Introduction: Critical Paradigms

JONATHAN CULLER

WHAT WE CALL LITERARY CRITICISM CAN BE TRACED BACK TO various modes of judgment, praise or blame, of songs and their performances. Singing contests and symposia were among the contexts in ancient Greece for the exercise and articulation of critical judgment; but a properly *literary* criticism, the classicist Andrew Ford argues, comes into being only with the emergence of a conception of poetry as a verbal artifact, subject to grammatical and rhetorical analysis, formal classification, and technical evaluation: "Only when singers became 'poets,' craftsmen of words rather than performers, could a properly 'poetic' literary criticism emerge as the special knowledge that discerns the excellence of poetry so understood" (9). Such criticism depends on a system of genres that prescribes the correct *telos*, or aim, of each type of song and what is appropriate to each, making possible judgments of success.

For most of its history, literary criticism was linked to generic categories based on mimesis—genres differing according to what is represented—and to the rhetorical analysis of efficacious speech: criticism is praise or blame made possible by conceptions of goals and norms. The revolution in the concept of literature, which we link to that generally revolutionary time of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, breaks with a conception of literature linked to generic norms and with what Jacques Rancière, in *La parole muette*, calls "the normative system of Belles-Lettres" (13; my trans.). Rancière summarizes the shift from a concept of literature as mimesis to a concept of literature as expression:

> This cosmological change can be expressed strictly as the term-by-term reversal of the four principles that structured the system of literature as mimesis. To the primacy of fiction is opposed the primacy of language.

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> To literature's distribution in genres is opposed the antigeneric principle of the equality of all subjects represented. To the principle of appropriateness or propriety [*convenance*] is opposed the indifference of the style with respect to the subject represented. To the ideal of the word as act is opposed the model of writing. (28; my trans.)

Rancière stresses that this change in the concept of literature can either pass unnoticed or be rendered absolute; it can be taken as just a further notion of what works do, or else it can become the basis of a new paradigm (13–14).[1] So while critics may continue to evaluate works in terms of the norms of genres, verisimilitude, and appropriate expression, there is a new conception of literature at work—observable in Flaubert and Mallarmé, for example—whose internal tensions, Rancière argues, have nourished modern literary reflection.

This shift in the concept of literature ultimately transforms literary criticism: no longer is its task to assess the performance of a text in terms of generic norms; a much broader field is open to it. Within this new framework, which gradually comes into play for criticism over the course of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, criticism may, of course, still pursue the evaluative project, but since the generic norms are no longer given, it must inquire what the norms should be for the evaluation of a given text. But increasingly criticism, which before 1850 was almost never interpretive, has claimed the task of telling us what works mean. If the work is expressive, then criticism elucidates what it expresses: the genius of the author, the spirit of the age, the historical conjuncture, the conflicts of the psyche, the functioning of language itself. Rancière's title, *La parole muette*, captures one paradox of the expressive model: the work is mute, and the critic must speak for it, unfolding the hidden meaning. What the discourse of the text appears to say is never what the work says: the literary critic must articulate the significance of these mute words. There are, Rancière argues, only two models, a mimetic poetics, which determines the genre and generic perfection of a work, by examining the action it imitates, and an expressive poetics, which shows how works express the state of affairs, the language, the genius that gave rise to them.

> This basic division places on the same side the adepts of pure literature and the historians and sociologists who make literature the expression of a society. . . . It puts the practice of pure artists and social critics under the law of the same spiritualist principle, whose ineradicable vitality stems from its ability to transform itself into a principle of positive science and materialist philosophy. This principle can be summarized in two fundamental rules: first, discover in words the animating force that drives their articulation [*la puissance de vie qui les fait énoncer*]; second, discover in the visible the sign of the invisible. (49; my trans.)

