

29 "That everything flows must be expressed . . . in anything we would call the application of language" (*PR* #54).

30 For the way possibility has been elided or ignored in official translations and commentaries on Wittgenstein, see Katherine J. Morris, "The 'Context Principle' in the Later Wittgenstein," *Philosophical Quarterly*, 44 (1994), 294-310.

31 Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, tr. D. F. Pears and B. F. McGuinness (New York, 1961), #5.6.

## Are Parody and Deconstruction Secretly the Same Thing?

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Does the principal purpose of *Sec* [Derrida's pet name for his essay "Signature Event Context"] consist in being *true*? In stating the truth?

And what if *Sec* were *doing something else*?<sup>1</sup>

**A**S THESE TEASING QUESTIONS hint, deconstruction does not aspire in a straightforward way to be a discourse of truth. It is interested in questions of truth, but it does not pursue them in the direct, serious, and analytic fashion of speech-act philosophers like John R. Searle or of traditional hermeneutics. In the subjunctive voice, it might be "*doing something else*," but what? Derrida goes on to outline his essay's (and philosophy's) uneasy relationship with truth, exclaiming "How is it possible to miss the point that *Sec*, from one end to the other, is concerned with the question of truth, with the system of values associated with it, repeating and altering that system, dividing and displacing it in accordance with the logical force of the *iter*, which `ties repetition to alterity'."<sup>2</sup> Repetition, alteration, iterability: these doublings and distortions of truth into language are what fascinate Derrida, rather than truth as essence or truth as brute fact. He looks at the effect of truth in language with the eye of neither an idealist nor an empiric, but a parodist. Long ago, Gregory L. Ulmer argued that "part of the difficulty of Derrida's *oeuvre* is that it may be the first fully developed theory ever couched in the parodic mode."<sup>3</sup> Much in Derrida's work demonstrates the accuracy of this perception. However, I want in this essay to take this point further and to turn it around, to argue that Derridean deconstruction is not just a (serious) theory couched in a parodic mode (that it is a parodic theory of language), but also that it treats language and questions of truth and reference as if they were already in a play of parody (that it is a theory of parodic language). Though some recent work is beginning to look at ways of taking it less "seriously,"<sup>4</sup> this is decidedly not the way it has generally been received in the academic community, so the first thing I have to do is to make a space for this argument in the context of thought about deconstruction.

## I. The Range of Deconstruction

Deconstruction can, among other things, be read as a rethinking of Western philosophy, or as a rhetoric of textuality and absence. I take the second path because I am not intellectually equipped to assess deconstruction as a challenge to philosophy, and I am temperamentally disinclined to believe either (a) that it is on the verge of destroying civilization as we have known it, or (b) that it is on the verge of creating new heaven and new earth, beyond logocentrism. So, for my purposes, deconstruction is a thoroughgoing rhetoric of traces and absences in language, a theory of textuality, and a powerful (if occasionally pointless) way of reading. This essay's interest in it is tactical rather than fundamentalist, and the tactics that I will focus on are those connected with interpreting texts.

As a method of interpretation, deconstruction came to fame as a hostile way of disfiguring texts, as, according to Mark Edmundson's persuasive argument, an attack by philosophy on literature.<sup>5</sup> In an act of hermeneutic violence, it sought to expose and exploit the gaps, blindnesses, contradictions, and aporias in texts that make naive claims to truth, beauty, reason, structure, progress, mimesis, and the like. Paradoxes, inconsistencies, and unconscious contradictions (conceived psychoanalytically, politically, or in a spirit of formalist rigor not wildly different from New Criticism) were exposed, especially in Romantic texts, and their implications were teased out in more or less tendentious ways. This seemed exciting in the 1970s and early 1980s, but employing a skeptical method to undermine texts which are naive about their truth claims is really rather easy, and it rapidly becomes repetitive.<sup>6</sup> A few of these deconstructions provided interesting and rigorous investigations of the terms of and biases in the production of meaning in texts. A lot lapsed into empty, odorless formalism or the vandalism of mere "radicalism."<sup>7</sup> From this distance, it seems obvious that, if you employ a method which *assumes* that all texts are fragmented, decentered, and contain the seed of their own negation, you are liable to keep generating interpretations which purport to *discover* that individual texts are fragmented, decentered, and contain the seed of their own negation. Your readers are within their rights both to wonder whether the tail is wagging the dog, and to lose interest after a while. After all, only the dullest positivist or flakiest idealist is capable of staying shocked even in the medium term by "the discovery" that authorial or structural meaning cannot be fully determined in language. Mimesis is a powerful illusion, but I can think of no age and few hermeneutic theories so completely under its sway that they have denied the possibility of irony and ineradicable ambiguity, even from seemingly straightforward statements. This is

obvious, and it is not new. Did a straw-formalist ever refuse to believe that the meaning of a text could be anything other than a fully determinate core of objective and timeless significance? It's not impossible. But whether or not he or she ever existed in the world, he or she has had a mighty run in hermeneutic fiction, reinvented endlessly by deconstructors who need a target at which to aim their "radical" interpretations. This fictional target even proves so stationary that it allows deconstructors to pretend that the failure of absolute determinacy in interpretation necessarily leads to absolute indeterminacy. Moreover, by a very deconstructible failure of self-consciousness, it allows them to ignore the fact that even they are making themselves understood (functionally, if not perfectly) when they assert that understanding is unavailable.<sup>8</sup> If everything truly were radically indeterminable, either we can not know this fact, or we can know *only* this fact, and all further discussion and interpretation are pointless. Even if this were true, nothing can follow it, except an infinite and subjective play of signifiers.<sup>9</sup>

