exam.⁷³⁶ And, unlike at Yale, where theory was not institutionalized in the English Department, theory at Irvine flourished in what was a combined English and Comparative Department since the department’s beginnings in the mid-1960s.

With all these intellectual and institutional differences between UCI and Yale in the air as well as in the ground so to speak, Miller began to seriously consider the advantages and disadvantages of moving to UCI, an institution which, to him, embodied the promise, hope, and opportunity. In an August 20, 1985 letter to Lillyman, Miller speculated that there “may already be occurring a move to the west coast as the center of literary study and literary theory.”⁷³⁷ And, in a letter written to Derrida on the same day as his dispatch to Lillyman, Miller pondered

⁷³⁵ Jones-Katz, “Constantly Contingent,” 65.

⁷³⁶ *Ibid.*

⁷³⁷ Miller to Lillyman, August 20, 1985 letter, Box 24, Folder 29 Irvine Offer 1985-1986, J. Hillis Miller Papers, The Critical Theory Archive, The University of California-Irvine, 1.

“whether there is not occurring now a general shift of intellectual activity to the West Coast and whether both of us might not have a greater effect for ‘deconstruction in America’ out there than in spending another decade at Yale.” “Yale will always be Yale,” Miller continued, “but I wonder if we have done about as much as can be done there for the moment. Certainly Paul [de Man] thought so, and spoke in his last months of how he had thought he could make a real change in Yale but ‘had not made a dent’ in the place.”⁷³⁸ For Miller, the time was ripe for him and others for an institutional change.

But, if UCI was the future to Miller—the future of literary study and literary theory, the future of intellectual activity, and the future of “deconstruction in America”—then the school had to meet certain specific stipulations to ensure the transfer of and assist the alliance between the UCI literary-critical community and the Yale School. For example, Miller—as well as Derrida, with whom Miller had been discussing a possible move—was concerned with “the quality of graduate students who might be attracted to Irvine. As compared to the Yale ones.”⁷³⁹ This was an issue that Krieger assured Miller that he did not have to worry about, as graduate funding was and would continue to be generous at UCI, and that Irvine was attracting some of the best doctoral students in the country who were interested in Critical Theory, of course all because Irvine was a great center of literary study and literary theory.

The negotiating did not end there, however. After Krieger quelled Miller’s concerns about the excellence of UCI graduate students, Miller explained to Lillyman that Derrida’s concerns had to be allayed as well. Specifically, Miller told Lillyman that, if Derrida was to transfer to UCI, then he had to be assured that he would have “the public forum he ha[d] for one of his three seminars a week at Yale, that is, a format in which students and colleagues from all

⁷³⁸ Miller to Derrida, August 20, 1985 letter, Box 24, Folder 29 Irvine Offer 1985-1986, J. Hillis Miller Papers, The Critical Theory Archive, The University of California-Irvine, 1.

⁷³⁹ Ibid.

over, not just from Yale, [were] welcome.” As Miller relayed to Derrida in a August 26, 1985 letter: “I’ve mentioned one or two things in a letter to the Vice Chancellor [at Irvine] that I think would be important in your consideration (lecturing in French; something like the open forum for your seminar once a week, as you have it at Yale) of an invitation they make to you.”⁷⁴⁰ And during all these back and forth negotiations, Miller was sending out feelers to and soliciting the opinions of colleagues at UCI about his potential move West. Miller wanted to determine what the UCI community had to offer Miller and other deconstructionists. In a September 15, 1985 letter to Professor of English and Comparative Literature at UCI Wolfgang Iser, a German literary scholar who became known during the late 1960s and 1970 for his reader-response theory in literary criticism, Miller expressed his excitement at the possibility of being at “Irvine with you [Iser], Murray [Krieger], [Jean-Françoise] Lyotard, the younger people already there, to which may possibly be added Derrida (for five weeks a year), and...my brilliant young colleague here [at Yale], Andrzej Warminski.”⁷⁴¹ Certainly, UCI seemed like a promising home where Miller could align his deconstructive project with UCI’s Critical Theory.

Eventually, it did for Derrida as well. When Miller met with the Lillyman to discuss the terms of UCI’s offer, Lillyman asked Miller if there was any subject that he would like to raise, anything that he might miss from Yale. Miller replied that he valued having Derrida as a visiting colleague at Yale. “We’ll hire him,” said Lillyman, “How much does he make?” Miller told him, and Lillyman said, “We can increase that by 50%.” In a 2015 interview, Miller recalled that he left the meeting thinking Lillyman was just “talking through his hat,” but in a week Miller had an offer for Derrida at a greatly increased salary and as a permanent tenured off-scale (meaning above the normal salary rankings) full distinguished professor third time appointee in

⁷⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁷⁴¹ Miller to Wolfgang Iser, September 15, 1985 letter, Box 24, Folder 29 Irvine Offer 1985-1986, J. Hillis Miller Papers, The Critical Theory Archive, The University of California-Irvine, 1.

“Humanities” with joint appointments all around, even in the philosophy department.⁷⁴²

Derrida’s appointment at UCI meant that his intellectual and institutional reach transcended disciplines; Derrida was in effect a theorist whose influence could and did extend to all humanities departments. And, in a sense, Derrida became the embodiment of the ideal Critical Theorist, a master thinker and practitioner of theory—in Derrida’s case the formulator and user of his own deconstructive stance and style of interpretation—whose work could achieve Krieger and Adam’s grandiose aim during the late-1970s to unify the humanities, though of course Derridean deconstruction aimed to do so by way of differentiation and dissemination.

