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CRITICAL  
THEORY  
SINCE  
1965

edited by  
HAZARD ADAMS  
and  
LEROY SEARLE

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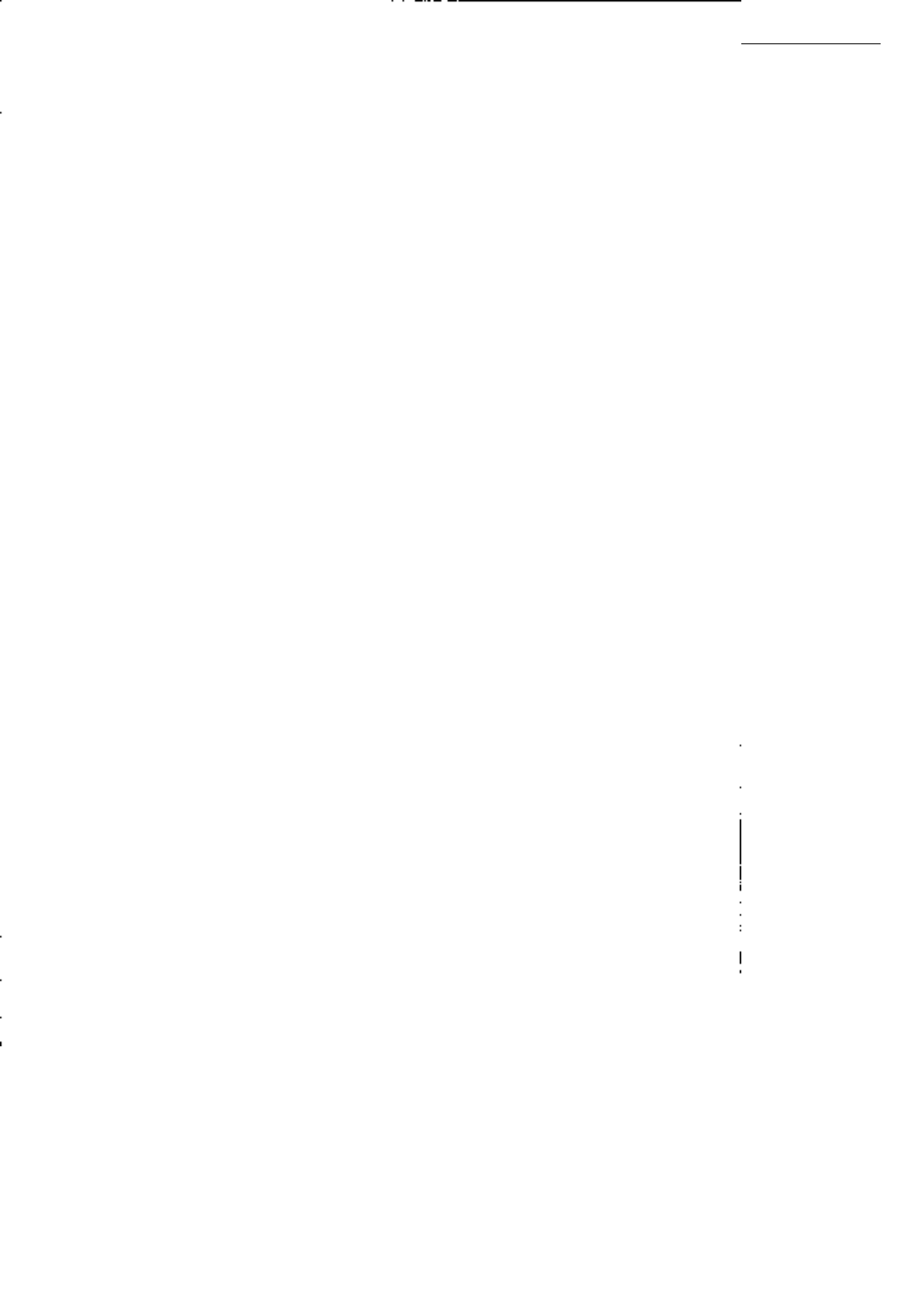
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# Preface

THIS ANTHOLOGY is a sequel to *Critical Theory Since Plato* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1972) and attempts to bring the history of literary theory reasonably up to date. The year in the title marks approximately the ending date for selections in *Critical Theory Since Plato*, though a few of the essays that appear there were first published between 1966 and 1969. Except for two instances, here we have not published essays by authors who appeared in *Critical Theory Since Plato*, even though several of them continued to be active in the two decades that this book covers. As in the earlier volume, works of specifically critical practice—so-called practical criticism, structural analysis, hermeneutics, etc.—have been excluded, except in marginal cases like Heidegger's essay on Holderlin. (A historical collection of critical practice, beginning with the earliest readers of Homer and Scripture is our next task.) This book follows roughly the plan of its predecessor, with one important addendum. A large appendix includes selections from sixteen writers not represented in *Critical Theory Since Plato*. Some of these writers could well have been there and are made available here to fill out the picture (Harcourt Brace Jovanovich has not wished to undertake a revision). Others are present here because, though not strictly literary theorists, they have been extremely influential or in their essay they address an issue of importance in an especially helpful way. The selections from Ferdinand de Saussure's *Course in General Linguistics* are an example of the former and Isaiah Berlin's "Verification" the latter.

The presence in the appendix, and even in the main body, of texts not addressed directly to literary matters reflects the fact that in recent years the world of literary theory has been greatly expanded. This change has made selection especially difficult. It has also made us look back at *Critical Theory Since Plato* and wish that certain texts of earlier ages had been included there. From the perspective of 1986, for example, Plato's *Catylina* and parts of the *Phaedrus* take on an increased importance, as do certain texts of classical rhetoric. Our aim in the appendix has not been, however, to supplement the companion volume so much as to provide some of the necessary background for the main body of this text. The selections in *Critical Theory Since Plato* remain indispensable as background to this sequel. Any detachment of the study of modern and contemporary literary theory from the earlier history of criticism we regard as a serious mistake.