The expressive model, in fact, opens a vast range of possibilities for literary criticism, enabling the efflorescence of criticism in the second half of the twentieth century. Within the generalized expressive model, where works may express everything from the ideology of a historical situation to the fundamental negativity of language or the impossibility of literature itself, literary criticism has given itself immense scope, an array of possible "approaches" that may seem to have little to do with one another or even to be antagonistic, though they derive from the same principle—the principle that makes literary criticism fundamentally interpretive yet also hostile to the idea that the work has a message: there is no simple message but a variety of configurations that the work may express.

Critical approaches attempting to reconstruct codes, generic or otherwise, that make possible literary works and their effects—structuralism would be the major example here—have not flourished in this critical context, where the presumption that interpretation is the fundamental task reigns su-

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preme (the question addressed to any new critical development is, does it really help us produce new and better interpretations of literary works?). But, ironically, it was structuralism, the major antiexpressive project, that through its theorization of multiple discursive practices and cultural codes and its opening up of the domain of signification enabled the remarkable exfoliation of critical possibilities, which became "approaches" to interpretation. No longer were the expressive possibilities limited to the genius of the author or the spirit of the age. Insofar as all human experience and the imagination of its limits are matters for literature, no realm or conjuncture is too remote or implausible to be something literature might express.

This is the context in which we ask the question of literary criticism for the twenty-first century. Will criticism continue to be primarily interpretive? Are there new models of interpretation? If what we call "theory" has been the deployment of discourses and analytic perspectives originating in other disciplines for use in one's own, are there new theoretical orientations available that may enrich literary studies in this new century? With the eroding of the value of the cultural capital long represented by literature, will literary studies and hence literary criticism need to take new forms?

The future of literary criticism will doubtless depend, in part, on what happens to literature: Will a different model of literature emerge, and, if so, will there be new tasks or opportunities for criticism? Will the move from a print-based to an electronic-based culture have repercussions for the concept of literature and hence for criticism? The notion of the literary text as a finished verbal artifact, which, Ford claims, enabled a literary criticism to emerge in ancient Greece, may change, as electronic form makes texts potentially mutable. Katherine Hayles notes that while literature has always functioned as a technology designed to change the reader's cognition, in electronic systems feedback loops will enable different levels of interaction between text and reader to continuously inform and mutually determine one another, transforming texts as readers perform them. In Jorge Luis Borges's fantastic "The Book of Sand," the letters in a book shift into new positions every time the book is closed. Now in electronic texts words and images may shift, through algorithms or programs that create an infinite number of possible combinations (Hayles 106). We have been accustomed to say of great literature that the text always has surprises in store, so that readers always find something new in it. Electronic texts can literalize (and perhaps trivialize) this condition. More significantly, they can lead to a "reimagining of the literary work as an instrument to be played" (121).

If, as a result of such developments, literature comes to be seen less as the fixed text that emerged as the condition of possibility of criticism in ancient Greece and more as an event, a specific instance of singular interaction, how will this affect criticism? Will it return to the mode of evaluation, exploring the potential value of various interactive programs or systems? Will older texts come to be studied, as Meredith McGill and Andrew Parker propose in this issue, as products of media processes? Will performance studies, here discussed by Peggy Phelan and Joseph Roach, take on a new centrality in literary studies, as it comes to treat texts less as signs to be interpreted than as performances whose conditions of possibility and of success can be interrogated? There is certainly evidence that we are moving in this direction. In the realm of poetry, for example, who would have predicted twenty-five years ago—at a time when most poetry had eschewed rhyme and other traditional formal devices that enable it to be treated as a performance, when poetry was making itself ever more textual—that a major literary or cultural form would arise that eschewed melody for rhythm and rhyme? The rise of rap, which shows no sign

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of disappearing, highlights the importance of those formal structures most prominent in performance and suggests the possibility of reverting to a notion of the work as act of language. Will criticism, confronted with newly prominent forms of discourse, find itself needing to treat the work as an event whose effects can be charted rather than as mute speech requiring exfoliating interpretation?