Derrida’s appointment as a tenured professor also guaranteed the stability of his position, not just at Irvine but, because of UCI’s growing reputation, in the North America academy as well. This stability was something that Derrida never had at Yale, as Yale never even offered him the possibility of tenure. Every academic year, de Man and Miller had to explain to the Yale Provost that Derrida was an internationally renowned scholar and a wonderful teacher whose seminars were attended by up to eighty students and faculty even though they were in French, and could they please appoint him for another year as a ‘lecturer without permanent appointment’ for a six week visit to give the equivalent of a semester of graduate seminars.⁷⁴³

Derrida’s and Miller’s intellectual and institutional presences ensured Irvine’s department of Critical Theory became the most famous in North America, attracting students from across the United States and, indeed, the world. For example, overflow crowds always attended Derrida’s seminars, which crammed the equivalent of ten traditional weeks of an academic semester into five weeks. And UCI faculty and administrators were well aware of not only Derrida’s, but also Miller’s draw. “With the addition of J. Hillis Miller to our already strong program in literary

⁷⁴² Derrida would come to share his post with French philosopher, sociologist, and literary theorist Jean-François Lyotard in the autumn, and Wolfgang Iser in the winter.

⁷⁴³ Jones-Katz, “Constantly Contingent,” 65, 45.

criticism, our School of Humanities will command even closer attention in academic circles,” UCI Chancellor Jack Peltason wrote in a prescient statement. “Miller’s arrival is an indication of our depth in the humanities as well as science and medicine.”⁷⁴⁴ And Krieger, UCI’s longtime supporter and organizer of theory at Irvine, was especially happy about the addition of Miller to the faculty ranks: “It is a terrible loss for Yale, but an absolute breakthrough for Irvine. With him and others who will follow, Irvine should be the best place anywhere for literary criticism.”⁷⁴⁵ For the rest of the 1980s and 1990s, Krieger’s prediction came true, with UCI becoming the most respected and important place for literary criticism and theory more generally in not only the United States but the entire world.

Deconstruction at Home, in Theory

On February 9, 1986, *The New York Times Magazine* published Colin Campbell’s article “The tyranny of the Yale Critics,” an attack on the Yale School and Derrida, “the man who invented deconstruction.” Campbell’s article was rather shrill, asserting that, ever since the 1970s, the “hermeneutical mafia” had extended its tentacles over literary studies at Yale, and from there, to universities across the United States, with many of the most prominent literary critics adapting Derrida’s ideas, all to the detriment of the profession.⁷⁴⁶ Though Campbell’s *NYTM* article was supposed to be insightful and timely, it was in fact dated, and not only because it aimed at an intellectual configuration and institutional presence at Yale that, after de Man’s death in 1983, had already lost its main source attraction. Campbell’s article was dated also because it targeted a group that had at that point effectively disbanded, and willingly so one might add. Hartman and Bloom had for almost half a decade moved on from either producing

⁷⁴⁴ Quote in Phil Sneiderman, “Yale literary prof. lured away to UCI,” *Orange Coast Daily Pilot*, February 2, 1986.

⁷⁴⁵ *Ibid.*

⁷⁴⁶ Campbell, “The Tyranny of the Yale Critics.”

deconstructive readings or engaging in a productive struggle with deconstructive interpretive practices, while Miller and Derrida soon jumped ship to UCI. Nevertheless, the Yale School continued to exert influence, its legacy spread through teaching, lecturing, and publications.

Epilogue: The Eclipse of the Age of Deconstruction

In the early summer of 1987, three years after Paul de Man's death, Belgian graduate student Ortwin de Graef discovered that when de Man was in his early twenties he contributed approximately two hundred pro-German articles to the Nazi-controlled press during the early years of the German occupation of his native Belgium.⁷⁴⁷ In August of that year at a conference in Antwerp, de Graef informed Samuel Weber, a former student and colleague of de Man, of his discovery. Upon his return to the United States, Weber passed on the upsetting information to Derrida. Derrida then contacted de Graef, who, aware that he was "handling a dangerous and spectacular explosive," sent Derrida twenty-five of de Man's essays.⁷⁴⁸ Three months later, in December 1987 and following a *New York Times* article on de Graef's discovery, editors of the journal *Critical Inquiry*, proposed to Derrida that he "be the first to speak" about the revelations.⁷⁴⁹ Derrida agreed, and in the spring of 1988, he published a response to the revelations in *Critical Inquiry*. Applying his deconstructive reading techniques to de Man's wartime texts, Derrida argued that, while these writings at first appeared to conform to the official rhetoric of the occupation forces, a careful reading—that is, a reading in which one interrogates such obvious meanings—reveals that de Man's writings in fact subverted the Nazis' agenda.⁷⁵⁰ Whatever de Man's intentions, his articles, according to Derrida, undermined the rhetoric of the German occupation.

⁷⁴⁷ "Yale Scholar's Wrote for Pro-Nazi Paper," *New York Times*, December 1, 1987. See the volume *De Man, Wartime Journalism, 1939-1943*, ed. Werner Hamacher, Neil Hertz, and Thomas Keenan (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1988).

⁷⁴⁸ "Paul de Man's War," 597.

⁷⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 596. "Yale Scholar's Wrote for Pro-Nazi Paper."

⁷⁵⁰ Derrida, "Like the Sound Deep Within a Shell: Paul de Man's War," *Critical Inquiry* 14, no. 2(1988): 607. Throughout this essay, italicization is in the original unless otherwise noted.

