

Against Dehumanised Hermeneutics

Eroticisation of Literary and Academic Discourse

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Abstract. The paper problematises two distinct approaches to contemporary hermeneutics which advocate its complete reconceptualisation. One, offered by Jacques Derrida, excoriates “hermeneutic somnambulism” that disregards the text’s sovereignty, and – by extension – the author’s intended meaning. Derrida criticises the prescriptivist mindset of an exegete who imposes their interpretation on a text in an attempt to classify, delimit, and appropriate its meaning. On the other hand, Roland Barthes, as one may read in *The Pleasure of the Text* and *A Lover’s Discourse: Fragments*, praises the ultimate readerly and interpretative freedom; to read deeply is to achieve a sense of bliss (*jouissance*), a sensual pleasure which Barthes compares to that of a sexual climax. Both authors noticeably eroticise their language and employed imagery: partly to shock, and partly to make their reader aware of how much human corporeality, affectivity, and carnality have been disregarded in traditional hermeneutics. Both, too, propose exchanging scholarly hermeneutic paradigms (active interpretative stance) for the sheer readerly pleasure (passive receptive stance), by means of which reading – freed from its exegetic function – becomes a passionate act full of interpretative possibilities.

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Countering the hermeneutic impasse

While perusing Friedrich Nietzsche’s unpublished manuscripts one may eventually stumble upon a most unusual and seemingly random sentence, written, quite probably, in his hand: “ich habe meinen Regenschirm vergessen” (*Sämtliche Werke* 578) [1]. Is it an actual confession or, rather, a figment of Nietzsche’s imagination? Is it a quote? In such a case, the author of *The Gay Science* not only forgot his umbrella but also a necessary reference (the line is, after all, encased in quotation marks), not to say anything about the lower-case “i.” This minute note scribbled hastily on the margin may be quite perplexing for the reader; admittedly, ascribing some deeper meaning to it seems nigh impossible. It caught the ever-attentive eye of Jacques Derrida, who assesses that said sentence, “detached as it is, not only from the milieu that produced it, but also from any intention or meaning on Nietzsche’s part, should remain so, whole and intact, once and for all, without any other context” (*Spurs: Nietzsche’s Styles* 125). In its apparent haphazardness, it actively – and very subversively – resists, if not completely nullifies, univocal interpretation. As further explicated by the father of deconstruction,

[1] It is quite possible that that unpublished piece, precisely because it is readable as a piece of writing, should remain forever secret. But not because it withholds some secret. Its secret is rather the possibility that indeed it might have no secret, that it might only be pretending to be stimulating some hidden truth within its

fold. Its limit is not only stipulated by its structure but is in fact intimately confused with it. The hermeneut cannot but be provoked and disconcerted by its play. (133)

The infamous statement about the umbrella invites the reader to partake in a very specific “grammatological reading,” [2] a highly idiosyncratic textual game according to whose precepts one is to find some meaning against all the odds. “Interpretation,” a finite activity, becomes “interpreting” – an unending process of decoding of the unsaid. In *Spurs*, the philosopher attempts to rationalise any potential readings of Nietzsche’s *inédit* as much as he tries to prove the veritable infinitude of readerly points of reference, thus delimiting the boundaries of what he deems more conventional (and by now obsolete) exegesis. Derrida’s choice of this very sentence may be motivated by its dualistic nature. On the one hand, it is easily translatable from German and forms a perfectly intelligible message. “No fold, no reserve appears to mark its transparent display. In fact, its content gives the appearance of a more than flat intelligibility” (129). On the other hand, it is entirely devoid of both non-literary and intertextual meaning – one cannot possibly say what the author meant, if he did mean anything at all. “There is no infallible way of knowing the occasion of this sample or what it could have been later grafted onto,” asserts Derrida (123), offering further commentary on the Nietzschean manuscripts:

Given this lack of assurance, the note which the editors have appended to their classification of these unpublished pieces is *a monument to hermeneutic somnambulism*. In blithest complacency their every word obscures so well a veritable beehive of critical questions that only the minutest scrutiny could possibly recover there those questions which preoccupy us here. (124; emphasis mine)

There is no easy way out of the hermeneutic impasse created by Nietzsche’s note; in its very core it is based on a dissonance between its apparent clarity as well as straightforwardness and its infinite openness for interpretation, by which token it as much induces in the reader the desire to fully interpret its potential implications as it renders futile any coherent construal of meaning in that “the ‘*ich*’ stands as a definite pronoun whose referent is indefinite” (Schrift 107). Derrida appears to sneer at the hermeneut who engages in a truly quixotic endeavour of the retrieval of the *pharmakon* – at them struggling with unsurpassable aporia underlying this crux of a sentence, which, in actuality, might not mean anything at all. In its simplicity, the *inédit* undermines the basic dichotomy of truth and falsity, for neither concept seems applicable or practical in its analysis. The sentence in question “is not caught up in any circular trajectory. It knows of no proper itinerary which would lead from its beginning to its end and back again, nor does its movement admit of any center. Because it is structurally liberated from any living meaning, it is always possible that it means nothing at all or that it has no decidable meaning” (*Spurs* 131–133). Given its markedly high “stratum of readability,” it can be easily “translated with no loss into any language” as well as subjected to a whole spectrum “of much more elaborated operations” (129). To substantiate this claim, Derrida even offers a minor “‘psychoanalytic’ decoding” (129) of Nietzsche’s thought process, the main purpose of which is divulcation of the absurdities of the aforementioned