So where do we find ourselves, ten years into this new century? This issue on literary criticism for the twenty-first century originated in a program by the Division on Literary Criticism for the MLA convention. A call for papers for a session with this title elicited more than sixty abstracts, showing that many members were eager to speak out on this subject. A special issue of *PMLA* on the topic seemed an attractive idea, and *PMLA*'s call for papers yielded more than fifty submissions. The assignment was a difficult one, though: potential contributors were asked not to complain about what is happening in contemporary criticism but to sketch some future possibility and to illustrate what sort of consequences it might have in practice. In the end, for various reasons the Editorial Board accepted only one of these submissions, so we find ourselves without essays imagining future versions of historicist criticism or criticism for the digital age, both of which are likely to be important parameters. Fortunately, the board redirected several excellent essays to our issue, and we were able to commission statements about the future of criticism from a range of contributors, in the United States and abroad.

One striking feature of contributions to this issue—salient in essays that were not accepted and some that appear here—is the motif of return: a return to rhetoric, a return to thematics, a return to textual criticism, as Paul de Man in 1982 entitled his program for rhetorical reading "The Return to Philology." In the humanities, one might conjecture, we prefer to advance through rereading, reinterpreting texts and movements of the past, arming ourselves with forces they make available but whose potential, for one reason or another, was not realized in their earlier versions. Literary criticism, in particular, advances by rereading, which is also invention, of course, but which legitimizes itself under the banner of fidelity to what has been neglected or misappropriated by previous readers.

We begin with a "return to the political." Jean-Jacques Lecercle, an especially lucid critic and theorist, who has written extensively about modernism, literary theory, and the theory of language, calls for a new political criticism, in effect a return to Marxism, which, he says, seems nearly to have vanished from the critical scene in the twenty-first century.[2] Such a return is certainly apposite, since today the Marxist claim that capitalism contains the seeds of its own destruction has never seemed more prescient, and the mask of the pretense that capitalism is good for workers has slipped, revealing the machinations of a financial elite that profits from financial disasters it creates for others. Lecercle's article is especially noteworthy for the role it accords to literature, not, in traditional Marxist fashion, as reflection of a historical state of affairs nor, as in more recent political criticism, as a convenient set of occasions for reflections on power, justice, and injustice but as the most reflective mode of existence of the language in which worldviews are embodied and as potential agent of transformation. He cites Rancière, for whom the three revolutions of modern literature (democracy of subject, democracy of genre, and democracy of language) are linked to three forms of radical democracy. In the theses with which he concludes the essay, Lecercle stresses that a return to the political treats language as a conception of the world, a sedimentation of what Antonio Gramsci calls common sense, on the one hand, and good sense, on the other, which literature helps to critique. Literature can advance the political task of prompting change because it captures the three times of the political: "the past of

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history and common sense sedimented in language; the present of the emerging hegemony of the future dominant class, as well as the present of emerging language; and the utopian future of language and society." This concept of literature, not as reflection of the socioeconomic conjuncture but as active intervention in the social, provides a range of tasks for literary (and not just literary) criticism.

Richard Klein, by contrast, maintains that the future of literary criticism will be Derridean. What would it mean, though, to take Derrida as a model for literary criticism of the century or even the next decade? In *The Singularity of Literature* Derek Attridge writes, "Derrida's work over the past thirty-five years constitutes the most significant, far-reaching, and inventive exploration of literature for our time" (139). Not simply *of* our time but *for* our time. This is not widely recognized. One of the more grotesque aspects of the mediatic reception of Derrida in the United States is the idea that somehow Derrida's work and deconstruction generally have constituted an attack on literature. But one finds in Derrida a celebration of literature of a sort not much heard these days:

> Experience of being, nothing less, nothing more, on the edge of metaphysics, literature perhaps stands on the edge of everything, almost beyond everything, including itself. It's the most interesting thing in the world, maybe more interesting than the world, and this is why, if it has no definition, what is heralded and refused under the name of literature cannot be identified with any other discourse. It will never be scientific, philosophical, conversational.
>
> ("This Strange Institution" 47)

Literature can be "the most interesting thing in the world, maybe more interesting than the world" because it exceeds the actual and includes its possibilities, opening their condition of possibility.