For many, including a few in the deconstructive camp, Derrida's readings were preposterous, offensive even. Five respondents in *Critical Inquiry* charged Derrida with trying—and ultimately failing—to explain away the clear meanings of his friend's articles.⁷⁵¹ Notwithstanding respondents' accusations, Derrida himself even noted the “indelible wound” of de Man's anti-Semitic article, “*Les Juifs dans la littérature actuelle*,” which was published in *Le Soir*, Belgium's most popular newspaper, on March 4, 1941. In his article, de Man chillingly argued, among other things, that “the solution of the Jewish problem” would not be detrimental to the “literary life of the West.”⁷⁵² De Man's wartime writings repulsed readers, and not only de Man's critics, but his friends and colleagues as well. And yet, though Derrida recognized the ineffaceable injury of de Man's writings, he never successfully reconciled it with his own championing of de Man's subversion of the ideology of the Nazi occupation.⁷⁵³ Derrida's deconstructive reading of de Man's pro-German wartime writings seemed to contradict his personal response to de Man's articles.

By way of the “de Man affair,” particularly the exchange between Derrida and the five *Critical Inquiry* respondents, this conclusion explores the legacy of the Yale School and deconstructive reading practices in the North American academy in the 1990s and early-twentieth century. The following will first explore Derrida's deconstructive readings of his friend's wartime writings, which not only proved highly controversial, becoming red meat for hungry enemies of deconstruction, who offered them as proof of deconstruction's nihilism. The ensuing debate over Derrida's deconstructive readings of de Man's wartime writings and his thirty-five years of silence also exposed the limits of Derrida's techniques of reading, of solely adopting a hermeneutics of suspicion for the interpretation of objects and events of the world.

⁷⁵¹ For respondents' essays, see *Critical Inquiry* 15 (1989).

⁷⁵² *Ibid.*, 623. Quoted in Derrida, “Paul de Man's War.”

⁷⁵³ “Paul de Man's War,” 631.

The debate catalogued the shattering of deconstructionists' assertion that language was incapable of channeling "presence," overturning their belief that the past was "an absence, a nothingness, a page on which to write, a place for dreams and images."⁷⁵⁴ Even those sympathetic to Derrida have reflected that "[t]he dramatic discovery...of de Man's wartime journalism rudely interrupted the American dream of deconstruction as 'the joyous affirmation of the play of the world and of the innocence of becoming'...[A]fter the de Man affair, never again such innocence."⁷⁵⁵ For many, the revelation of de Man's wartime writings marked the beginning of the end of the critical supremacy of deconstructive reading practices, those interpretative practices the Yale School and their colleagues helped install as some of the most fashionable and innovative modes of reading in the North American academy during the last three decades of the twentieth-century. Nevertheless, despite this reaction, the Yale School members' and their students' deconstructive reading techniques continued to exert considerable influence in the North American academy. As explored in this epilogue's second section, the debates of the de Man Affair threatened but ultimately did not overtake the diverse ways that Yale School members and their students applied and disseminated deconstructive interpretive techniques.

The 1987-1989 *Critical Inquiry* Debate

Whether he intended it to or not, Derrida's seventy-two page *cri de cœur* in the Spring 1988 issue of *Critical Inquiry*, titled "Like the Sound Deep Within a Shell: Paul de Man's War," stoked the flames of the 1987-1989 de Man Affair. It did so largely because Derrida's

⁷⁵⁴ Gumbrecht, "Presence Achieved In Language (With Special Attention Given to the Presence of the Past), *History and Theory* 45, no. 2 (2006): 317-327; Michael Bentley, "Past and 'Presence': Revisiting Historical Ontology," *History and Theory* 45, no. 2 (2006): 349.

⁷⁵⁵ Quoted in Derrida, *Writing and Difference*, 292; *life.after.theory* eds. Michael Payne and John Schad (Continuum 2003), 175.

deconstructive readings of de Man's wartime writings and his thirty-five years of silence directly fed into the impressions inside and outside the North American academy about Derrida and his "deconstruction." Derrida and the Yale School members' deconstructive reading practices, one should recall, had already provoked rather extreme, sometimes downright hysterical, responses. In the press, for example, such vilification stretched back to the early-1980s, when conservatives such as William Bennett in the *Wall Street Journal* launched polemics against deconstruction, condemning it as a movement against Western civilization. But there was also been little love lost for deconstruction during the 1970s and early-1980s among members of the North American left, from Marxists to Liberals, many of whom faulted Derrida and his epigones for an inadequate commitment to truth that made it impossible to develop a political philosophy.⁷⁵⁶

Derrida's deconstructive reading of de Man's silence in his *Critical Inquiry* essay supplied fresh fodder for these opponents of deconstruction. For example, at beginning of his essay, Derrida stated that he did not know of the "dark time spent between 1940-42 by the Paul de Man [he] later read, knew, admired, loved."⁷⁵⁷ In writing this, Derrida acknowledged what was obvious to himself and others: de Man remained silent about his life during World War II, never once openly explaining the relationship between his postwar work and his earlier collaborationist activities. Because of Derrida's commitment to his deconstructive interpretive technique, however, he was obligated to interrogate the conceptual opposition between de Man's silence and the ways de Man did speak about his past. In other words, Derrida attempted "to deconstruct" de Man's silence, to uncover any overlooked statements by de Man about his past. After acknowledging de Man's muteness, for instance, Derrida observed that de Man's silence "was not absolute," but "was publicly broken on at least one occasion." "In 1955," Derrida

⁷⁵⁶ For a good summary of these attacks, see Rapaport, 27-33.