Selections in the text have been arranged chronologically by year of publication, writing, or first presentation as a lecture, rather than by some imposed rubric. Organization of the field by rubric has become increasingly difficult.

There are too many crossing and converging lines of force. In any case, we have not seen an anthology of the history of criticism arranged by rubric that has not been disconcerting to work with.

Our own views, of course, appear in the choice of selections, the headnotes, the introduction, and the afterword; we have attempted to be eclectic and to allow a wide hearing. In the present situation any other decision has presented itself as unthinkable. Our choices of texts have been sometimes for historical import and influence as well as for representation of certain kinds of theory. Limitations of space have prevented our including many works we would like to have seen here. We hope the bibliography helps to make up for these omissions.

We regret that we have been unable to obtain permission from Oxford University Press to reprint an essay by Tzvetan Todorov and have been refused permission to reprint an essay by Fredric Jameson.

We are in the debt of many scholars and critics who have generously responded to our requests for advice, and we wish to acknowledge their help here: M. J. Abrams, Carolyn Allen, Jonathan Arac, Douglas Collins, Northrop Frye, Sandra M. Gilbert, Geoffrey Hartman, E. D. Hirsch, Wolfgang Iser, Davor Kaperanic, Murray Krieger, Vincent B. Leitch, Wallace Martin, J. Hillis Miller, Walter J. Ong, S. J., Edward W. Said, Thomas L. Sebeok, Steven Shaviro, Barbara Herrnstein Smith, and Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak. The editors are particularly in the debt of Mary Gazlay, who has handled the securing of permissions and has proofread the text. Needless to say, the errors and omissions are our responsibility.

Acknowledgments of permission to reprint appear in bibliographical notes at the bottom of the first page of each selection. Footnotes are identified at the end of each by author [Au.], translator [Tr.], or editors [Eds.]. References citing *Critical Theory Since Plato* employ the acronym CTSP. Authors whose works are included in this text are indicated by the italicizing of their names, and readers who wish to consult their essays should go to the contents list.

HAZARD ADAMS  
LEROY SEARLE



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CRITICAL THEORY  
SINCE 1965

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# Introduction

by Hazard Adams

1

THE YEAR 1967 marks the midpoint in a decade of profound change and disquiet, particularly in its latter half, that did not leave the world of criticism and theory untouched. This change has been seen perhaps most dramatically in the United States, where it occurred more suddenly than elsewhere, principally because of the delay in the arrival of both European phenomenological and structuralist criticism in this country and the sudden demise or, some would say, transformation of the latter into poststructuralism or deconstruction. (American linguistics and anthropology had a structuralist phase, but it was exhausted before 1965.) As a result, North American criticism hardly had a structuralist phase at all—a phase that had developed over decades in Europe. As did its predecessor volume, this anthology naturally takes a North American point of view and thus, because of the phenomenon mentioned, somewhat skews the history of these matters, not only in this introduction but also in the selections made. It also limits itself to the history of criticism and theory in Western thought.

The other part of the title also reveals the North American perspective in its continued use of the term "critical theory." In North America the term has tended to mean the theory of literary criticism, whereas in Europe it has been associated with social thought and specifically identified with the so-called Frankfurt School of sociological analysis and critique of ideology. For our title we continue to use the term in the former sense, though we recognize the significance of the latter and its arrival long since in North America. Further, we recognize, and this anthology demonstrates, that much more than what had previously been thought of as relevant is involved today in questions about literature. Indeed, in some influential theories the term "literature," which does not have as long a history as one might suppose, has itself been put in question. The hidden, implied "literary" in our title we accept as problematical, even as we allow it to remain for quite practical reasons, one of which is that an anthology must establish boundaries, rough as they may be. The implied term means that this book holds works relevant to the theoretical concerns of criticism, imagined as the study of texts traditionally considered literary. We recognize at the same time the broader range of theory now thought important and even the view that there can be no firm boundaries established for such concerns or for literature itself. That we have felt compelled to make these remarks attests to the existence of a situation requiring a new anthology, which may do something toward clarifying the relations or differences among the many conflicting and independent positions being held or developed today. Never in the history of criticism has there been such a plethora of competing jargons and systems, to say nothing of antisystems.

## II

In the effort to give some order to a large collection of separate pieces spanning over 2,000 years, the general introduction to *Critical Theory Since Plato* had recourse to the useful orientation of theories summarized by M. H. Abrams in his book *The Mirror and the Lamp* (1953). There he divided theories into four types called mimetic, pragmatic, expressive, and objective; and he noted that they predominated in the history of criticism, but not exclusively, roughly in the order in which they are given above—from the mimetic views held by Plato and Aristotle, through the pragmatic views of Horace and numerous medieval, Renaissance, and Enlightenment critics, to the expressive views of the romantic theorists, and finally the objectivism of the modernists.

In order to account for what is rather oddly called "postmodernism" and sometimes the "newer" criticism, successor in America to the New Criticism, one may profit by examining the history of criticism and theory from a somewhat different perspective, dividing it into three worlds that tend to overlap: those of ontology, epistemology, and linguistic thought. That would be to observe how criticism has moved along routes also taken by philosophy and other disciplines.<sup>1</sup> From this vantage, criticism and theory seem to be in the throes of sorting out the implications of a major shift to an interest in language that stirred late in the eighteenth century, flowered in the nineteenth, and threatened to sweep all before it in the twentieth. This shift was marked by the almost compulsive attention paid in almost all fields to language, symbols, and signs. The movement gathered momentum rapidly in this century—probably too rapidly for easy assimilation—on the tide of the previous epistemological movement, which it gradually replaced.