One would be hard put to find in Derrida's writings on Mallarmé, Shakespeare, Kafka, Joyce, Blanchot, Ponge, Genet, Celan, or Baudelaire a critical method. Klein stresses the variety of his critical interventions; and it may be precisely because it is not easy to say what these essays are that Derrida might fulfill Klein's prediction as a general model or repertoire of critical possibilities—from the aphoristic reflection on proper names and naming of "Aphorism Countertime," on *Romeo and Juliet,* to the rigorous pursuit of a thematics of the gift and the counterfeit and of textual self-reflexivity in the chapters of *Given Time* on Baudelaire. One might highlight the radical patience of these essays and their focus on small units—not Joyce or Mallarmé but a particular sentence. What one can say is that they attempt to respond to the singularity of the texts they treat. While Derrida's critical performances are partly consonant with the traditional notion that the task of criticism is to celebrate the uniqueness of each literary work, he notes that singularity is necessarily divided, takes part in the generality of meaning, without which it could not be read, and so is not closed in on itself but iterable ("This Strange Institution" 68). The singularity of a work is what enables it to be repeated over and over in events that are never exactly the same. Stressing this aspect of singularity, as opposed to a traditional notion of uniqueness, Derrida never claims to offer a reading of a text as an organic or self-contained whole but rather undertakes to write "a text which, in the face of the event of another's text, tries to 'respond' or to 'countersign'" (62). "Reading," Derrida says, "must give itself up to the uniqueness [of the work], take it on board, keep it in mind, take account of it. But for that, for this rendering, you have to sign in your turn, write something else which responds or corresponds in an equally singular, which is to say irreducible, irreplaceable, 'new' way: neither imitation, nor reproduction, nor metalanguage" (69–70). This is a tall order, not at all easy to do, which helps explain why this critical work on literature has not so far been a model for

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literary studies in general, but Klein's challenge is a worthy one for criticism to take up.

Monika Fludernik predicts a new paradigm for literary studies based not on Derrida's work but on an eventual coalescence of various sorts of work in cognitive science. What is most surprising in her essay is that a leading narratologist (her *Towards a "Natural" Narratology* is the most important work of narratology of the past twenty years) should construct a story for literary criticism in which structuralism is the bogeyman: it locked away history, ethics, themes, context, and aesthetics in a Pandora's box, from which they have now escaped, transforming the literary terrain—as if a mistaken detour in the 1960s and 1970s had set back literary studies, imposing limits that it finally broke down, allowing the flourishing of Foucauldian discourse analysis, cultural studies, feminism, gender theory, queer studies, ethnic studies, postcolonial criticism, and critical race theory, not to mention various historicisms. But, on the contrary, it was structuralism, with its conviction that wherever there is meaning there are systems that make meaning possible and that to understand cultural products one must analyze these systems, that laid the groundwork for these investigations. The structuralist/semiotic project, treating literature as one type of cultural practice, made possible cultural studies. Conceiving meaning not as an inherent property of texts but as a differential product of social and cultural codes and practices, it encouraged attention to reading and to such matters as the cultural construction of gender, not to speak of Foucauldian "archaeology." For structuralism, we are made what we are by the array of discursive practices that constitute us as social beings—whence the stimulus to feminist and other studies. In fact, it was structuralism that *opened* the Pandora's box and loosed these other critical possibilities upon the world. And, of course, the whole narratological project, which asks about the general properties and structures of stories, is a structuralist one, even if it now seeks to take its concepts and models from cognitive science rather than from linguistics. It is understandable that Fludernik would make structuralism the scapegoat in her narrative because for some time narratology has been in the doldrums, seen as a product of the structuralism that a poststructuralist age believes itself to have outgrown, and now that it is experiencing a revival, especially through its links to cognitive studies, it would doubtless like to distance itself from a structuralist past that many associate with a rebarbative terminology: *heterodiegetic*, *homodiegetic*, and so on.