⁷⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 596-597.

stated, “while de Man was at Harvard [as a graduate student], there was an anonymous denunciation concerning his activity in Belgium during the war. And de Man explained himself at that moment, in a letter...to the Head of the Society of Fellows.”⁷⁵⁸ In the letter, de Man clarified that, “during the German occupation, in 1940-42, he maintained a literary column, but when the pressure of German censorship became too much...he ceased writing and did what decency demanded that he do.”⁷⁵⁹ Having “explain[ed] himself publicly on at least one occasion,” Derrida wrote, de Man’s silence therefore “cannot be understood in the sense of a dissimulation.”

After establishing the conceptual opposition between de Man’s total silence and his open acknowledgement of the past in his Harvard letter, Derrida continued to apply his deconstructive reading technique, offering a different avenue through which de Man disclosed his past. Derrida “deconstructed” the binary between de Man’s total silence and his open acknowledgement of his past by way of introducing the concept of de Man’s indirect affirmation of past events. Derrida wrote: “I am left to meditate, endlessly, on all the reasons that induced him not to speak of it more...What could the ordeal of this mutism have been, for him? I can only imagine it.” Derrida argued that for de Man to have “incited...a public debate” about his wartime activities would have been a “distressing, pointlessly painful theatricalization,” “a pretentious, ridiculous, and infinitely complicated gesture.” Derrida concluded: “I prefer, upon reflection, that he chose not to...provoke...this spectacular and painful discussion.”⁷⁶⁰ After explaining de Man’s lack of openly speaking to Derrida and others about his past, Derrida then suggested that de Man did in fact speak to him about his wartime activities, but implicitly, indirectly: “At moments I say to myself: he supposed perhaps that I knew, if only from reading him, everything he never spoke to

⁷⁵⁸ Ibid., 636.

⁷⁵⁹ Ibid., 636-637.

⁷⁶⁰ Ibid., 639.

me about. And perhaps in effect I did know it in an obscure way.”⁷⁶¹ And for Derrida, de Man’s writings were the best place to hear his—oblique—commentary on his wartime activities.

Derrida wrote: “I invite those who wonder about his silence to read” de Man’s work. Derrida concluded: “[H]e did the right thing, I say to myself, by leaving us...[with] an ordeal, the summons to a work of reading...an interminable analysis.”⁷⁶² For Derrida, his and others’ obligation was to endlessly apply deconstructive stances and styles of reading to what at first appeared to be de Man’s obvious thirty-five years of silence. By doing so, according to Derrida, one would see that de Man had in fact spoken about his wartime collaboration, albeit in an indirect manner.

Due to the reception of Derrida’s work in North America, above all the routine portrayal of his project as an anti-historical, nihilistic theory of interpretation, *Critical Inquiry* respondents overlooked the role Derrida’s commitment to his deconstructive reading techniques played in his interpretation of de Man’s silence. In his response, W. Wolfgang Holdheim, Professor of German Literature at Cornell University, argued that Derrida’s “comments on de Man’s persistent silence about his past” were “implausible and self-defeating.” Derrida “manages to interpret de Man’s silence as a virtue and a necessity.”⁷⁶³ American historian Jon Wiener of the University of California-Irvine concurred. He argued that Derrida’s explanation also dismissed de Man’s questionable behavior. “One of [de Man’s] students,” Wiener wrote, “reported that when asked about his past, de Man lied. Derrida was aware of this evidence when he wrote his essay.”⁷⁶⁴ And, Wiener argued, Derrida’s suggestion that “de Man ‘did the right thing’ when he

⁷⁶¹ Ibid., 649.

⁷⁶² Ibid., 639.

⁷⁶³ W. Wolfgang Holdheim, “Jacques Derrida’s Apologia,” *Critical Inquiry* 15 (1989): 793.

⁷⁶⁴ This student was Juliet Flower MacCannell. She stated “‘I asked him what he did during the war. He said ‘I went to England and worked as a translator.’” Quoted in Jon Wiener, “Jacques Derrida on Paul de Man’s Collaboration,” *Critical Inquiry* 15, no. 4 (1989): 800.

hid the truth about his past,” was “a morally bankrupt argument,” “minimiz[ing] the extent of the problem de Man's actions pose.”⁷⁶⁵ Contrary to Derrida’s justifications of de Man’s silence, Wiener maintained that, “[i]f Paul de Man had wanted to, he could have found a way during his adult life to explain what he had done and what he thought about it.”⁷⁶⁶ Disregarding not only how but also why Derrida applied his deconstructive reading techniques to the obvious signs of de Man’s silence, *Critical Inquiry* respondents viewed Derrida’s reading simply as an outright denial of de Man’s silence, as an attempt to mitigate the personal and professional damage caused by the revelations.

Yet, because *Critical Inquiry* respondents overlooked how and why Derrida’s deconstructive project produced his reading of de Man’s silence, they did not simply find Derrida’s verbal contortions unacceptable. Respondents also failed to note the moments when Derrida’s own suspicious reading of de Man’s silence did not even satisfy Derrida himself. Towards the end of his interpretation of de Man’s silence, after his claim that de Man’s silence was not absolute and his suggestion that de Man indirectly spoke about his wartime activities, Derrida wrote: “*Even if sometimes a murmur of protest stirs in me, I prefer, upon reflection, that he chose not to take it on himself to provoke, during his life, this spectacular and painful discussion.*”⁷⁶⁷ Though Derrida’s commitment to his suspicious reading practice moved him “to deconstruct” the clear signs of de Man’s silence and reveal the unapparent ways de Man spoke about his past, a complaint from within Derrida himself disapproved.⁷⁶⁸ Derrida resisted his suggestion (to himself) that the de Man he “read, knew, admired, loved” was silent and “did the

⁷⁶⁵ Wiener, 799.