“hermeneutic somnambulism” omnipresent in academia. The major task of any psychoanalyst is to achieve “a hermeneutic mastery” (131) over their subject – a venture as commendable as it is, at times, naïve. In a terse passus in *Beyond Good and Evil* concerning respect (or lack thereof) for what is sacred and canonical, the German philosopher states outright: “what is perhaps the most disgusting thing about so-called scholars, the devout believers in ‘modern ideas,’ is their lack of shame, the careless impudence of their eyes and hands that touch, taste, and feel everything” (161). And for the academically trained hermeneut-prescriptivist, posits Derrida seconding Nietzsche, everything *has* to have some sense; unfortunately, their efforts to uncover hidden meaning can verge on the absurd and the impossible – especially when they project sense onto something that happens to be inherently meaningless, as, chances are, the random comment on the forgotten umbrella. Every “impulsive reader” and “hermeneut ontologist” – driven by “their common belief that this unpublished piece is an aphorism of some significance” – struggle with all their might “to satisfy their interpretative expectations” (Derrida, *Spurs* 131). To make things worse, as rightfully observes the deconstructionist, the sentence was encased in inverted commas, thus signifying it might come from some other source (which then promises it quite possibly being imbued with even greater significance). Dangling somewhere on the margin, Friedrich Nietzsche’s whimsical note – just as his umbrella – might have been *left* there and completely *forgotten*; “folded/unfolded,” it “remains closed, at once open and closed or each in turn” like “an umbrella that you couldn’t use” (Derrida, *Spurs* 137). It may indeed hide some truth hidden beneath its folds, to use a Derridean metaphor, but it might just as well only tempt the reader to engage in an interpretative game which they cannot possibly win, by provoking them to disambiguate its mystery, while – at the same time – actively resisting any such concentrated effort. The search for “the intended meaning” of a text – one of the primary tasks of the reader – oftentimes ignores the author of a given literary work altogether. As observed by Louise M. Rosenblatt on the pages of *The Reader, The Text, The Poem: The Transactional Theory of the Literary Work*, “with most texts, the naive reader automatically assumes that his interpretation approximates to the author’s ‘meaning,’ to ‘what the author had in mind’” (112–113). “Literary texts provide us with a widely broadened ‘other’ through which to define ourselves and our world,” (145) adds the academic but at the same time emphasises that one should be aware that “[w]hat the reader brings to the text will affect what he makes of the verbal cues” (83). To read and to interpret is to engage oneself in a two-way relationship with a text, which may either enhance or nullify its meaning depending on one’s knowledge, sensibility, or life experience. “The interpreter’s primary task is to reproduce in himself the author’s ‘logic,’ his attitudes, his cultural givens, in short his world” (Hirsch 242) – the task, one may add, as commendable as, at times, difficult.

Derrida, at one point, dares hypothesise that, “[t]o whatever lengths one might carry a conscientious interpretation, [...] the totality of Nietzsche’s text, in some monstrous way, might well be of the type ‘I have forgotten my umbrella’” (*Spurs* 133). [3] This overgeneralisation is in many ways problematic, for, in actuality, “there is no ‘totality to Nietzsche’s text,’” because his impressive *œuvre* is, in a way, “fragmentary and aphoristic” (135) in its entirety. Non-interpretability of the note found in the manuscripts brings into question the

condition of traditional hermeneutics – nothing seems to be certain, what Derrida further emphasises by doubting objectivity of his very own statements. “My discourse,” he daringly asserts, “has been every bit as clear as that ‘I have forgotten my umbrella’” (135). Just as Nietzsche’s sentence – despite its apparent intelligibility – connotes nothing concrete about reality, Derrida’s commentary on its potential implications is equally inefficacious, which fact, after all, he himself subversively acknowledges. Following his line of reasoning, one may then state that what dominates in his works (just as in some of Nietzsche’s) and what is – perhaps paradoxically – also one of their strongest elements is their “undecipherability” which originates in “certain movements where the text [...] could very well slip quite away” (135). [4] Undecipherability that goes against the reader “succumbing to the old occultist urge to crack codes, to distinguish between reality and appearance, to make an invidious distinction between getting it right and making it useful” (Rorty, “The Pragmatist’s Progress” 108).

Derrida does not attempt to answer the question that he tentatively posed beginning his metatheoretical divagations – whether or not one may actually interpret a sentence taken out of context, be it truly meaningful or not, is entirely irrelevant. Naturally, he does not wish to expound his own interpretation of Nietzsche’s note, either. What seems to be the sole focus of his analysis, as is the topic of the present article, is the state of contemporary hermeneutics and its ambition to unambiguously decode, classify, and impose meaning. As one may conjecture on the basis of his loose observations regarding Nietzsche’s output, the French scholar is against both hermeneutic close reading, the main purpose of which is “excavation” of hidden sense, and philological, i.e. purely academic, exegesis, which – in turn – almost inadvertently imposes a range of methodological conceptualisations onto its subject. What needs to be emphasised is that in no way does it imply that Jacques Derrida disregards Friedrich Nietzsche’s *œuvre* or its importance to modern philosophy. On the contrary, the focal point of *Spurs* is but a search for truth – a topic very relevant to Nietzsche as it is to the broader public sphere. And it is no coincidence: the marked scepticism of the author of *Beyond Good and Evil* is indeed clearly visible in his treatment and criticism of (broadly defined) truth, rationality, and morality, whose many facets cannot be controlled and bound “by throwing drab, cold, gray nets of concepts over the brightly colored whirlwind of the senses” (Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil* 15). Derrida, following Nietzsche’s footsteps, tries to problematise their intricacies as well as to dispel the illusion – sustained by traditional hermeneutics – that truth can be fully grasped, explored, and accounted for. [5] Both thinkers seem to say in unison: it cannot, because truth, supposedly just like a woman, “will not be pinned down” (Derrida, *Spurs* 55).

“Supposing truth to be a woman”

One may risk to surmise that this comparison (Derrida, *Spurs* 55), which is recurrent in Nietzsche and in Derrida, appears to draw attention to general non-accessibility of both truth and women. Controversial though it may be, such a statement lends itself well to new modes of exegetic reading and, consequently, to formulation of new discourses, including those based on semi-erotic, anti-

phallogocentric, or simply anti-normative rhetoric. “All the emblems, all the shafts and allurements that Nietzsche found in woman,” including “her seductive distance, her captivating inaccessibility,” or “the ever-veiled promise of her provocative transcendence, [...] these all belong properly to a history of truth by way of the history of an error” (89). Derrida seems to say: truth, not unlike a woman, can be sought, looked after, and courted – but she is never easily found and, being fully independent, she may never be trapped. “Man and woman change places. They exchange masks *ad infinitum*,” which then nullifies the relations of “appropriation, expropriation, mastery, servitude” (111). To further motivate his incendiary and provocative argument, Derrida employs a number of Nietzschean metaphors:

There is no such thing as a woman, as a truth in itself of woman in itself. That much, at least, Nietzsche has said. Not to mention the manifold typology of women in his work, its horde of mothers, daughters, sisters, old maids, wives, governesses, prostitutes, virgins, grandmothers, big and little girls.