In her very useful survey of developments in literary and narratological studies inspired by work on cognition, Fludernik posits an emerging "grand coalescence of narratology, the empirical study of literature, stylistics, possible-worlds theory, and metaphor studies," which may produce a paradigm shift. She sees this as a shift to empirically validatable theory, but, so far, what is empirically testable does not rise to the complexities that are most characteristic of literary works, so this may remain something of a scientistic pipe dream, whereas the more immediate effect of a resurgent narratology is to present an alternative to the paradigm of interpretation. Resisting what I earlier called the expressive paradigm of criticism, narratology seeks not to produce new interpretations of literary works but to make explicit the structures that enable them to have the effects they do. This is as true of a cognitivist narratology, which eschews special literary categories and seeks to explain literary effects in terms of general cognitive processing operations, as it is of a narratology that prides itself on its specialized metalanguage attuned to the sort of narrative structures found in literature. Optimism about the coming of a new paradigm should be tempered with caution, Fludernik notes, since different cognitivist approaches have not yet coalesced, but another reason for caution might be that while cognitivist categories seem deeper, more

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fundamental, than traditional narratological categories, it is not clear that, for instance, "blending" explains things better than a traditional term such as *metaphor*. The resurgence of narratology, though, and of the paradigm it represents—poetics, as opposed to hermeneutics—is certainly to be welcomed.

Simon Jarvis's "For a Poetics of Verse" also proposes a poetics, though not one aiming to ground itself in disciplines exterior to literary studies. Work on rhythm and meter has in recent years been dominated by a specialized linguistics, attempting a science of verse, and this, Jarvis suggests, may be one reason why these matters, so obviously central to poetry and its effects, have been neglected by critics, especially since the basic questions in metrics have not been solved. The other reason for neglect, he convincingly argues, is that critics, caught up in the hermeneutic-interpretive paradigm, assume that the task of literary criticism is to produce readings:

> What poetics may be able to say about verse style is considered to be useful insofar as it contributes, in a subsidiary and relevant fashion, to this goal. The assumption that poetics subserves hermeneutics presses connoisseurship of verse style so rapidly and so forcibly into interpretative service that it leads to falsified and unconvincing claims about verse style and its supposed effects, thus prompting many excellent scholars to set the whole domain to one side.

For the criticism of the future, a historical prosody, Jarvis envisions approaching the aesthetics of verse as musicologists approach musical phrasing and structure and art historians approach painterly technique. Stressing that technique is the way in which art thinks and most intimately registers historical experience, he proposes a "poetics of repertoire," of "the quasi system of local expressive forces that individual prosodic gestures may take on or develop in particular authorships, coteries, periods, and genres." Verse is a set of practices, special forms of "perverse thinking" and verbal performance, and critics need to immerse themselves in these practices in order to elucidate not what poems mean but how they achieve the effects they do. This is a worthy project for criticism of this century.

Such a focus on technical historical practices, however central to a major form of literary expression, would be a decisive change for literary criticism, which of late has sought instead to widen its focus to take into its purview texts of many different sorts and to incorporate into literary theory the most powerful and pertinent theoretical discourses. Shelly Rambo's "Haunted (by the) Gospel" explores the possible conjunctions of trauma theory and notions of haunting and spectrality—which are likely to be of continuing importance for literary criticism and theory. Rambo draws on trauma theory and hauntology, as it will be called, both for highlighting new dimensions of religious texts and for exploring poetry such as Paul Celan's. Along with Peggy Phelan's "'Just Want to Say,'" which brings together Richard Poirier and Michael Jackson for an exploration of the significance of performance studies today, Rambo's essay illustrates possible confluences of future criticism, previously hard to envision. For Phelan, performance studies works to address the power of artistic phenomena that she situates not in words, for instance, but in an affective relation to enactment—whence her meditation on Jackson's death—but that in the case of poetry can be linked to what Robert Frost calls "oversound": "the thing in the poem that is not simply the result of the specific words or meter, an elusive thing more than the sum of these." If, as Phelan maintains, "performance is now the dominant language of contemporary life," criticism of the future needs not just to consider literature *as* performance but also to stress the *and* of literature and performance and develop a "more muscular math for calculating oversound, the thing not in the words, not in the melody, not in the dance, not in the meter."