⁷⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 799.

⁷⁶⁷ *Ibid.* Emphasis added.

⁷⁶⁸ *Ibid.*

right thing.”⁷⁶⁹ Derrida’s “murmur of protest” was a sign of what his suspicious reading could not overcome, what he could not “deconstruct,” what could neither be distanced nor avoided: de Man’s silence. Though Derrida continued to employ deconstructive stances and styles of reading during to his own initial interpretation of de Man’s silence, his language invariably pointed to de Man’s silence rather than stood “for it.”

A similar failure of Derrida’s hermeneutic of suspicious occurred during his deconstructive reading of de Man’s wartime writings. Derrida argued that while de Man’s wartime texts at first appeared to conform to the official rhetoric of the occupation forces, a careful reading reveals that de Man’s writings in fact subverted the Nazis’ agenda. Derrida for example initially recognized de Man’s complicity with the official rhetoric of the German occupation. He wrote: “*On the one hand*, [the]...*dominant* effect [of ‘Les Juifs’ went] unquestionably in the direction of the worst.” De Man “describes the traits of what...are ‘degenerate and decadent, because enjuivés [“enjewished”]’ cultural phenomena...; he mentions the ‘important role’ that the Jews have played in ‘the phony and disordered existence of Europe since 1920.’ He has recourse...to the stereotypical description of the ‘Jewish spirit’: ‘cerebralness,’ ‘capacity for assimilating doctrines while maintaining a certain coldness in the face of them.’ He notes that ‘Jewish writers have always remained in the second rank’.” And, “a terrifying conclusion,” with de Man suggesting that “the creation of a Jewish colony isolated from Europe would not entail, for the literary life of the West, deplorable consequences.”⁷⁷⁰ For Derrida, “Les Juifs,” upon a first reading, unmistakably corresponded to the principal context in which it was read in 1941.

⁷⁶⁹ Ibid., 596-597.

⁷⁷⁰ Ibid., 622-623. Quoted in Derrida.

However, Derrida's commitment to his deconstructive techniques of reading pushed him to question the relationship between "Les Juifs" and its obvious historical context. "[O]n the other hand and first of all," Derrida wrote, "the primary, declared, and underscored intention" of "Les Juifs" was "an indictment of 'vulgar anti-Semitism.'" While "condemn[ing] vulgar antisemitism may leave one to understand that there is a distinguished antisemitism in whose name the vulgar variety is put down," Derrida wrote, de Man did not make this claim. Therefore, Derrida argued, "the phrase can also mean something else, and this reading can always contaminate the other in a clandestine fashion: to condemn 'vulgar antisemitism,' especially if one makes no mention of the other kind, is to condemn antisemitism itself inasmuch as it is vulgar, always and essentially vulgar."⁷⁷¹ From Derrida's deconstructive perspective, this second meaning of the phrase "vulgar anti-Semitism" may at first appear farfetched, but this implausibility results from Western metaphysics' privileging of the conviction in the union between presence and language. For Derrida, however, "[o]ne ought not...condemn these sentences...without examining everything that remains readable in a text one can judge to be disastrous." According to Derrida, one must continue to apply deconstructive interpretive techniques, which, in this instance, meant to identify the opposite meaning of de Man's thesis against "vulgar antisemitism."

Having uncovered an unobvious sign, Derrida gathered examples to support what he read as de Man's counterarguments against the official ideology of the German occupation. "It is not," Derrida observed about de Man's argument, "particularly conformist to denounce antisemitism, an antisemitism, whichever it may be, at that moment, in that place."⁷⁷² And, Derrida wrote: "if de Man's article is necessarily contaminated by the forms of vulgar

⁷⁷¹ Ibid., 624-625.

⁷⁷² Ibid., 625.

antisemitism that frame it [de Man's article is surrounded on the Le Soir page by anti-Semitic articles], these coincide in a literal fashion, in their vocabulary and logic, with the very thing that de Man accuses, as if his article were denouncing the neighboring articles."⁷⁷³ De Man also, Derrida argued, even had the courage to suggest that "Gide, Kafka, Lawrence, Hemingway, surrealism, futurism" were "already canonical: they belong to tradition, they have 'orthodox ancestors.'" De Man thus "reinscribes all of these 'accursed ones' in the then protective legitimacy of the canon and in the great literary family."⁷⁷⁴ De Man, by placing these literary figures inside the European tradition, mocked the authorized rhetoric of the German occupation that cast these modernist writers and artists as "Degenerate Art." For Derrida, "Les Juifs," when one has the "courage," can be seen to carry anticonformist attacks against and into the social context he had been hired to endorse at Le Soir.⁷⁷⁵ For Derrida, in other words, if one continued to apply the deconstructive stance and style of reading to de Man's "Les Juifs," then even statements that went "unquestionably in the direction of the worst" could be shown to contain subversive meanings that were initially unapparent.

And yet, Derrida, like his deconstructive reading of de Man's silence, could not completely convince himself of his suspicious reading of the obvious meanings of "Les Juifs." As if attempting to wholly suppress the undeniable physical reality of de Man's "Les Juifs," Derrida, in the last paragraph of his "on the one hand" section, wrote: "It is also necessary, when evaluating *this* act, *this* text...to maintain a 'certain coldness' and to take the trouble of that 'work of lucid analysis' de Man associates with this 'coldness' even as he attributes it, *in this very text*, to the Jews. As these traits are rules of intellectual responsibility rather than natural characteristics reserved to Jews and Frenchmen, does not the 'work of analysis' have to be

⁷⁷³ Ibid., 625-626.