For just this reason then, there is no such thing either as the truth of Nietzsche, or of Nietzsche’s text. (101–103)

At the end of the day, it is then “[t]he question of the woman” that “suspends the decidable opposition of true and non-true” (107). “The hermeneutic project which postulates a true sense of the text,” continues Derrida, “is disqualified under this regime. Reading is freed from the horizon of the meaning or truth of being, liberated from the values of the product’s production or the present’s presence” (107). [6] There is much to be said about the truth–woman analogy – to further employ this gender-indexical metaphor, one may state, following Céline, that “[w]oman is very troubled” – as is truth – insofar as

she wants to stay young. She has her menopause, her periods, the whole genital business, which is very delicate, it makes a martyr out of her, doesn’t it, so this martyr lives anyway, she bleeds, she doesn’t bleed, she goes and gets the doctor, she has operations, she doesn’t have operations, she gets re-operated, then in between she gives birth, she loses her shape, all that’s important. She wants to stay young, keep her figure, well. She doesn’t want to do a thing and she can’t do a thing. (“The Art of Fiction No. 33”)

Naturally, such an opinion can be easily countered; Hélène Cixous, her wit and language always as sharp as steel, states with confidence and assurance:

A feminine text cannot fail to be more than subversive. It is volcanic; as it is written it brings about an upheaval of the old property crust, carrier of masculine investments; there’s no other way. There’s no room for her is she’s not a he. If she’s a her-she, it’s in order to smash everything, to shatter the framework of institutions to blow up the law, to break up the ‘truth’ with laughter. (888)

I wished that that woman would write and proclaim this unique empire so that other women, other unacknowledged sovereigns, might exclaim: I, too, overflow; my desires have invented new desires, my body knows unheard-of songs. [...] Where is the ebullient, infinite woman who, immersed as she was in her naiveté, kept in the dark about herself, led into self-disdain by the great arm of parental-conjugal phallogocentrism, hasn’t been ashamed of her strength? (876)

The abovementioned conceptualisations, the former crude and unnecessarily underlaid with irony, do indeed problematise truth (“woman”) and broadly understood veracity in a satisfactory manner – both are very complex in nature; both may change with time; both – given their multifacetedness – resist easy interpretations and becoming but “a fading rose” (Céline, “The Art of Fiction No. 33”). All of which work against the traditional exegete and his by now ossified methodological apparatus.

With time, what is quite noticeable, Jacques Derrida seems to fall under the spell of Nietzsche’s sensual and highly evocative language – his rationalist, distant, and unemotional stance on the topic with which he began his ruminations in *Spurs* slowly thaws out, subtly giving way to a more exuberant, eroticised discourse. As he himself notices, an analysis devoid of formal and societal impositions appears to be a far more efficient way of commentary on the complex nature of interpretation and on a text itself; a text, which – after all – more often than not has the very same sensual, alluring qualities, many of which are, as if by default, regarded by Nietzsche as feminine. Once again both thinkers assert, practically in unison: the text, the hermeneut’s *inamorata* – just like truth and just like a woman – will never be appropriated or “pinned down.”

One’s indefatigable efforts to uncover sense or hidden meaning, as preached by traditional hermeneutics, are many a time as inviable as they are unnecessary. The incessant search for truth may blight the actual beauty of literature; given its “institutionality, i.e. its fragility, its absence of specificity, its absence of object” (Derrida, “This Strange Institution Called Literature” 42), the exegete’s efforts “to finalize literature, to assign it a meaning, a program and a regulating ideal” (38) might bring about its eventual demise. Nietzsche imagines an ordinary reader saying: “This work charms me: how could it fail to be beautiful?” (*Beyond Good and Evil* 104). He does so only to contrast them with a figure of an authoritarian theoretician, a person that one may recognise in “these philosophers [who] admit to taking *pleasure* in saying no, in dissecting, and in certain level-headed cruelty that knows how to guide a knife with assurance and subtlety, even when the heart is bleeding” (104; emphasis in the original). They do not understand simple readerly joy any more, reacting but with “a genuine disgust for all these over-enthusiasms, idealisms, femininities” (104). Such an attitude is also criticised by Derrida, who comments – addressing the “desire for *everything* + *n* – naturally I can analyze it, ‘deconstruct’ it, criticize it, but it is an experience I love, that I know and recognize” (“This Strange Institution” 35; emphasis in the original). This experience, underlaid with a real zest for life, is rendered void by traditional hermeneutics which imposes onto it a range of binary conceptualisations, none of which truly account for its *sui generis* nature. The domineering tone of academic discourse that characterises most of literary and philosophical analyses is, then, inferior to “the element of chance [...] and apparent randomness” (66) as well as simple pleasure that the reader may derive from immersing themselves in a given text. It is not about constituting one *true sense* or one *true interpretation*, Derrida seems to say, but – on the contrary – about allowing oneself to generate more meanings, and to let them proliferate both in academia and in the public sphere, which, in turn, begets more ever original and creative (re-)readings. For it to work, said proliferation cannot be controlled or governed by any external authority – only then may contemporary hermeneutics truly thrive anew. If there

is any additional end to *Spurs*, apart from the aforementioned search for truth, it is a confirmation that there is no *one* truth in and of a given text, for its meanings are, as they well should be, infinite.

Admittedly, such a conceptualisation of the topic is progressive and untypical, to say the least. It is based on a number of idealistic premises that enforce certain conformity both on the writers and on the readers. Jacques Derrida is, as can only be expected, fully aware of its potential implications; by referring to the Nietzschean understanding of truth and by projecting gender-specific properties on its particularities, he consciously – and very subversively – attacks a long tradition of normative hermeneutics, exposing its weaknesses and contradictions. Being fully cognisant of its monumental status, he does not mar its practices as much as he reminds the reader that there are *other* ways of reading (and reading into) literature, not necessarily marked by structuralist purity and orderliness. It then begs the question: is Derrida actually against interpretation? The answer is twofold: he disregards the importance (of by now obsolete) traditional hermeneutic reading, according to which one is to uncover some predefined “sense,” “meaning,” or “truth,” when the reading practice and concomitant critical response are limited by normative poetics, which imposes the “right” and “wrong” modes of reading (the latter going against the glorified figure of the Author). On the other hand, the philosopher praises “interpreting” (previously distinguished from mere “interpretation”), i.e. a creative and imaginative process dictated solely by the text itself, whose outcome may never be foreseen or formally limited. In this sense he is opposed to conventional exegesis known to be the basis for and of the metaphysical tradition. In *Spurs*, as in his later works, Derrida not only criticises its vices, but he also promulgates a new mode of reading-interpreting, namely *lecture*. By comparing truth to women (and *vice versa*), he shows by this analogy how much pressing for truth hinders its eventual discovery, as much as it tantalisingly intensifies the reader’s desire for its actual retrieval. For a person to fully comprehend a text, to achieve “the understanding of the understanding” (Greisch 25), he or she attempts to possess it, quite possibly against its will. And this, in turn, changes reading into a completely different activity altogether.