In the seventeenth century, epistemology had usurped the place of ontology, or the problem of being, which had dominated philosophy from its recorded beginning in ancient Greece. Mainly because of Plato, criticism received from the world of ontology two ideas that pervade it to this day, despite periodic campaigns to eradicate them: the ideas embodied by the terms "mimesis" and the "didactic." Under their domination, literature remained at best a handmaiden to philosophy and, in the Christian era, to theology. At worst it was regarded as an unruly child requiring surveillance and periodic correction, or even as an enemy to be destroyed or exiled from proper society.

The world of epistemology, usually marked in its beginnings by the science of Galileo, the empiricism of Francis Bacon and John Locke, and the rationalism of René Descartes, did not charge abruptly the dominance of these two venerable terms. They persist to this day, sometimes in synonyms, and they have amply proved their staying power. But the famous bifurcation of nature, as A. N. Whitehead called it in his *Science and the Modern World* (1925), gave rise to a new emphasis. The bifurcation he refers to was the separation of human experi-

<sup>1</sup> Abrams's own analysis of the postobjective 390 of criticism, which he calls the "Age of Reading," can be found in this volume. Authors whose names are in italics are included in this volume and can be found in the contents list beginning on p. x.

once into objective and subjective or primary and secondary realms of knowledge. The problem of knowledge came to be regarded as prior to the problem of being. George Berkeley's criticism of Locke was that if the objective or primary qualities of experience were privileged—were accorded the status of the real—and the secondary qualities were merely subjective and a sort of illusion, how could we ever know the primary at all? After all, the primary qualities could be experienced only through the subjective, which had been declared relative and unreliable. Berkeley's form of subjective idealism was more successful as a criticist or *reductio ad absurdum* of Locke's distinction than as a route for philosophy, however; and the subject-object problem continued to dominate epistemology. It gave rise to David Hume's radical skepticism (CTSP, pp. 313–23), which in turn led to Immanuel Kant's critical philosophy (CTSP, pp. 377–99). It gave rise to ideas of the aesthetic, the imagination, and what Abrams called the "expressive" theoretical orientation in romantic criticism. The effort was to clear a space for human experiences the importance of which was not accounted for in a philosophy that accepted only scientific knowledge. Literary theory labored nevertheless under the domination of subjectivity and its inevitable but alien partner the objective. Aesthetics, which was systematically developed as the concept we know in the eighteenth century, involved the idea of experience and affect, particularly experience not reducible to objective measurement or to the Kantian categories of the understanding. "Imagination" in its many transmutations came to be regarded as a term denoting a creative mental power that overcame the implied and feared solipsism of the subjective by actually shaping experience into the real (see Coleridge, CTSP, pp. 468–70). "Expressive" is a term that describes the activity of the poet in bringing to externality the inner being or self. Theories of imagination and mental creativity sought to overcome the powerful bifurcation of subject and object and the isolation that threatened each individual in a world where subjectivity reduced to feeling apparently could not reach the object or beyond the enclosure of the self. Theories of pure subjectivity, in its extremity impressionism, accepted the bifurcation and in so doing acknowledged the inevitability of a radically solipsistic subjectivity for poet and critic alike. The classic text expressing this view is the conclusion to the *Renaissance* of Walter Pater (1894), for a while suppressed by its author as dangerous to youth. Its most famous sentences are "Experience, already reduced to a swarm of impressions, is ringed round for each one of us by that thick wall of personality through which no real voice has ever pierced on its way to us, or from us to that which we can only conjecture to be without. Every one of those impressions is the impression of the individual in his isolation, each mind keeping us a solitary prisoner in its own dream of a world." (The whole of the conclusion is in CTSP, pp. 643–45.) Anatole France's famous remark in his "Adventures of the Soul" (1888–93) expresses the same situation: "To be quite frank, the true ought to say: 'Gentlemen, I am going to talk about myself on the subject of Shakespeare, or Racine, or Pascal, or Goethe—subjects that offer me a beautiful opportunity'" (CTSP, p. 671).

At about the same time the phenomenological movement, which was in part an attempt to reestablish the ontological world in the face of the epistemological world's new supremacy, attempted to heal the fissure between the subject and the

world by rejecting the Kantian theory of the unknowability of things in themselves and promoting consciousness as knowing that is more than knowing in the epistemological sense of producing scientifically verifiable "truth." Consciousness is always the consciousness of something according to the purative founder of phenomenology, *Edmund Husserl*. Phenomenology in its many varieties in Europe, it was claimed, was an attack on epistemology, but the movement took only halfway measures, as shown by a term commonly used among phenomenological critics, "intersubjectivity." Intersubjectivity implies an objectivity somewhere; and, too, the shift from the term "knowledge" to "consciousness" was not a complete break. In any case, the phenomenological movement, the major aesthete of which was *Roman Ingarden*, never dominated the scene in Europe. In America its related literary theory, the "criticism of consciousness," flourished briefly under the proprietorship of Georges Poulet (CTSP, pp. 1213–22) and his disciple at The Johns Hopkins University, *J. Hillis Miller*. Miller's career is a microcosm of one line of movement in America: a criticism in the period with which we are concerned. Trained at Harvard in the New Criticism, he passed through Poulet's influence and emerged in the seventies a Derridean deconstructionist, engaging in a polemic with M. H. Abrams on the question of whether textual meaning could be determinate or was inevitably indeterminate. Phenomenological theory with its emphasis on poetic consciousness mediated successfully by the literary work arrived comparatively late in North America, however. Indeed, even in Europe it was quickly unpushed, as the work of *Martin Heidegger* on language shows, in the great web of language theory that transfigured philosophical interest once again and brought to eminence the linguistic world.