⁷⁷⁴ Ibid., 628.

⁷⁷⁵ Ibid., 625, 623.

tirelessly pursued with ‘a certain coldness?’”⁷⁷⁶ Derrida struggled to pivot to his second reading. He strained to adopt his deconstructive technique “in the face of the *unpardonable* violence and confusion of [de Man’s] sentences.” Derrida resisted his “deconstruction” of the evident meanings of de Man’s article.⁷⁷⁷

Derrida’s closing paragraph contains the likely reason for his inability “to deconstruct” de Man’s antisemitic article. He wrote: “Through the *indelible wound*, one must still analyze and seek to understand. Any concession would betray, besides a complacent indulgence and a lack of rigor, an infinitely culpable thoughtlessness.”⁷⁷⁸ For Derrida, to accept that text’s obvious meanings and choose silence—to thus not adopt a deconstructive stance and style to read de Man’s “Les Juifs”—would be to fail to take his responsibilities. While able “to deconstruct” and subdue the occasional “murmur of protest” against his interpretation of de Man’s silence, Derrida was unable to leave his first interpretations behind—that is, unable to transform the content of de Man’s article into a presupposition. Derrida’s “indelible wound” signaled that additional language would never erase or alter the damage caused by the obvious meanings of de Man’s article.

Even more fiercely than Derrida’s deconstructive reading of de Man’s silence, *Critical Inquiry* respondents contested Derrida interpretation of de Man’s wartime journalism, particularly his reading of de Man’s “Les Juifs.” “Try as he can,” Professor of American Literature John Brenkman and Professor of English Jules David Law wrote, “Derrida cannot make de Man’s first two paragraphs [of ‘Les Juifs’],” which contain de Man’s thesis against “vulgar antisemitism,” “sound anything more than ambiguous at best.”⁷⁷⁹ And Derrida’s

⁷⁷⁶ Ibid.

⁷⁷⁷ Ibid.

⁷⁷⁸ Ibid., 631. Emphasis added.

⁷⁷⁹ John Brenkman and Jules David Law, “Resetting the Agenda,” *Critical Inquiry* 15 (1989): 809.

application of his second reading of de Man's thesis to the remaining paragraphs of "Les Juifs," Brenkman and Law asserted, is a "blatant misreading" that ignored that "the controlling paragraph...is more plausibly the final one—envisioning the forced removal of Jews from Europe—in the light of which Derrida should have realized that the supposed ambiguity of the first paragraphs was sinister rather than coy."⁷⁸⁰ Holdheim agreed with Brenkman and Law, arguing that Derrida's reading of "Les Juifs" is "a matter of making the text say something other than what it says." Derrida achieved this goal by "employ[ing]...the age-old salami technique, which consists in cutting off slice after slice until the sausage has totally disappeared."⁷⁸¹ Derrida's deconstruction allowed him to dissolve incriminating evidence against de Man: as Derrida's reading of "Les Juifs" progressed, Holdheim wrote, "de Man is increasingly depicted as a man who had (quite monistically) the right ideas and tried to smuggle them into a hostile context. He had to do so, supposedly, in covert and ironic ways."⁷⁸² For respondents, de Man's "Les Juifs" unmistakably corresponded to the surrounding context. And only a perverse reading—such as Derrida's—would try to transform de Man's racist complicity into a surreptitious resistance to all notions of anti-Semitism.⁷⁸³ Though Derrida passionately offered a variety of interpretations of de Man's wartime articles, he struggled—and failed—to defend his friend.⁷⁸⁴

Derrida's interpretations of de Man fed the widespread view of deconstruction inside and outside the North American academy as anti-historical, amoral, or, at the very least, ethically questionable. For Derrida, however, his obligation was to apply his deconstructive stance and style of reading to de Man, and thus consider interpretations different from what at first appeared

⁷⁸⁰ Ibid., 809-810.

⁷⁸¹ Holdheim, 789.

⁷⁸² Ibid., 792.

⁷⁸³ Holub, 160.

⁷⁸⁴ Wiener, 797.

to be de Man's total silence and the obvious meanings of his wartime articles. From Derrida's perspective, respondents' refusal to entertain alternate readings was proof of their rejection of the deconstructive mode of reading. For example, Professor of English Marjorie Perloff's point that Derrida "never once refer[ed] to...the history books of the period, the archives, protocols, and documents published in and about Belgium" highlights that respondents never tackled the reason behind Derrida's deconstructions of de Man's silence and wartime writings.⁷⁸⁵ Because *Critical Inquiry* respondents focused solely on the errors and inaccuracies of Derrida's essay, they failed to see and understand how and why his defense of de Man had pushed Derrida to the limit of his hermeneutic of suspicion. They failed to see the instances when Derrida was unable to leave his first responses to the obvious meanings of de Man's silence and wartime writings behind. Thus, beyond being a debate over de Man's wartime writings, a debate that nicely captured media representations of Derrida and his work, the *Critical Inquiry* debate chronicled a threshold moment for deconstructive reading techniques. Specifically, the *Critical Inquiry* debate registered the limits of North American deconstructionists' insistence that language is unable to permit the things of the world to become tangible and accessible to consciousness and sensory perception. In this regard,

The Legacy of the Yale School

After the publication of Derrida's 1988 essay on de Man and the responses the following year, the next year or so saw a series of exchanges in venues other than *Critical Inquiry* over the meaning of de Man's wartime writings, his thirty-five years of silence, and the relationship between his collaborationist writings and his postwar work. These debates, in total, came to be known as the de Man Affair. And, just like Derrida feared and as he expressed in his initial

⁷⁸⁵ Marjorie Perloff, "Response to Jacques Derrida," *Critical Inquiry* 15, no. 4 (1989): 768.