Appropriation of the Other

When a number of formal propositions phrased so eloquently in *Spurs* may, in a way, be read as a preliminary manifesto offering new conceptualisations of one’s reading practice, Derrida further develops his ideas a few years later in *Signéponge*, his examination of Francis Ponge’s *œuvre*. All his theoretical hypotheses concerning the hermeneut’s Sisyphean retrieval of the *pharmakon*, of the-meaning-that-is-not-there, are finally put to the test on concrete material. The philosopher focuses primarily on human inherent desire to *appropriate* and, quite possibly, *manipulate*, *classify*, or *delimit* meaning, which is – to all intents and purposes – a primary function of exegetic reading. While interpreting a text, any text, one always works with a creation written by the Other. His or her piece is literally taken, possessed, usurped by the reader, and they may do whatever they wish with its contents. One may even venture to say that the reader also

appropriates the Other, just as Derrida – for the sake of an experiment – appropriates Ponge himself:

Francis Ponge will have been self-remarked. I have just called this sentence, I have just given a name to a sentence. To a sentence, not to a thing, and I have, among other things, called it an attack.

Attack, in French, forms a very hard word, which nevertheless, and very promptly, falls into pieces. As for the thing thus attacked in the attack, however, falling into pieces is not in any way ruinous; on the contrary, it monumentalizes. (*Signéponge/Signsponge* 4)

I don't believe it at all, but if I were to believe that a proposition acquired its pertinence by miming its subject matter and letting the thing speak (and the thing here is Francis Ponge), I would justify my attack in the name of *mimesis*. (4)

By “attacking,” or – to somewhat assuage this term – addressing his subject, the philosopher also pays homage to his creation. Whether he expresses praise or opprobrium, Derrida reverts to the fundamental right of *voicing his opinion*; looking at it from a different, less text-focused perspective, he does not appropriate the otherness as much as he simply confronts it on the same terms. Hence, he engages in a deeply personal contact with the Author and their creation in what he calls “a situation of radical heteronomy in regard to the thing” (12). “In the disproportion of this heteronomy,” continues Derrida, “an *erotics* engages itself between two laws, *a duel to the death* whose bed and turf, object [*l'objet*] or objective [*l'enjeu*] (object [*l'objeu*]) will always sketch out a signature in the *pre* of a text in abyss” (12; emphasis added). To reformulate his assertion: to read and to write is to engage with a *thing* which both *is* and *is not mine*, for it “remains an other whose law demands the impossible” (14); it is to make contact with the Other and enforce the relation of heteronomy. “The thing is not just something conforming to laws” – in its reception we may be “foraging within it *or* within ourselves” (12; emphasis in the original), which eventually generates meaning independent of the two. By saying so, Derrida harks back and refers to the very cornerstone of traditional exegesis, to it being “[i]nsatiable, yes, and insaturable, a point I insist on since it always also involves water and thirst” (12). And even though one may find “water” aplenty in any library, it is never enough to satisfy their craving.

What begs the question is why Derrida is so preoccupied with and interested in *le pré d'un texte en abyme*, “the *pre* of a text in abyss.” Why does he try to conceptualise something that has been taken as a given since time immemorial? The academically trained hermeneut, or simply any reader who was raised in that intellectual tradition, [7] assumes it to be completely normal to appropriate various texts they happen to peruse (even if they themselves would never use this word) – after all, such an activity begets meaning, broadens their horizons, and enriches their knowledge, bringing “[a] joyful wisdom” (Derrida, *Spurs* 139). The French philosopher with great verbal dexterity manages to highlight and purposefully defamiliarise what came to be considered perfectly acceptable: the disrespectful treatment of a text and blatant disregard for its sovereignty, further sanctioned, and even promoted, by normative poetics (it was not without a reason, as emphasises E. D. Hirsch in *Validity in Interpretation*, that Gadamer very tellingly conceptualised the reader's pre- or proto-understanding of a text as

“prejudice” [259]). “I owe to the thing an absolute respect,” declares Derrida, “which no general law would mediate: the law of the thing is singularity and difference as well” (*Signéponge/Signsponge* 14). Only then can an *object* of interpretation truly become its *subject*, by which token a given text comes to be a unique, and respected, representative piece of a particular literary tradition that may be read-interpreted in opposition to other works of culture. This, in turn, requires the reader to cultivate their *ethical sensibility*. According to Richard Rorty, it is a specific interpretative stance that allows the reader to truly commune with the subject of the work which they peruse. Ethically sensible interpretation would account for its subject and place it somewhere in a broader literary culture, in which sense the hermeneut does not appropriate the Other’s work by projecting onto it a range of *their* conceptualisations but includes it into their discourse on the same terms; to truly appreciate works of literature, one should concentrate on “us” rather than on “I,” thus promulgating a tolerant, inclusive, respectful attitude to the otherness of the subject which, what one should never forget, lays itself open to attack by voicing its innermost feelings, opinions, and thoughts in a given text. The reader should *always* react to a given work with genuine, uncurbed emotions, “[f]or a great love or a great loathing” – remarks Rorty – “is the sort of thing that changes us by changing our purposes, changing the uses to which we shall put people and things and texts we encounter later” (“The Pragmatist’s Progress” 107). Attaining such an affective attunement with the Other is a choice which may or may not be made; it does not govern interpretation inasmuch as it bespeaks one’s sensibility and openness to what is different, “non-mine.” [8]

This line of reasoning brings Jacques Derrida to a number of surprising stipulations: by engaging with the Other “in a situation of absolute heteronomy and of infinitely unequal alliance” (*Signéponge/Signsponge* 48), the reader may experience both “the impossibility of re-appropriation and the moments of depressed impotence” as well as “the dance of an erection just before the moment at which it ‘jubilates’ and ‘joys,’” for they are “in the process of exchange,” interspersed with moments of ecstasy, frustration, anxiety, anger but also happiness, all of which are constitutive to “the power of an infinitely singular writing” (16). A most peculiar description of reading indeed, and noticeably eroticised. One cannot help but wonder: is there a particular end or a reason for such suggestive and carnal rhetoric? The process of reading-interpreting, Derridean *lecture*, may be treated as a highly idiosyncratic intimate encounter, during which the exegete succumbs to the charms of the Other. What differs from a traditional hermeneutic approach is the relation between the reader and the writer – for Derrida, it is a personal confrontation – not with the glorified, larger-than-life figure of the Author but with the subject, viz. some other *individual*.