We now recognize that the epistemological age carried the seeds of this transformation within itself. Giovanni Battista Vico (CTSP, pp. 293–302) anticipated the transformation with his theory of tropes as early as his *New Science* in 1725. It was latent in the first stirrings of a crude anthropology, etymology, and archeology in the eighteenth century and in the theories about mythology and the origin of language that continued to be offered into the nineteenth century. It was latent also in the thought of Kant, which seems to us today to cry out for transference of the notion of the constitutive from the mind to language. But on the whole philosophy remained concerned with problems of perception, knowing, and being with little attention paid to the mediation of language. There was, however, a strand of neo-Kantianism carried from Wilhelm von Humboldt to Ernst Cassirer, who published his three-volume *Philosophy of Symbolic Forms* in the 1920s, that did introduce language theory. Von Humboldt's brother Alexander had traveled widely in the Americas and gathered much information about languages, which Wilhelm put to use in his theories. In this neo-Kantian line, language became the medium of human creativity, the location of human imaginative power, an outgrowth or expression of human spirit. Cassirer, also in the debt of Vico, fled from the Nazis and arrived in the United States to write *An Essay on Man* (CTSP, pp. 994–1003), in which he regarded man as the *animal symbolicum*. This was a time during which the New Criticism succeeded in dominating critical fashion in America. Isolated from European developments, the New Criticism was in large part a reaction against the positivistic historical

scholarship and pedagogy of the American academy. It came only belatedly to recognize that its practice had philosophical implications. This recognition came about gradually in the work of such peripheral figures as Monroe Beardsley (CTSP, pp. 2014–31), Eliseo Vivas (CTSP, pp. 1069–77), and Philip Wheelwright (CTSP, pp. 1102–12). It was supplemented and analyzed by Vivas's student Markay Krieger (CTSP, pp. 1223–49).

When Abrams wrote of the "objectivist" critical orientation, he had in mind this movement, which objectifies the Kantian producer of aesthetic "purposiveness without purpose" or "internal purposiveness" in a linguistic artifact, apart from the historical author and separate from a subjective or empirically constituted reader. The New Criticism's considerable involvement with quite different positions—including the psychologism of I. A. Richards (CTSP, pp. 847–59) and self-styled classicisms of T. F. Hulme (CTSP, pp. 766–82) and T. S. Eliot (CTSP, pp. 783–90), its anti-Platonism, and its own curious positivism—cannot be charted here. Krieger's *The New Apologists for Poetry* (1956) remains an excellent analysis and one of the first rigorously theoretical works in American criticism. It is important to notice that the New Criticism in America did its work in ignorance of European phenomenology, which had preceded it chronologically but in America sought to succeed it. Neither had Europe been affected by the New Criticism, which took some time seeping into the academic bastions of England. The situation was the same with another European movement profoundly at odds with phenomenology but with some aspects of which phenomenology had directly to cope, specifically its direct concern with language.

This movement was, of course, structuralism, the origin of which is usually regarded as being the posthumously published *Course in General Linguistics* of Ferdinand de Saussure. Phenomenologists had been interested in language, of course. Heidegger is famous for remarking that language speaks man, that all man's thought is implicated in language. For Heidegger, however, language was mediatory, and the consciousness of the subject worked in and through it to the reader. For the structuralist, the "through" was eliminated, as was the phenomenological subject. De Saussure's aim was to establish a science of language on a firm foundation, and that meant to him that it would be necessary to isolate the object of study as a world or system of its own. The problem for such a study of language had always been, on the one hand, the supposedly originating human subject and, on the other, the troublesome referent. Both kept carrying into its study the baggage of externality. Actual speakers or real dogs and horses trotting through the world of language were certainly a nuisance to anyone attempting to establish a science dealing with it. Chemists do not want the "luckweed and a few fish" that the poet W. B. Yeats insisted on in water; they want that "poor naked creature H<sub>2</sub>O." Physicists do not want dirt in their matter, which only clogs up the effort to constitute matter in and as number. Further, as Northrop Frye remarked in his *Anatomy of Criticism* (CTSP, pp. 1127–47), which begins as a plea for development of a true "science" of criticism, physicists study physics, not nature. Linguists, on this principle, would study linguistics, not language, and certainly not nature or human nature. Linguistics would have to be a science unconcerned with subjects or referents.

So language study and linguistically oriented philosophy which in their se-

matically oriented forms had always included acknowledgment of the referent and in their neo-Kantian forms had been supremely concerned with expression by a speaker, were reduced under the influence of de Saussure to the assumption that language was a binary system. Only the signifier (sound image, for de Saussure) and signified (concept) remained. This view has never fully won the day, however. Threefold systems which included the referent were influential before de Saussure, as the works of Gottlob Frege and Charles Sanders Peirce show, and after in their followers and others who insisted on language's capacity to bring the world into symbolic existence. The work of anthropological linguistics in many of its forms has emphasized the relation of human behavior to language (for example, Benjamin Lee Whorf). Indeed, as *Emile Benveniste*, himself inclined to a structuralist position, shows, de Saussure was equivocal or inconsistent about the status of the referent. Heidegger had been deliberately equivocal about the question of the subject, of whether if language speaks man, man does not also speak language. In Saussurean structuralism the banishment of the referent as a scientific irrelevance brought things down firmly on the side of the view that human beings are caught in the "prison house of language," as Fredric Jameson called it. Language had come to speak man—with a deterministic vengeance, even to the extent that the human subject, staple of the epistemological age, came into question. Indeed, language had seemed to replace the world and people, or rather the world had become linguistic rather in the same way that physicists had made the world mathematical.