Critical Inquiry article on de Man, many inside and outside the North American academy opposed to Derrida and de Man's work used the revelations of de Man's past as a club with which to beat their enemies. For them, "[U]nable to defeat deconstruction intellectually," Hartman observed in his 2007 memoir, "its American opponents used the Holocaust cudgel against it. Deconstruction was condemned as, somehow, the extension of a fascistic mindset."⁷⁸⁶ De Man's detractors felt vindicated—one professor anonymously proclaiming in a February 16, 1987 issue of *Newsweek* that "'deconstruction turned out to be the thousand-year Reich that lasted 12 years.'"⁷⁸⁷ For many, de Man had been unmasked as a fraud who had used his anti-historical deconstructive reading strategy to protect himself from accusations of the blatant collaboration during his youth. While de Man's friends and colleagues came to his defense and implored that one approach de Man's life and work with great care, others felt betrayed, wondering if de Man, despite his apparent 'real[ness],' was simply a confidence man.⁷⁸⁸ Like Derrida, de Man's former allies were shocked and dismayed. Barbara Johnson, de Man's former graduate student could simply not "avoid feeling rage and disgust" at de Man's anti-Semitic article.⁷⁸⁹

Though the controversy surrounding de Man threatened to bury "deconstruction," the work of the Yale School in fact continued its digestion in universities and colleges in the United States and around the world. This absorption, begun in the 1970s, occurred through traditional academic paths: teaching, publications, lecturing, and faculty appointments, the latter at Yale and across the United States of younger scholars who had been influenced by the work of the original

⁷⁸⁶ Hartman, *A Scholar's Tale*, 82.

⁷⁸⁷ David Lehman, "Deconstructing de Man's Life," *Newsweek*, February 15, 1988, 65.

⁷⁸⁸ See for example, Jonathan Culler, "It's Time to Set the Record Straight about Paul de Man and His Wartime Articles for a Pro-Fascist Newspaper," *Chronicle of Higher Education* 34 (1988): B1; Hartman, *A Scholar's Tale*, 87.

⁷⁸⁹ Johnson, "The Surprise of Otherness: A Note on the Wartime Writings of Paul de Man," in *A World of Difference*, xv, xi.

five Yale School members. Several generations of graduate students in Yale's Departments of Literature had listened to de Man's seminars, attended Derrida's annual lectures, or studied under Bloom, Hartman, and Miller.⁷⁹⁰

Take for example Miller, who, soon after his arrival at Yale in 1972, accrued a large number of dissertation advisees, most of whom wanted to work with him on the Victorian novel. Two of Miller's many doctoral advisees from that time were Eve Sedgwick and Margaret Homans; the former, as explored in Chapter Four, went on to become a groundbreaking work in gender studies and queer theory.⁷⁹¹ Harold Bloom stood in stark contrast to Miller, who was active in Yale's English department—he served as chair for three years in the 1970s—and directed the dissertations of a cohort of graduate students at both Yale and then the University of California-Irvine. Bloom, as explored in Chapter Three, left Yale's English department in 1975. He had convinced his old friend A. Bartlett Giamatti, a former Renaissance scholar at Yale who became the university's president in 1978, to make him an extra-departmental Professor of Humanities. With his new appointment, Bloom retained little of the duties required as a member of the English department, including attending departmental meetings, serving on graduate student exams, or even directing dissertations. Bloom developed the habit, begun in the early-1980s, of making rather boastful declarations of not generating “disciplines” or “clones.” In a 1985 interview for example, Bloom said that de Man was “[t]he best critic and best human being I've known.” Despite such high praise of de Man as a critic and a human, however, Bloom also expressed his dislike with “what [de Man did] as a teacher, because [his] students [were] as alike as two peas in a pod.”⁷⁹² While Bloom certainly gained a great deal of independence from Yale's bureaucracy and his everyday presence within the English department shrunk, he continued to

⁷⁹⁰ Miller himself has reflected on this legacy of the Yale School. See Miller, “Tales out of (the Yale) School,” 128.

⁷⁹¹ Warminksi, “Interview: ‘Deconstruction at Yale,’” 227.

⁷⁹² Harold Bloom, interview by Imre Salusinszky, in *Criticism in Society*, 67.

extend his influence, which grew by way of his publications and lectures at Yale and elsewhere. In these ways, Bloom's authority and presence on the North American literary-critical scene remained quite strong.⁷⁹³

Whether or not one lamented de Man's influence on his students, de Man's legacy was undeniably in large part due to the extraordinary number of graduate students whose dissertations he supervised and the great number of these students who came to occupy chairs in the North American academy.⁷⁹⁴ His students included: Ian Balfour, Ellen Burt, Roger Blood, Cynthia Chase, Samuel Chase, Barbara Johnson, Gayatri Spivak, and Andrzej Warminski. What is most conspicuous about this second generation of the Yale School is the ways in which this group adopted and adapted deconstructive techniques of interpretation to a diverse set of scholarly interests and problems. Warminski for example has become best known as the most distinguished and authoritative reader of his former teacher and doctoral advisor de Man's work. According to many, including Miller, Warminski "has also been one of the few critics who can extrapolate beyond de Man's readings of such authors as [German philosopher Immanuel] Kant and [German philosopher Georg Wilhelm Friedrich] Hegel."⁷⁹⁵ For all intents and purposes, Warminski dutifully followed in his former teacher's footsteps, even publishing intricate and complicated explications of de Man's writings and de Man's readings of others.⁷⁹⁶

⁷⁹³ Miller, "Tales out of (the Yale) School," 128. Like Bloom, Hartman did not aim to create a following. Unlike Bloom, however, Hartman was hardly engaged in a polemic with his fellow literary critics when either thinking about or performing his teaching duties. Hartman reflected in 2007: "I have not harbored the wish to create a following. The give and take of a seminar discussion was always a real pleasure, and so the noticeably brilliant individual seemed only as important as a collective reading effort that produced the insights on the part of even the less brilliant. Was I too distancing at times? It is possible; having had to bring myself up, I attribute a significant measure of autonomy to others, dislike any sort of intellectual coercion, and may have been, at times, a 'lazy-faire' teacher and mentor." Quote from Hartman, *A Scholar's Tale*, 155.