To substantiate his argumentation, the philosopher quotes Ponge himself: “It all happens (or so I often imagine) as if, from the time I began to write, I had been running, without the slightest success, ‘after’ the esteem of a certain person” (16). [9] The subject of interpretation, “a certain person,” in actuality becomes the hermeneut’s “object of love” (50) – to show said “object” their affection, the reader respects its difference and sovereignty, “letting it breathe *without me*” (20). In the end, to partake in *lecture* means to partake in the aforementioned jubilant dance, which, alternatively, might as well be comprehended as “a duel to the death,” in which both parties have the same rights and privileges. In yet another words, it is

a *tête-à-tête* of two “entirely-others” (100) who agree to meet on their own terms, none of which can be externally enforced by some third party. Thus conceptualised, Derrida’s scholarly ruminations on the particularities of interpretation give way to an erotic, carnal discourse pertinent to and much better suited for an exploration of interpersonal relations, becoming very Barthesian in its form and message. Roland Barthes, after all, also disregarded traditional exegesis, only to praise *lecture*, limitless reading-writing which defies and deflects the cold, patronising gaze of the hermeneut.

Imagined authors, idealised readers, and the intricacies of literary lovemaking

What Derrida said about the reader and the writer, as well as about their intimate relationship sustained by the act of reading-interpreting, may be assumed as auxiliary to his broader contemplations on the essential characteristics of traditional, systematised exegesis. Barthes, on the other hand, devoted his whole work to nothing but the aforementioned interrelation – in *The Pleasure of the Text*, one of the more original and daring academic analyses in the last half-century, the literary theorist examines a range of various experiences an individual may derive from reading, some of which are very sensual and carnal in nature. As assessed by Susan Sontag, “whereas Nietzsche addresses the reader in many tones, mostly aggressive – exulting, berating, coaxing, prodding, taunting, inviting complicity – Barthes invariably performs in an affable register” (“Writing Itself: On Roland Barthes” 71). For both authors “the point is to make us bold, agile, subtle, intelligent, detached,” but it is Roland Barthes, who – having “repeatedly compared teaching to play, reading to eros, writing to seduction” – truly strives “to give pleasure” (72).

The beginning of his work is as prescriptive as it is provocative: “never apologize, never explain” (*The Pleasure of the Text* 3), declares Barthes after Bacon. Introducing the notion of pleasure to the otherwise stiff, “antiseptic” discussion on interpretation is not that unwarranted – as only stands to reason, since the writer may experience joy in their creative process (which, at the same time, does not necessarily nullify their “writerly maladies”: a pervasive sense of *ennui*, *acedia*, or *Weltschmerz*), the reader may also derive pleasure from perusing their creations. For that to occur, and for the “grammatological reading” to commence, the author has to first initiate the interpretative game:

I must seek out this reader (must “cruise” him) *without knowing where he is*. A site of bliss is then created. It is not the reader’s “person” that is necessary to me, it is this site: the possibility of a dialectics of desire, of an *unpredictability* of bliss: the bets are not placed, there can still be a game. (4; emphasis in the original)

The fact that one may feel “bliss” while reading is self-evident and beyond any doubt, of which Barthes is surely well aware: suffice to mention his typology of texts which classifies them as either “readerly” or “writerly” in form and character, and two concomitant types of pleasure that he distinguishes – *jouissance* and *plaisir*. What is unconventional, and so controversial, is the way he conceptualises the readerly experience; his description is clearly saturated with sexual overtones: what allures the reader is “that foam of language which forms by the effect of a

simple need of writing,” “those milky phonemes,” “the motions of ungratified sucking, of an undifferentiated orality, intersecting the orality which produces the pleasures of gastrosophy and of language” (4–5). By addressing the figure and life philosophy of de Sade, he proceeds to elaborate:

Neither culture nor its destruction is erotic; it is the seam between them, the fault, the flaw, which becomes so. The pleasure of the text is like that untenable, impossible, purely *novelistic* instant relished by Sade’s libertine when he manages to be hanged and then to cut the rope at the very moment of his orgasm, his bliss. (7; emphasis in the original)

Barthes concludes his argument by stating that “what pleasure wants is the site of a loss, the seam, the cut, the deflation, the *dissolve* which seizes the subject in the midst of bliss” (7; emphasis in the original). While his licentious language may initially be quite shocking and overwhelming, for the author clearly compares readerly pleasure to that of a sexual climax, Barthes does elaborate on and rationalise his line of reasoning on the following pages. His formal proposition is equally surprising as those of Derrida’s – he denounces the linear decoding advocated by traditional hermeneutics in one’s attempt to “excavate” a given text’s meaning, and promotes the search for its irregularities, for all the places where it falls apart or does not make sense, for its cuts, fissures, seams. Thus understood, the pleasure of the text comes not from a formulation of one coherent message in and of the text but from exploring its numerous evanescent nuclei of meaning interspersed throughout its pages “like the ashes we strew into the wind after death” (Barthes, *Sade, Fourier, Loyola* 9). In other words, the reader may truly experience the beauties of a given literary work if they let themselves be carried and influenced by the text’s *signifiés* and its “twisted dialectic” (8). “Language reconstructs itself *elsewhere* under the teeming flux of every kind of linguistic pleasure” (Barthes, *Pleasure of the Text* 8; emphasis in the original) – it needs not be compartmentalised, classified, appropriated. On the contrary, what Barthes emphasises by referring to Flaubert, one should truly master “a way of cutting, of perforating discourse *without rendering it meaningless*” (8; emphasis in the original). In this sense, literary discontinuity and various lacunae within a text are what generate pure pleasure, and what may be equally alluring as “the most erotic portion of a body *where garment gapes*” (9; emphasis in the original). The author builds upon this mental image, comparing the text’s tempting qualities to those of “the intermittence of skin flashing between two articles of clothing (trousers and sweater), between two edges (the open-necked shirt, the glove and the sleeve); it is this flash itself which seduces, or rather: the staging of an appearance-as-disappearance” (10).

Roland Barthes’s ideas on interpretation are equally original as those of Derrida’s on “[t]he question of the woman” and its importance for “[t]he hermeneutic project” that freed reading “from the horizon of the meaning” (Derrida, *Spurs* 107). Despite a number of differences in their argumentation, they both seem to agree on what exegesis should *not* be, namely an emotionless search for unity, oneness, and linearity which appropriates and totalises a given text by imposing on it meaning that it might not contain in the first place. Instead, one should look for “the seam of the two edges, the interstice of bliss” (Barthes, *Pleasure of the Text* 13) where sense truly is, and approach it accordingly: the

reader is “not to devour, to gobble, but to graze, to browse scrupulously, to rediscover” (13) and subject themselves to “drifting” to be “driven about the language’s illusions, seductions, and intimidations” (18). Only then may one attain “[t]he pleasure of the text,” which Barthes defines as “that moment when my body pursues its own ideas – for my body does not have the same ideas as I do” (17); the reader relishes “the pulsional incidents, the language lined with flesh, a text where we can hear the grain of the throat, the patina of consonants, the voluptuousness of vowels, a whole carnal stereophony: the articulation of the body, of the tongue, not that of meaning, of language” (66–67). The truly passionate *lecture*, so advocated by Barthes, has two forms: “one goes straight to the articulations of the anecdote, it considers the extent of the text, ignores the play of language” (12), whereas

the other reading skips nothing; it weighs, it sticks to the text, it reads, so to speak, with application and transport, grasps at every point in the text the asyndeton which cuts the various languages – and not the anecdote: it is not (logical) extension that captivates it, the winnowing out of truths, but the layering of significance; as in the children’s game of topping hands, the excitement comes not from a processive haste but from a kind of vertical din (the verticality of language and of its destruction) [...]. (12)