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The task of calculating qualities that do not reside in the dimensions of art we may know how to analyze is a daunting one. If this seems a matter for a generalized poetics, of the sort posited by Jarvis, aiming not at prosody itself but at thinking in prosody, it also seems to echo the critical project outlined by Derrida in his demand that criticism respond to, inscribe itself in, answer to the singularity of the text it engages. Or perhaps what we need is a new set of aesthetic categories. Sianne Ngai, whose brilliant *Ugly Feelings* analyzes affects such as irritation, envy, disgust, and a combination of shock and boredom she calls "stuplimity," here offers three categories, the cute, the zany, and the merely interesting, which are phenomenologically familiar yet seldom analyzed, perhaps because they seem trivial. Her "Our Aesthetic Categories" outlines, in brief compass, a series of six outstanding problems in aesthetic theory that criticism should address, but the main argument of this extraordinarily shrewd piece is that literary criticism needs to attend to the aesthetic categories—which are both affective and conceptual—by which every aesthetic experience is mediated and that categories such as the cute, the zany, and the merely interesting are in fact extremely useful for thinking about aesthetic experience in general: they cut across various media, movements, and genres and so give critics a better way of approaching culture as a whole; they resist institutionalization and so seem more directly tied to aesthetic experience; and they are, in the end, important to any attempt to reflect on what she calls "the smoothness" with which supposedly radical and resistant art has integrated itself in consumerist culture. Her rich essay is likely to stimulate ideas about future projects in any literary and cultural critic.

Two pedagogical possibilities for literary criticism are outlined by Meredith McGill and Andrew Parker's "The Future of the Literary Past" and Ian Balfour's "Adapting to the Image and Resisting It," which explore horizons opened up for literary criticism by new developments in media. For McGill and Parker, the answer to the question of whether the twenty-first century calls for new critical paradigms is that it gives us a changed relation to the literary past by enabling us much more easily to see literary works as constituted in a complex relation to the history of media. Rejecting the idea of the media as motor and measure of cultural change and of literary works as products of a linear evolution of the media, from script to print to screen, they stress the incommensurability of literary history and media history, while they illustrate, with examples from Sidney, Stowe, and Pound, the importance of exploring the literary work's constitution in different media of an era ("there is always more than one medium"). Study of works' relation to different media enables scholars both to question the radical distinctions that are sometimes made between media and to see literary works in a new light as constituted in the play of media.

For Balfour, it is the relation between literature and film that is newly productive. Calling on literary criticism to resist a historical hostility to the image, he sees the pressure images can put on literature as potentially provocative and productive. Filmic adaptations can shed light on literature by highlighting what is particular to the literary work, especially, he argues, when there is tension between the two forms and differences in formal procedures (films of plays, by contrast, are not as stimulating). For McGill and Parker and Balfour, the rise of screen and image should be seen not as a threat to literary studies but as a supplement that makes possible a criticism more alert to the complexities and specificities of literature.

Three translations of texts relevant to criticism for the twenty-first century also grace these pages. Excerpts from two essays by Ottmar Ette, combined here as "Literature as Knowledge for Living, Literary Studies as Science for Living," urge literary studies

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to reclaim the subject of "life" from the sciences that have been allowed to claim it as their topic. Certainly in German, where the title of one of the two sources is "Literaturwissenschaft als Lebenswissenschaft," the connection is obvious and compelling. The study of literature—*Literaturwissenschaft*—is also a science of life, *Lebenswissenschaft*. Ette emphasizes that "the literatures of the world have accumulated a body of knowledge that has tremendous relevance for the knowledge for living together." There is, then, a dual task. On the one hand, literary instruction should deliberately take on the task that philosophy once performed, of reflecting on how to live and especially—a modern twist on the traditional reflection on the examined life—how to live with full awareness of cultural, gender, and racial differences. Of course, many literature courses in the United States do this already, and it often seems that in American primary and secondary schools the main use of literature is for discussion of cultural differences, which brings with it disadvantages of its own for the understanding of literature and, sometimes, for the thinking of difference as well. But Ette's is more than a program for the use of literature in schools:

> Literary scholarship would do well to devote much more, and more systematic, attention to analyzing exactly how literature stores such knowledge. . . . The different genres and subgenres of the literatures of the world can provide us with knowledge of how to live (in the novel), of how people have lived (in biography), and of how to try to transform one's own performed life into knowledge for living (in autobiography).