This view happened to be congenial in some ways with a political position that had long identified the concept of the subject or "man" with an oppressive capitalism built on the notion of the laissez-faire economic individual. But this position was usually materialistic in Marxist fashion, and thus those who held it rebelled against the idea of the referentless "prison house," even as they were happy enough to dispatch the individual subject, regarded as a bourgeois invention. This whole situation perpetuated something of a crisis in Marxist literary theory, but crises in literary theory have almost always resulted in an influx of energy. Structuralism had leftist leanings on the whole, or rather leftist politics in France leaned toward some aspects of structuralism while at the same time remaining extremely wary of the formalist direction that structuralism, with both subject and referent gone, threatened to take. Those leaning toward leftist social theory have considered the structuralist and deconstructive movement that followed it in America a reactionary domestication.

Certainly deconstruction can be regarded as a carrying of structuralist principles to their logical conclusion, and some would call this movement a *reductio ad absurdum* like that of Berkeley.

The individual subject or "man" came under attack also in the work of the historian *Michel Foucault*, certainly associated with structuralist thought though he always angrily denied the appellation. Foucault's influential *The Order of Things* (1966) announced the disappearance of humanist man, which he regarded as a creation of the Renaissance *épistémè*. With this disappearance, of course, went the idea of an author.

He viewed this demise as a liberation of sorts from a worldview responsible



for various cultural inscriptions as we have known them—the madhouse, the hospital, the prison, and even the conventions of sexuality. This kind of “archeological” anthropology (or anti anthropology) of Western culture had as its main characteristics the critique of institutions as such and could be looked on with interest by those who had studied the writings of the Frankfurt sociologists and philosophers *Theodor Adorno* and *Max Horkheimer*, though some in Europe regarded their work as not radical enough, especially Adorno’s aestheticism.

Anthropology had been born in the individualistic entrepreneurial work of scholars in the “field” of so-called primitive societies. Though the researcher was likely to consider him- or herself an “observer” in good scientific fashion, anthropology tended to be interested in social or collective “man,” not quite the “man” of whose existence Foucault called for the death knell. As “primitive” isolated societies (thus properly “laboratory” societies) disappeared, anthropology began to turn its methods back on Western “man.” Closely in contact with structuralism, mainly through the broadly influential work of *Claude Lévi-Strauss*, anthropology, always difficult to define as a “human science,” has become, for those outside it, a disseminator and meeting ground of ideas that have profoundly affected critical theory. Yet from the inside it appears chaotic; some of its major figures are dissenters (Lévi-Strauss can be regarded as a dissenter), and those who have invaded it from the outside, sometimes from literary criticism or for the purposes of literary criticism, remain interestingly marginal—*René Girard*, for example—perhaps more interesting than those inhabiting the main line. Part of the reason for this, as *Clifford Geertz* has indicated, is that there has been a change in modes of explanation in social sciences and a mixing of genres.

Lévi-Strauss’s anthropological analysis of myths does not seem at first to be based on linguistics, but the method is in fact derived from de Saussure’s treatment of language, and in that sense myths are treated as language. Linguistic method, specifically that of *Hjelmslev*, lay also at the base of *Roland Barthes*’ treatment of everything from clothing fashions to literary texts as mythological. The term “text” came to include all cultural systems as if they were languages or made up of languages. The triumph of the linguistic world may be marked by the sudden ubiquity of “text” and the treatment of everything as if it were linguistic. Perhaps the phrase that most fully expresses this situation is *Jacques Derrida*’s “*Il n’y a pas de hors-texte*,” which is probably best translated as “There is no outside the text.”

Fundamental principles of structuralist linguistics are, first, the arbitrary and, second, the diacritical nature of the sign. By the former is meant that there is no natural relation between the sound or appearance of a word and what it signifies. By the latter is meant that the sign is fundamentally expressive of a difference. Made up of a signifier (sound image) and a signified (concept) in arbitrary relationship, the sign is in itself differential. Furthermore, the sign is such by virtue of its difference from other signs in the system. A sign is therefore always defined by difference along a chain of such signs. Another fundamental principle is the difference between diachronic and synchronic approaches to linguistics. Diachrony emphasizes differences that relate successive terms in time and history.

Synchrony, more important in structuralism, is concerned with logical and psychological relations in an atemporal field. The concept of structure implies a differential system.

### III

Despite the great importance of structuralism in European thought, as represented in this anthology and its predecessor by Barthes (see *CTSP*, pp. 193-99), Lévi-Strauss, Jacques Lacan in psychoanalysis, Tzvetan Todorov in literary theory, and Yuri Lotman in aesthetics and cultural theory, its hegemony in North American criticism was short-lived if it ever existed at all. This happened because even as it appeared on the scene it was subjected to powerful critique by a young French philosopher at a conference at The Johns Hopkins University in 1966. The conference, at which only European thinkers presented papers, was designed to introduce structuralist thought to the American literary academy. At this conference Jacques Derrida delivered the paper "Structure, Sign, and Play in the Discourse of the Human Sciences," a critique of the thought of structuralism's leading figure, Lévi-Strauss. Derrida's critique pointed to a fundamental contradiction in Lévi-Strauss's position and in structuralist thought generally. In positing a system of differences, structuralism did not recognize that such a system implies that there is no origin of meaning apart from itself to which it or its parts can be referred; or, if it does recognize this fact, it does not do so consistently and tends to smuggle in the idea of a "transcendental signified" to stabilize the system. The reason there can be no such transcendental signified, origin, or "center" is that every signified in the linguistic chain is but another signifier. Derrida claimed that a true structure or the "structure of structure" would have no boundaries and could only be bounded, or really unbounded, by a notion of infinite "play," which in turn could not be regarded as a concept in itself. This critique had enormous implications for the theory of meaning, and Derrida worked them out at once in a series of books in which the views of several major thinkers were "deconstructed" along similar lines. In *Of Grammatology* Derrida found the same sort of contradiction in de Saussure. Derrida accepted the notion that language was a differential network, but he rejected de Saussure's privileging of speech over writing and noted that this privileging leads back to the notion of an origin or "center" of meaning in the human speaking subject, the very thing in phenomenology that structuralism resisted. Derrida had made language an ansystem rather than a synchronic system. In *Speech and Phenomena* he analyzed Husserl's phenomenology on similar grounds in order to deconstruct the idea of a transcendental consciousness.