“Winnowing out” the truth is as important to Barthes as it was for Nietzsche and Derrida – the difference being his understanding of what said truth entails. The author of *S/Z* seems to signal that the only “truth” that matters is the pleasure that – inasmuch as reading and love life are concerned – one may occasionally experience, should the circumstances be auspicious, or not, which he also emphasises, taking a closer look at Honoré de Balzac’s *Sarrasine*, by analysing “Sarrasine’s passion [...], his *seduction* inaugurated by a preliminary ecstasy; a long series of bodily states” (Barthes, *S/Z* 109; emphasis in the original) and by referring to “the *first time* he knows pleasure and loses his virginity” (109; emphasis in the original).

“I am engulfed, I succumb...” – *affirmation, altération, angoisse*

affirmation / affirmation

Against and in spite of everything, the subject affirms love as *value*. (Barthes, *A Lover’s Discourse: Fragments* 22)

altération / alteration

Abrupt production, within the amorous field, of a counter-image of the loved object. According to minor incidents or tenuous features, the subject suddenly sees the good Image alter and capsize. (25)

angoisse / anxiety

The amorous subject, according to one contingency or another, feels swept away by the fear of a danger, an injury, an abandonment, a revulsion – a sentiment he expresses under the name of *anxiety*. (29)

Roland Barthes’s *A Lover’s Discourse* is, quite possibly, one of the most charming attempts at conceptualisation of disorderly, affective language of a person being in love, who in no way can “keep his mind from racing, taking new measures and

plotting against himself. His discourse exists only *in outbursts of language*, which occur at the whim of trivial, of *aleatory* circumstances” (3; emphasis mine). His work, in so many ways devoted to the “anatomy of human desire,” [10] may also be read as an anti-hermeneutic manifesto. Love, affection, intimacy – as Barthes suggests – those are the concepts which are never properly accounted for in traditional exegesis; for they never can be: the highly systematised methodological apparatus of the hermeneut, a person normally excelling in cerebral pursuits, is not suited for the examination of such elusive phenomena. Human emotionality and affectivity are, as if by nature, unsystematic, unmethodological, and haphazard. They are driven by psychosomatic and somatopsychic stimuli, in which sense they care not for rationality, social mores, or other people’s expectations. Love knows no boundaries, and neither does it acknowledge semantic and topical coherence suited for an academic discourse. It is governed by evanescent feelings and mere serendipity, which – as previously explicated on the example of *The Pleasure of the Text* – may form very important nuclei of meaning for the subject that experiences them. There is no logic underlying the lover’s discourse, unless it can be based on pure affectivity.

Barthesian subject is to be “engulfed” [*s’abîmer*] in their feelings, to revel in an “[o]uburst of annihilation [...] in despair or fulfilment” (*A Lover’s Discourse* 10). Love, one of life’s greatest values, is to be *affirmed*: “when the lover encounters the other, there is an immediate affirmation (psychologically: dazzlement, enthusiasm, exaltation, mad projection of a fulfilled future: I am devoured by desire, the impulse to be happy): I say *yes* to everything (blinding myself)” (24). “[L]ove’s *value* is ceaselessly threatened by depreciation,” warns Barthes, “[b]ut the strength of love cannot be shifted, be put into the hands of an Interpreter; it remains here, on the level of language, enchanted, intractable” (24). Said language changes, *alters*, becomes distorted, by which token the image of one’s object of affection also changes: “Quite frequently, it is by language that the other is altered; the other speaks a different word, and I hear rumbling menacingly *a whole other world*, which is the world of the other” (26). The threatening confrontation of, as Derrida would have it, two “entirely-others” may lead to a noticeable sense of “disreality” [*déréalité*]. “I see the world – the other world – as a generalized hysteria” (88), says the subject, which may eventually make them feel pervasive *angoisse*, anxiety, that one day – due to mutual miscommunication – they may lose their lover forever. Assuming, of course, that their feelings were pure to begin with, for there is also a slight possibility that “the subject manages to annul the loved object under the volume of love itself: by a specifically amorous perversion, it is love the subject loves, not the object” (31).

As may be clearly conjectured, the state of being in love completely reverts the normal hierarchy of values, which is also applicable to the lover’s discourse – what ought to be filled with sense may be inherently meaningless and *vice versa*: a thing that in certain circumstances would have been assessed as trifle, for the enamoured subject may be priceless and filled with sense to the brim. The overabundance of sense, if one can even conceptualise such a phenomenon, sometimes quite subversively resists interpretation as much as its lack does. As exemplified by the Barthesian analysis of courtship, love encourages a new form of exegetic reading; the sentiment which is also clearly visible in, for instance, Sontag, as both theoreticians could say in one voice: “In place of a hermeneutics

we need an erotics of art” (Sontag, “Against Interpretation” 14). Or, to reconceptualise both ideas, hermeneutics based on a lyricised or eroticised discourse, *anti-hermeneutics*. “I want to change systems,” confesses Barthes, and adds peremptorily in quite a prescriptive tone: “*no longer to unmask, no longer to interpret*, but to make consciousness itself a drug, and thereby to accede to the perfect vision of reality, to the great bright dream, to prophetic love” (*A Lover’s Discourse* 60; emphasis mine). This perfect, bright vision has an almost transcendental and oracular nature: it just as well may be a revelatory manifestation, an epiphany, or an anamnesis. It is not easily analysable, which – once again – goes against traditional hermeneutics. There is no exegetic reading of intimate love that would not be superficial: love and lust are not governed by academic methodologies, and can only be commented upon *de actū*. One’s intimate relationship with the Other is unique and singular, as is their common language; a person never knows whether they love as much as they are loved back, which is equally true of the reader-writer interconnection. According to Barthes,

[t]he author who leaves his text and comes into our life has no unity; he is a mere plural of ‘charms,’ the site of a few tenuous details, yet the source of vivid novelistic glimmerings, a discontinuous chant of amiabilities, in which we nevertheless read death more certainly than in the epic of a fate; he is not a (civil, moral) person, he is a body. (*Sade, Fourier, Loyola* 8)

Then perhaps the subject returns, not as illusion, but as *fiction*. A certain pleasure is derived from a way of imagining oneself as *individual*, of inventing a final, rarest fiction: the fictive identity. This fiction is no longer the illusion of a unity; on the contrary, it is the theater of society in which we stage our plural: our pleasure in *individual* – but nor personal. (*Pleasure of the Text* 62; emphasis in the original)

In this sense, “a lover’s discourse” is also “a lover’s interpretation of the Other,” where to read and to interpret means to endow someone with one’s trust and affirmation. In other words: the act of reading is the act of intimate communion between two subjects: the one who experiences and the one who offered the experience in the first place.