Analysis of autobiography, in particular, he argues, is indispensable for a comprehensive understanding of life that can help guide our societies toward the future.

A very different perspective emerges from the other translation from the German. Selections from Werner Hamacher's "95 Theses on Philology," a title echoing Luther's transformative theses, constitute a declaration for philology as a name for criticism of the future. Though the last part of philology's name links it to the sciences (onto*logy*, bio*logy*, geo*logy*) and it was for a long time understood as the science for dealing with linguistic and particularly literary documents, the *philia* in the first part signifies "affection for, friendship with, inclination to the *logos* (speech, language, relation)." *Philo-logy* is an "inclination," an affection, longing, claim, wish, desire. Or, rather, philology "is a double agent for at least two incompatible ways of speaking. Through it runs the fissure between the language of longing and the language of knowledge." In these apophantic paragraphs, Hamacher advances a vision of a discipline of the interval, the detail, neither theory nor praxis but a movement of attending to that which divides from itself and slips away, in language that is never single, unitary. Frost's oversound would be a possible object of philology.

Abdelkébir Khatibi's "The Language of the Other" is in Hamacher's terms a philological exploration of the difference within language, the difference of language. For this Moroccan novelist, playwright, and critic, francophone author of a book on the Maghrebi novel, the problem of language is inseparable from that of otherness: one always writes in the language of the other. "This language is not a property; it is rather the empty place of an identity that is being reincarnated." His eloquent account of the solitude of the writer—a solitude that is "never the plenitude of self"—is joined to a discussion of the peculiar community of the language, "francophone," we call it, in which language is always translation: "Writing French, translating it in writing it, inside this active division where writing happens: I experience it as simultaneous translation. . . ." But in fact every work is "a frontier, a passage and a barrier, between languages," as the writer "grafts points of rupture, nodes of dissidence

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and resistance, onto the language, in such a way that this language that we write—if we write—is available for infinite translation."

Khatibi's essay might be subtitled "An Aesthetic Education in an Era of Globalization," which is the title of Gayatri Spivak's forthcoming book, discussed in her interview with Cathy Caruth. In an era of globalization when the network of capital "grind[s] everything into commensurability," the task of those who would make a difference is not to speak about politics (when literature professors speak about politics, "[n]obody pays the slightest attention to them") but to offer aesthetic education, which involves training the imagination for epistemological performance and democratic judgment. The interview explores the complexities of the notion of aesthetic education as it emerges from Kant and Schiller and links it both to "deep language learning" and to an ability to learn from the singularity of texts. Spivak does not speak directly of the future of literary criticism or literary theory, but it is certainly possible to extrapolate from this rich interview to a vision of a criticism engaged in a critique of models of Enlightenment reason at the same time that it explores the resources of singular texts for training judgment and imagination in the context of that unpredictability which it understands to constitute the possibilities of history.

Ankhi Mukherjee's "'What Is a Classic?'" compares essays with this title by T. S. Eliot and J. M. Coetzee, two outsiders to the English literary tradition, in considering the role of the classic in what she calls "the 'worlding' of an international literary criticism." While criticism "continues to shore up the idea of transcendent and foundational literary value against mobile configurations of knowledge, technology, and expertise," she nevertheless concludes that the question of the classic is a site of "agonistic discussion and debate that enables the literary-critical field to produce its own criteria for cultural distinction" and, ironically perhaps, since this seems far from the apparently centralizing function of the notion of the classic, actually provides an avenue for the articulation of value in world literature.