Fundamentally Derrida's attack was on the assumption lying behind the whole tradition of Western metaphysics as he saw it. Western metaphysics was the prisoner of the idea of "being as presence," that is, the notion of some anchor of being behind language, which was its ultimate truth or referent. He called this notion "logocentrism" and the tradition of privileging speech over writing "phallogocentrism." The fundamental influence on Derrida, in addition to

the structuralists and phenomenologists whom he deconstructs, is Friedrich Nietzsche, whom he regards as the first great deconstructor. Nietzsche's attack on Platonic dialectic and reason showed Plato to have employed the same rhetorical devices he attacks his opponents, the Sophists, for using. Nietzsche regarded Socratic reason as repression of the joyful play of language. Socrates would also suppress writing, where difference is clearly at play, there being in writing no present speaker to supply the illusion of meaning outside language. Derrida, of course, goes on to claim that it would make no difference if there were a speaker, since in the end speech can be shown to have the same differential character as writing anyway. In this sense, writing replaces speech as the model of language. It becomes Derrida's return for language's refusal of presence, of the concept as prior to it, and of the privileging of the signified over the signifier. Writing is the endless deferral and differing of meaning. For this condition Derrida coins a word in French that can only be written: *différance*, with an *a*, unknown to speech because it must be pronounced as if it were the same as *différence*. It combines, includes, and differs from the terms *différer* and *différence*, temporal and diachronic deferral and synchronic differing, respectively. Meaning is always subject to the "play" of *différance* along the linguistic chain. But because even *différance* threatens to become regarded as stabilized in meaning and thus subdued by the metaphysical tendency to assume a fixed meaning or center outside the antisystem. Derrida keeps inventing what he calls non-synonymic relations to other terms. Some of these terms replacing *différance* for a time in his discourse are "supplement," "trace," "spacing," and "play" itself.

Another way of considering all this is to observe that if everything is always already in the web of language, then there is nowhere to stand outside of language in order to gain any leverage on it. All discussions of language employ the so-called object of discussion. Archimedes said that he could lift the universe if someone could point out where he should stand to do it. Derrida displaces this problem to the realm of the sign.

Derrida's move has the same elegance and, in the linguistic age, has created the same sort of interest that Berkeley's *reductio ad absurdum* of Locke's distinction between primary and secondary qualities had, and created, for the epistemological age. It is possible to think of it as the extension of structuralism to absurdity. Berkeley, having discovered solipsism, tried to evade it by involving the eternal mind of God in constant creation or perhaps retention. It was an attempt at a transcendental solution, which would return epistemology to metaphysics. But perhaps Derrida is not the linguistic Berkeley but the linguistic Kant, attacking metaphysics at the linguistic rather than the epistemological level. Like de Saussure, Derrida pays no attention to the referent. Referents cannot be known as other than belonging to the signified, which in itself is a signifier, which connects to (by means of difference from) yet another signifier. This chain is perhaps imaginable as a circle as large as language itself, potentially infinite, like the curved space of Einsteinian physics. An object on this track would return to its beginning in an infinite length of time. But the matter should perhaps be put the other way around: Einsteinian space is infinitely curved by its constitution in language. No word in the linguistic world is a beginning, for it is always already

implicated in the infinite (yet closed and enclosed) system (*antisystème*), in which another word always precedes and follows it. There is no referent; neither is there an origin or center. Nor does Derrida bring in at the last moment a god from beyond the machine, as did Berkeley. There is only irony, inside and implicated. It is an irony of Nietzschean joyful play and performs the role in the linguistic world that romantic irony performed in the epistemological world. Because one can never escape entirely the rule of Western metaphysics and language's need to posit a center, origin, or transcendental signified even as its own differential behavior rejects it, one must write in language against language. One must write one's text against other texts, and even against one's own text. Derrida's books are confrontations with other texts, and in recent years they have actually been interweshings with other texts so that it is uncertain quite what text is immanenting on what and where one begins and another ends. Rather than endless Faustian striving for striving's ethical sake, or Byronic questing for questing's ethical sake, linguistic irony counsels joyous play along the linguistic chain. The identity of the romantic quoter was not in doubt, or at least he was constantly in a state of becoming. In the linguistic world, no longer "man," the player disappears without identity into differential play, or (to reverse Yeats) there is no dancer, only the dance. (On this line in Yeats, see *Paul de Man*.) All that is left of "man" is a "trace" in the linguistic act. The old isolated epistemological subject is declared gone, or at least unknowable. The new subject, if that is what we can call it, is constituted by language, which is to say culture, and it is therefore always already alienated from any notion of a simple prelinguistic being or self simply located.