⁷⁹⁴ Martin McQuillan, "'No Country For Old Men': Paul de Man and the Post-Romantic Predicament," in Paul de Man, *The Post-Romantic Predicament*, ed. Martin McQuillan (Edinburgh, Edinburgh University Press, 2012), 3.

⁷⁹⁵ Miller, "Tales out of (the Yale) School," 129.

⁷⁹⁶ See for example Andrzej Warminski, *Material Inscriptions: Rhetorical Reading in Practice and Theory* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2013); and *Ideology, Rhetoric, Aesthetics: For De Man* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2013).

While Warminski chose to follow in de Man's footsteps, many of de Man's other students, including Cathy Caruth and Dori Laub, decided to take de Man's deconstructive reading practices in new directions. Caruth and Laub became part of an informal group of sorts—Hartman called Caruth, Laub, Shoshana Felman, and himself a “virtual community of explorers”—that explored the question and issues related to trauma. While Caruth, Hartman, and Laub would play their own important roles in working through and applying the term trauma during the 1990s, it was in fact Felman, de Man's friend and former colleague in Yale's Department of French, with her 1991 essay, “Education and Crisis, or the Vicissitudes of Teaching,” who first effectively ushered the term “trauma, in its present critical formation, onto the American theoretical scene.”⁷⁹⁷ Nevertheless, more explicitly than Felman, who remained a self-avowed Lacanian as much as she was attached to the de Manian style of deconstructive reading, Caruth, in her 1996 book *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative, and History*, which used one of de Man's last essays as a starting point, remained one of the crucial texts for not only investigating the conditions of possibility of a theoretical discourse on trauma, but also a landmark and constant point of reference in the development of trauma studies in the field of literary theory.⁷⁹⁸

Besides their many doctoral advisees, the legacy of the members of the Yale Group can be found in the effects their teaching deconstructive readings techniques had on generations of Yale undergraduates, particularly on pupils in the Literature Major, above all Literature Z, a course de Man and Hartman designed in 1976 and first co-taught in 1977. Once, de Man told Miller, with “obvious pleasure,” that he and Miller were “demonstrating how teaching

⁷⁹⁷ Felman, “Education and Crisis, or the Vicissitudes of Teaching,” *American Imago* 48, no. 1 (1991): 473-495.

⁷⁹⁸ Hartman, “On Traumatic Knowledge and Literary Studies,” *New Literary History* 26 (1995): 537; Cathy Caruth, “The Falling Body and the Impact of Reference (de Man, Kant, Kleist),” in *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative, and History* (Baltimore and London: Johnson Hopkins University Press, 1996), 73-90.

‘rhetorical reading’ [de Man’s name for his brand of deconstructive interpretation] could be pedagogically successful.”⁷⁹⁹ The XYZ sequence of courses in the Literature Major also left a legacy beyond Yale. Graduate students in the XYZ sequence led discussion sections and as teaching assistants, specifically in Lit Z, their deconstructive education, as Warminksi recalled, “continued when [they] would have to teach the same Rousseau or Nietzsche text to undergraduates and to explain de Man’s reading to them.” “I think,” Warminksi continued, “this is probably where the real teaching took place, for there was no way to explain de Man’s lectures to sophomores without understanding them oneself.”⁸⁰⁰ In other words, in order to properly teach assigned material in Lit X, Y, or Z, graduate students had to instill themselves with deconstructive principles of interpretation.

This brief survey, though, does little justice to the manifold ways that deconstructive reading practices were disseminated throughout North American intellectual cultural life in the late-twentieth century. While the Yale School will always for obvious reasons be associated with Yale University, deconstructionists did not exclusively employ deconstructive stances and styles of interpretation in the Ivory Tower. There were deconstructionist architects, artists, musicians, and others, who produced deconstructed public spaces, including Daniel Libeskind’s Jewish museum in Berlin, fashion items, such as the clothing designed by the Antwerp 6+, music, including the albums of Scritti Politti, and plays, such as those of Caryl Churchill. As with their counterparts in the North American academy, these deconstructionists evoked anxieties about moral and cultural relativism.

This dissertation has attempted to show how and why members of the Yale School and their colleagues developed and helped make a powerful hermeneutic of suspicion—

⁷⁹⁹ Miller, “Tales out of (the Yale) School,” 129.

⁸⁰⁰ Warminksi, 220.

deconstruction—a formidable habit of thought in the North American academy during the last several decades of the twentieth-century. To explore the solidification of this habit of thought, this dissertation used a range of historical documents, including conference proceedings, course materials, published and unpublished writings, journals, marketing materials, and personal correspondence. By practicing an array of deconstructions, professors, graduate students, and undergraduate students became hermeneuts of suspicion and helped shape the present—and still principal—scholarly tradition in the North American academy of mistrust—indeed in some cases denouncement—of any assertion of authenticity, naturalness, or originality.

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