John Bryant's "Rewriting *Moby-Dick*" provides a program for literary criticism that Bryant calls the "revision narrative." Studying cinematic revisions of *Moby-Dick* by Ray Bradbury and John Huston, Edward Said's erroneous attributing of movie scenes to Melville, and the British editing of the novel, which sanitized Queequeg and Melville's subtle reformulating of the colonial experience, Bryant argues that revisions of all sorts are culturally symptomatic and should be preserved in narratives that can reveal the cultural mutability of texts through which we interpret ourselves.

"Lafayette's Impossible Princess," on the other hand, offers an iconoclastic argument against literary history, which too readily assumes that masterworks of one era influence those of a later age that share their features. Finely describing the innovations of *La princesse de Clèves*, whose invented or "deliberately counterfactual heroine" blocked strategies of the day for reading historical fiction, Nicholas Paige shows that this novel had no immediate effects or imitators; no trail leads from this novel to the fictional protagonists of the nineteenth-century novel, and criticism must remain vigilant about stories of literary history that we create: there can be major works that change nothing. Citing other examples, including *Tristram Shandy*, Paige's elegant essay offers a surprising program for twenty-first-century criticism: debunking the inferences by which critics provide literature with narratives that convince us that literature has an intelligible history.

Finally, Joseph Roach's "Performance" describes a widening gap between performance studies and literary studies and, by examining Erich Auerbach's work on mimesis, seeks a better understanding of that gap, the missed opportunities it has produced, and ways of bridging it. By moving away from literature, performance studies has contributed to a ne-

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glect of the Orphic dimension of literature, particularly poetry. Attempting to reinscribe performance under *mimesis* may not help, however, since it is precisely mimetic conceptions of poetry, I would argue—the poem as fictional imitation of real-world speech acts—that have eliminated the Orphic, ritualistic, dimension of lyric by encouraging students to treat poems novelistically, as dramatic monologues, imitating the utterance of a speaker whose situation and state of mind students are asked to reconstruct. Though it would be healthy and stimulating for literary criticism to link up with performance studies, attempting to do so under the aegis of mimesis seems to me an error. After all, Roach himself observes that "Orpheus does not so much imitate reality as stand in for it." That standing in, that performativity, is something that literary criticism needs to attempt to elucidate, separating the notion of performativity from its origins in speech-act theory, which have so far led to slogans but to little understanding of literary speech events.

The essays collected here certainly do not exhaust the possibilities of a literary criticism for the twenty-first century, but they do remind us—especially those of us old enough to have studied literature in the 1960s and 1970s—how vastly more rich and inventive are the critical possibilities today than they were before the theory revolution. Anyone complaining about the state of literary studies today should recall how things were in the days when New Critical explication and a pedestrian literary history were the major possibilities. Though there is no consensus on what the tasks of literary criticism ought to be in this new century, various critical developments are questioning the dominant hermeneutical paradigm of making the mute text speak. The possibility of coming to see literary works as events as much as texts to be interpreted will encourage a new poetics and make criticism a domain of continuing debate and invention.

Notes

1. In an efficient critique of Rancière, Laurent Dubreuil reminds us that though distinctive configurations in the concept of literature certainly come into play with Flaubert and Mallarmé, their pronouncements on literature would not be shared by all contemporary novelists, and the attempt to define a modern concept of literature in opposition to those of earlier times both oversimplifies the range of modern possibilities and neglects powerful historical affinities. Scholars seeking the birth of literature allow their conceptual obsessions to masquerade as effective events, Dubreuil concludes. "There is no *invention* of literature during the (post)revolutionary era, since all elements of 'literary' poetics were already there in Rancière's *belles lettres*" (64). This is why, I believe, Rancière insists that this new concept can simply be superposed on the old and pass unnoticed, as well as become profoundly transformative.

2. It is striking that this is more true of France than of the United States, where strains of Marxism and post-Marxism continue to animate various critical and theoretical projects.

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