#### IV

Derrida's constant play across his own terms points to the notion that if one is to attempt interpretation it cannot come to an end, that there can never be anything but this play. Interpretation has been a problem through the history of criticism, and the issue has been, for the most part, the question of determinate or indeterminate meaning or even the meaning of the word "meaning" itself. The problem can be seen in the tradition of reading of both Homer and Scripture. Homer has been subjected to all kinds of readings, from strict decoding of a presumed allegory, as in the famous cave-of-the-nymphs scene from the *Odyssey*, which Porphyry read as a Neo-Platonic allegory of the descent of the soul into matter, to strict historical reading, which claimed the *Iliad* to depict real events and held the *Odyssey* to be the report of a sea voyage. Interpretation of Scripture traverses the same interpretive ground, made even more complicated by the tradition of rabbinical interpretation of the Old Testament, a method that tended to build an endless interpretation out of the text, and the contrasting Christian typological readings in which the New Testament was seen as historical fulfillment of Old Testament antitypes. Derrida's work could be seen as an extension of the rabbinical mode.

The problematical nature of interpretation is nothing new, however. In the secularization of hermeneutic practice from the nineteenth century onward there has been a quarrel over methods and ends. This centered first on Scripture, but soon it shifted to secular texts, including history. In *Validity in Interpretation* (CISP, pp. 127-94) E. D. Hirsch sought some years ago to locate a center of meaning in the reconstruction of authorial intention, a cause that had been challenged long before Derrida in the arguments of the New Criticism against intention (see Wimsatt and Beardsley *CISP*, pp. 104-32). Hirsch, who may be identified with the tradition of nineteenth-century positivism, directly opposed the work of *Hans-Georg Gadamer*, identified with phenomenological hermeneutics, whose *Truth and Method* put forth the idea that to reconstruct the authorial outlook was always from a temporal "horizon" of our own and that what occurs in any interpretive act is a conversation of horizons between that of the text and that of the interpreter. In other words, every interpretation is the reading of a temporal relation of difference. Gadamer called the interpreter's horizon variously "prejudice" and "foreconcept." This foreconcept undergoes constant revision as time passes, and thus the past must constantly be reinterpreted. This view is connected to the Heideggerian notion of hermeneutic, which in his usual way Heidegger discloses via etymological search. "Hermeneutic" is "referable to the name of the god Hermes by a playful thinking that is more compelling than the rigor of science. Hermes is the divine messenger. He brings the message of destiny. *Hermeneuein* is that exposition which brings tidings because it can listen to a message." The phenomenological reading implicates a reader, an author, and a message, in contrast to deconstruction, but it recognizes an irresolvable problem or paradox of interpretation nevertheless, which it names the hermeneutic circle. This circle has two aspects. The first is the need for constant reinterpretation, because of the endless change of horizon in time. The second is the situation always present: In order to interpret, one must begin with either part or whole, but the part depends on the whole and the whole on the parts, so that what is required is an oscillation back and forth from a foreconcept of the whole to part to new foreconcept and so on. Heidegger is perhaps less cryptic than usual in the following remark about the hermeneutic act: "In interpreting we do not, so to speak, throw a 'signification' over some naked thing which is present at hand; but when something within the world is encountered as such, the thing in question already has an involvement which is disclosed in our understanding of the world, and this involvement is one that gets laid out by interpretation." Thus phenomenology, too, has its theory of difference, though it is a temporal and horizontal difference only.

#### V

This is not at all to say that the New Criticism, which the movements we have been considering replaced, was not conscious of these problems. The essay by *Stanley Cavell* that begins this anthology is deliberately chosen as a transition

piece from one set of approaches to another. Cavell is concerned with two issues that he addresses in terms that would be familiar to anyone schooled in the tradition of aesthetics and in the New Criticism—the problem of paraphrase and the question of aesthetic judgment. With no connection to either structuralism or phenomenology, the New Criticism only came to recognize what relationship its problems had to those Kant had addressed. Kant's approach seems from one point of view old-fashioned and from another not so old-fashioned at all. The issues seem to recur in poststructuralist debate in other terms, somewhat displaced—the problem of meaning displacing the problem of aesthetic value, for example. As a general policy it might be well to look back on the Kantian and New Critical positions to see just how much change has actually taken place in North American theory. One may say fairly that the major result for critical practice has been the reaction against interpretation in the sense of the search for a fixed or “determinate” meaning of the text. The attitude is clearly stated in *Jonathan Culler's* “Beyond Interpretation,” where deconstruction and other recent developments in critical theory are regarded as freeing the text from the allegedly authoritarian notion of a center or origin of recoverable meaning. Cleanth Brooks, probably the model New Critic, could write “The Heresy of Paraphrase” (CTSP, pp. 1033–41), but his own practice tended to make from his idea of irony as a principle of structure what the poststructuralists called variously “closure” and “totalization.” (For a radical dismissal of “totalization” see *Deleuze and Guattari*, even to the extent of proposing the idea of a “schizo-id” work.) Derridean structure, of course, has no center. The structure of structure is centerlessness. New Critical irony becomes bureaucratized, it is claimed, as an aesthetic center, objectifying the text and producing meaning, even as the idea of paraphrasable meaning is denied. This would allow for the possibility of “unity,” ending the free play of signifiers in a parole of the text's own making. The poststructuralist position also rejects the New Critical notion that the language of poetry differs in any way from that of everyday language, or, if it does, it is only in degree and a very small degree at that. One thinks here of the work of John Crowe Ransom (CTSP, pp. 871–90). Ransom attempted to characterize the oddity of poetic language by dividing the poem into paraphrasable core and a texture of “irrelevant” detail. One thinks of Robert Penn Warren's notion of poetic “impurity” (CTSP, pp. 981–92), and of Philip Wheelwright's “depth language” (CTSP, pp. 1103–12). Poststructuralists insisted on seeing these attempts to define poetry as in some way special as a program to “privilege” poetic discourse, viewing this and the idea of the “autonomous” poetic object as closing off textual possibility and also as being suspect for political criticism. It is more accurate, however, to claim that the New Criticism tried to defend poetry against an already privileged positivistic view of language and science.