Roland Barthes’s revolutionary propositions concerning *lecture*, reading-interpreting, are very similar to those offered by Jacques Derrida. Both thinkers inquire what the sense of reading is and why it is inherently connected to an impassionate, cerebral, and highly systematised “excavation” and subsequent verbalisation of the author’s intended meaning advocated by traditional hermeneutics. They promulgate a different type of reading: one that is not an “antiseptic,” dehumanised, automatous *retrieval of meaning* – especially when meaning has the status of the *pharmakon* – and that is a unique *experience* between two people: an intimate, highly personal encounter. Both Barthes and Derrida are much more interested in this “chance meeting,” with all its enticing, mysterious attributes; letting oneself “drift” with the narrative flow, to be surprised by the text, to be tempted, charmed, and enthralled by its potential infinitudes – those are the qualities they seek in each and every text.

Their ideas are most interesting indeed, but one might still wonder: is there a specific end for such a conceptualisation of reading and interpreting?

Ways of seeing, ways of reading

Barthes addresses and partially assuages the reader's unease by admitting that "the position of pleasure in a theory of the text is not certain. Simply, a day comes when we feel a certain need to *loosen* the theory a bit, to shift the discourse, the idiolect which repeats itself, becomes consistent, and to give it the shock of a question. Pleasure is this question" (*Pleasure of the Text* 64; emphasis in the original). Now, as one may assess with certainty, this day has finally come; the beginning of theory becoming "loosened" may indeed be traced back to the late 1960s, when the academic discourse was fully saturated with structuralist purity and imposed methodological perfection. Pleasure "can embarrass the text's return to morality, to truth: to the morality of truth: it is an oblique, a drag anchor, so to speak, without which the theory of the text would revert to a centered system, a philosophy of meaning" (64–65). The theoreticians' need to free the discourse from external impositions, the very cornerstone of poststructuralism, had many consequences; its influence can be seen on generative grammarians, who had initially planned to conceptualise the universal grammar of literature, on normative poetics worshipped by numerous prescriptivists, and on narratologists, who tried to universalise and compartmentalise the entirety of human literary production. As it happens, the change was also present in traditional hermeneutics; structuralist theoreticians were not really interested in the problematics and intricacies of interpretation, simply classifying them as appurtenant to the domains of poetics and hermeneutics (thus very unfairly minimising or even completely nullifying their importance to the humanities); surprisingly, they did not really concern themselves with the linguistic component underlying traditional exegesis. Poststructuralist critics, on the other hand, not only did account for by then forgotten aspects of reading-interpreting, but they also suggested one assume a new perspective on many problems that burdened literary theory at that time, two of which were its orthodoxy and inherent systematicity. They, in a way, allowed the humanities to concentrate on a human being again: on one's corporeality, affectivity, somaticity; in part to counteract and undo, as interestingly phrased by Terry Eagleton, "the damage done by a Cartesian tradition," because of which "one of the first images the word 'body' brings to mind is that of a corpse. To announce the presence of a body in the library is by no means to allude to an industrious reader" (*The Illusions of Postmodernism* 71).

Both Barthes and Derrida very actively contributed to the discussion on the state of hermeneutics from the late 1960s onwards. Suffice to mention Barthes's "Science versus Literature," in which he truly championed the importance of pleasure for and in reading literature, and which – as he assessed – was non-present in scientific discourses. What he did have in mind was not only a pleasure one derives from engaging in their cerebral pursuits but a purely sensual, erotic experience. While problematising "the Eros of language" (Barthes, "Science versus Literature" 898), he acknowledged its absence in literary studies – something which he could hardly accept. Both Barthes and Derrida, once again, were very much against the number of traditional conceptualisations: of literature, of the canon, of reading, of interpreting. They were well aware that to truly change the by now ossified approach to the topic, they needed to surprise

their reader, to shock and agitate them. As charmingly phrased by Virginia Woolf, the main end of a good text is that “it should give us pleasure; the desire which impels us when we take it from the shelf is simply to receive pleasure. [...] It should lay under a spell with its first word, and we should only wake, refreshed, with its last” (“The Modern Essay” 216). Derrida and Barthes knew full well that to put a spell on their readers and to criticise hundreds of years of exegetic analysis, boldly as they did, they had to propose something revolutionary, to launch an attack which nobody anticipated. By conjoining erotics with hermeneutics, love with science, and, most controversially, sex with the text, they achieved an enormous success. They did have a “scientific scandal” in mind from the very beginning; as recalled by Barthes, who “[o]ne evening, half asleep on a banquette in a bar, [...] tried to enumerate all the languages within earshot” (*Pleasure of the Text* 49), only to conclude:

This speech, at once very cultural and very savage, was above all lexical, sporadic; it set up in me, through its apparent flow, a definitive discontinuity: this *non-sentence* was in no way something that could not have acceded to the sentence, that might have been *before* the sentence; it was: what is eternally, splendidly, *outside the sentence*. Then, potentially, all linguistics fell, linguistics which believes only in the sentence and has always attributed an exorbitant dignity to predicative syntax (as the form of a logic, of a rationality); I recalled this scientific scandal [...]. (49–50; emphasis in the original)

Barthes’s work, as much as Derrida’s, had an enormous impact not only on linguistics and philosophy, being their respective points of departure, but also on poetics, literary theory, and hermeneutics. Both thinkers jostled against much stronger opponents: head figures of various other disciplines and revered scholarly institutions. Still, they knew what they were doing and what would be the most effective strategy: “If you hammer a nail into a piece of wood, the wood has a different resistance according to the place you attack it: we say that wood is not isotropic. Neither is the text: the edges, the seam, are unpredictable” (36). Their verbal onslaught might not have changed hermeneutics forever – might not have hewn this block of wood, to use Barthes’s metaphor – but they did make a deep enough cut. [11] After all, they sowed a seed of doubt, garnering a broad readership of like-minded individuals who believed that there are *other* ways of reading, interpreting, and commenting upon literature – also in an academic setting.