There is no doubt that Brooks in his discussion of poems in his book *The Well Wrought Urn* tended in the end to allegorize poems, his view being apparently that awareness of doing so was enough, if enough qualifications were made along the way. But this was not enough for the poststructuralists. Thus in Derrida one gets the following well-known remark: “From this language it is necessary to free ourselves. Not actually to try to free ourselves from it, for that is impossible

without forgetting our historical condition. But to imagine it. Not actually to free ourselves from it, for that would be senseless and would deprive us of the light of sense. But to resist it as far as possible." This is a recognition that the language we employ in everything, including critical practice, tends toward the illusion of successful allegorization, "totalization," and closure and that there must be eternal vigilance even as one uses the language. From this point of view, Brooks was not disruptive enough of his own discourse.

## VI

At this point it may be worthwhile to consider a little more how the idea of autonomy of the literary text, accused as it has been of elitism, privilege, and closure, developed in the first place, and what such autonomy did and did not imply, particularly an autonomy defined essentially in terms of language. The New Criticism, though it developed apart from structural linguistics, definitely belonged in its own way to the linguistic world. In any case, the idea of autonomy was by no means a New Critical invention.

At least since Aristotle, literature had been defined by differentiating it from history, it being tacitly agreed that to define something one had to find its difference from something else. Aristotle declared literature (or poetry) to be more universal than history, which he regarded as tied to particulars. In the Middle Ages, poetry was frequently compared to theology, either to its detriment or in order to defend it as offering moral fables supportive of theological teaching. But the rise of science generated need for a vigorous new defense and comparison. Aesthetics was to a great extent the outcome of this need, and of all aesthetic theories Kant's was the most rigorous and comprehensive. He attempted to carve out a place for a certain kind of judgment that did not move by means of the categories of understanding to subsume particulars under a general rule applicable to other particulars. Kant's aesthetic judgment was radically singular and in this sense autonomous, since it could not be brought under the laws of the understanding. This autonomy became transferred to the object when viewed as aesthetic. Kant was equivocal, however, about just exactly where this autonomy lay, because the object *as object* or "thing in itself" could not be known but only constituted in the pure forms of space and time and further submitted to a subjectively universal aesthetic judgment (see *CISP*, pp. 279-99). Nor did Kant recognize adequately the linguistic nature of the literary aesthetic object.

It was nevertheless from Kant that the notion of the autonomous linguistic object, the poem, developed. Being made of language, the poem was apparently an employment of language in a different way from statements operating under the aegis of the externally purposive Kantian understanding, which always works toward generalization. Efforts to elaborate this difference abounded, often as parts of whole philosophical and aesthetic systems. Some of these theories imagined poetic behavior as a departure or deviation from a linguistic norm, the model of which was symbolic logic. This tendency was best exemplified in its

extreme by the term invented for poetry (and later abandoned) by I. A. Richards, "pseudo-statement."

But though a number of these deviationist views were popular, a competing opposite view developed all through the modern period. It built in some versions on Vico's theory of the origin and growth of language and culture, which insisted on certain major tropes as actually central to or at least originally central to language. It was the language of science verging on mathematical symbolism that was the departure, or at least development, from this tropological source. The model of symbolic logic was the deviation. The true nature of language was Vico's "poetic logic." This view struggled for acceptance against a strongly scientific and positivistic intellectual tide which appears even in those who attempt to articulate it—Ernst Cassirer (*CTSP*, pp. 994–1013), Philip Wheelwright (*CTSP*, pp. 1103–12), Susanne Langer, and others. This tradition represents what might be called the positive side of a theory of tropes or, in the parlance of some of them, "myth" (see *Adamas*). By contrast the deconstructive theory of tropes, in, for example, Paul de Man, emphasizes the duplicity, seductiveness, and unreliability of an inevitably tropological language.

Always opposed to the Derridean deconstruction and not associated with the Viconian line have been those theorists influenced by the analysis of language made by *Ludwig Wittgenstein* and those grouped around the speech-act theory of *J. L. Austin* and his disciple *John R. Searle*. As M. H. Abrams points out, there are similarities between Derrida and Wittgenstein in that both reject language as naively representational. But Wittgenstein did not concern himself so much with how language fails to transcend itself. Rather he inquired into how language pragmatically works, when it does. He was not interested in showing that language inevitably fails to accomplish what it seems to imply that it sets out to do—represent. In his *Philosophical Investigations*, Wittgenstein simply does not believe that it is to be judged as representation. This is a line with much influence in philosophy but less in critical theory at the present time, though a critic like *Charles Altieri* is strongly in the debt of Wittgenstein and speech-act theory, as is *Stanley Fish* with quite different results. Altieri subjects Derrida to scrutiny from that point of view. John Searle has criticized Derrida in print, as have linguists of other persuasions, critical of what they regard as a misunderstanding of de Saussure brought about by the recorders and editors of de Saussure's text. (De Saussure's text is based on notes taken down and edited by his students.) Derrida's answer to Searle shows that his position, thoroughly skeptical, is on its own terms impregnable, but its self-enclosure, even as it advises the joy of open play, may also be what eventually causes a draining away of interest in it.

## VII

In the work of the major deconstructionist theorists the notion generated by Vico and the line emerging from it is rarely mentioned, perhaps because Vico's concerns were historical and the history he wrote sees with a certain ambiva-



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