By fusing hermeneutics and erotics, the text and pleasure, not only did both theoreticians undermine the scientific and methodological principles of traditional exegesis, but they also managed to achieve one more thing...

The humanities – humanised anew?

The number of changes in academia in the second half of the 20th century had an irrevocable impact on the way contemporary readers approach literary texts nowadays. It was structuralism that managed to “dehumanise” literary studies, and whose proponents cared for nothing but recurrent linguistics patterns and theoretical structures. The user of language (and, by extension, the reader-interpreter) was not treated as a living and breathing person but as a placeholder,

a speculative construct onto which the scholars projected their ideas of what one may (or, more prescriptively, should) say, think, and act like. As for hermeneutics, it also dehumanised the figure of the Author, who became – at best – an “author,” an elusive “guarantor” of meaning preserved in his or her texts, a formless, shapeless figure whose sole purpose was to impose their sense onto their creation, which was then “excavated” by the hermeneut. Communication *and* artistic creation became, in a way, inferior to the acts of their decoding in forms of linguistic analyses and exegetic reading, both of which offered scholars a methodological toolkit that could well account for the examination of their objects alone: no figure of the “author” or the “reader” were needed. Such academic research, given its character, may indeed have been precise and self-sufficient, but it lacked one important element: the human behind it. The entirety of human artistic production was analysed as prescribed by theoretical paradigms, but said analysis was – to all intents and purposes – lifeless and two-dimensional. A human being was thus deprived of Bergsonian *élan vital*, affectivity, and its body, becoming but a barren automaton. [12] The dehumanised humanities – a repository of unoriginal ideas pertaining to exanimate subjects – were what really worried Derrida and Barthes, which may have incentivised them to excoriate hermeneutics in the first place. Their main goal was not to criticise the methodological apparatus by means of which texts were dissected and examined in so mechanical a manner; rather, they wanted to *humanise* both the subject and the object of scholarly analyses: not only to make them “alive” as much as truly “human.” Their idea to address the problematics of reading and narrativisation was a sensible one – after all, it is the domain of the text where the writer and the reader may truly commune with each other. Both Barthes’s and Derrida’s message seems to be pretty straightforward: it is not *structures* but *people* who communicate with one another; not lifeless *constructs* but *persons of flesh and blood* – in many ways imperfect but all the more beautiful for their inherent flaws.

Any literary creation is much more than *just a text* – it spans “all the operations by which one can make of one’s signature a text, of one’s text a thing, and, of the thing, one’s signature” (Derrida, *Signéponge/Signsponge* 20). This signature, as asserted by Barthes, is also “an anagram of the body” (*Pleasure of the Text* 17) – it encompasses all of one’s lived experience, *Lebenserfahrung*, and can be rearranged in the form of the narrative only to be subsequently shared with others so that people “may help one another to attend to words, phrases, images, scenes,” (Rosenblatt, *Reader, Text, Poem* 146) all of which facilitate their mutual communication, promote camaraderie, and encourage a collective sense of *esprit de corps*. As a consequence – what seems to be equally applicable to Barthes as it is to Derrida – one may assume that writing is a kind of intimate confession, a love letter to the Other-that-is-not-here, as much as reading is a deeply personal contact with the Other whose absence one tries to negate by familiarising themselves with their life story carved onto the pages of their work.

Notes

[1] The entry dated Autumn 1881, 12 (62).

[2] See Greisch (209ff.). Greisch's work, just like Derrida's *Voice and Phenomenon* as well as *Margins of Philosophy*, encourages one to "demystify" a whole range of various texts, especially philosophical analyses, in a truly deconstructionist fashion that goes way beyond more traditional hermeneutic reading.

[3] Notice how the translator corrects Nietzsche's sentence by capitalising "I"; in the French version one may spot both upper- and lower-case variants: *J'/j'ai oublié mon parapluie*.

[4] The assumption is that "meaning" or "sense" can originate in various places in a text where it does not conform to any standards, being incoherent, disjointed, or supposedly unintelligible. As Derrida adds later, "[y]ou might even agree to that is contained a certain ballast of rhetorical, pedagogical and persuasive qualities. But suppose anyway that it is cryptic. What if those texts of Nietzsche [...] were selected for reasons whose history and code I alone know? What if even I fail to see the transparent reason of such a history and code? At most you could reply that one person does not make a code. To which I could just as easily retort that the key to this text is between me and myself, according to a contract where I am more than just one" (*Spurs* 135–136).

[5] Cf. Rorty, "Philosophy as a Kind of Writing," wherein the author claims that "Derrida looks about for a way to say something about language which will not convey the idea of 'sign' or 'representation' or 'supplement'" (151).

[6] Cf. Hirsch's comment in *Validity in Interpretation*: "The interpreter's job is to specify the text's horizon as far as he is able, and this means, ultimately, that he must familiarize himself with the typical meanings of the author's mental and experiential world" (223).

[7] Eric Donald Hirsch assesses that any "beginner may on occasion arrive at an understanding that is truer than the practiced scholar's. The narrowing process of trial and error, guess and counter-guess that the beginner must go through may in rare, lucky instances save him from an overly hasty typification. His expectations may be more flexible, and he may therefore perceive aspects that an expert could miss" (103).

[8] "The reader, concentrating his attention on the world he has evoked," assesses Louise M. Rosenblatt, quite similarly to Richard Rorty, "feels himself freed for the time from his own preoccupations and limitations. Aware that the blueprint is the author's text, the reader feels himself in communication with another mind, another world" (86).

[9] The quote comes from the Preface to Ponge's *Proêmes* (1948).

[10] The term proposed by Peter Brunette. Review from *The Washington Post Book World* on the book's back cover.

[11] "I distrust," admits Richard Rorty in "The Pragmatist's Progress," "both the structuralist idea that knowing more about 'textual mechanisms' is essential for literary criticism and the post-structuralist idea that detecting the presence, or the subversion, of metaphysical hierarchies is essential. Knowing about mechanisms of textual production or about metaphysics can, to be sure, sometimes be useful. Having read Eco, or having read Derrida, will often give you something interesting to say about a text which you could not otherwise" (105).

[12] Cf. Eagleton's comment in *The Illusions of Postmodernism*: "The postmodern subject, unlike its Cartesian ancestor is one whose body is integral to its identity. Indeed from Bakhtin to the Body Shop, Lyotard to leotards, the body has become one of the most recurrent preoccupations of postmodern thought" (69).

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