I do not deny that this sort of intellectual and rhetorical extremism can reasonably be extrapolated from aspects of Derrida's theory and practice.<sup>10</sup> Defenders of Derrida's rigor, who deny that the Master ever takes the primrose path of flaccid indeterminacy or can reasonably be identified with the slack intellectual habits exercised in his name, are telling only part of the story. To protect Derrida from charges of silliness, they have to read his works selectively and under the guidance of his sternest statements of purpose, often suppressing any sense of the playfulness of his texts and explaining his ideas into a very different and more sober register from that employed in Derrida's own prose. Having tacitly saved him from himself for serious philosophico-critical discourse, they explicitly set about saving him from his opponents, and from his legion of misguided supporters, who misunderstand his message and garble it abroad in irresponsible and inaccurate forms. These more or less patient explicators—I am thinking here of authors such as Gayatri Spivak, Jonathan Culler, Christopher Norris, Vincent Leitch, Kevin Hart, and Geoffrey Bennington<sup>11</sup>—perform a heroic task in processing Derrida as a serious theorist, but they do not succeed in creating a lone, authentic Derrida. They have to rely too heavily on selective reading in what is a large and miscellaneous body of work, and on the ancient "evil ministers" argument, which holds that, as the King is by definition good and wise, errors committed in his name must be the fault of his evil ministers or, in this case, his stupid and biased publicists who appropriate his ideas for selfish and dubious ends.<sup>12</sup> Moreover, even among the serious redactors, there is no semblance of agreement on a single and consistent Derrida. There is no reason in the logic of deconstruction why there should be. The figure of the arduous

interrogator of Western metaphysics may be a more intellectually respectable and interesting construction of Derrida than that of the archprophet of absolute free play, but it, too, is a partial representation of the thinker and the thought. These partial and asymmetrical interpretations are what the skeptical tradition and the common principles of deconstruction should have taught us to expect. But before we pass on to my own necessarily partial explanation of what it is all about, we need to pause briefly over another very common recension of the image of deconstruction.

For there are those who insist that deconstruction is essentially political, and that it is a method for discovering the oppressed others beneath phallogocentric discourse. They use deconstruction as a hermeneutic of suspicion, as an instrument for unpicking the structures and rhetorics of racism, patriarchy, psychological repression, class. This is logically valid as a version of deconstruction, and can be mightily politically useful. However, deconstruction is not a hermeneutic of suspicion in the strict sense identified by Kevin Hart as: "searching for an explanation which is concealed within what seems natural and inevitable."<sup>13</sup> It does not discover occult *truths* that have been repressed, masked by false consciousness, or distorted by logocentrism; it deconstructs. To tie it to particular political ends is an appropriation that requires a potent combination of blindness and insight (blindness concerning the discourse of the oppressed combined with insight into the false consciousness of oppression). It is a dangerous tool, because so corrosive—being no respecter of value, it can and will deconstruct your cherished categories as well as those you attack. It can be (and has been) used to support a rainbow alliance of liberationist critiques, but it can provide only negative liberation. The fullness of freedom or justice needs to be asserted after or beyond a deconstructive critique; it is not a necessary residue of that process. Consequently, deconstruction is political in the sense that it provides a powerful mode for questioning authority and the ideological and structural force on which it depends. Positive doctrines do not follow, however, except as supplements, the arbitrary quanta which simultaneously fulfill and displace the original method. For example, Edward Said's classic study *Orientalism* provides a politically engaged deconstruction of Western representations of "oriental" cultures, but it is certainly not an act of "pure" deconstruction, though it is an act of major moral and intellectual importance. It is a hostile reading of an oppressive group of intellectual structures, and a "misreading" of them in many productive ways. It is not absolutely or totally true, it is not beyond metaphysical or ideological grounds, and it is not without its own blind spots. Its adherence to a moral and political argument is explicit and, in a philosophical sense, arbitrary. It is "unfair"

to its colonialist and orientalist opponents, refusing to engage sympathetically with their arguments, ideologies, and rhetorics, and it does not extend the same militant critical hostility to its own assumptions. In the real (mixed, fallen, political) world where people actually live, such an approach is urgently and contingently valid, and a better use of poststructural skepticism than even the most cunning dismantling of a Wordsworthian lyric. But it, along with all the other political dismantlings of binary oppositions, is lopsided and does not manage entirely to contain the deconstructive flow of language.

Given his subject and his relationship toward it, Said's vigorously hostile and subversive deconstruction is inevitable. If you take the deconstructive toolbox to work on texts which you find ideologically repulsive, a mass slaughter of those texts' racist/fascist/capitalist/phallogocentric/logocentric assumptions is going to occur. Such engaged readings share a spirit of violation with the more formalist deconstructions, which is one of the reasons the two paths mingle so indiscriminately in a large body of criticism. There is, however, another way, which is the subject of the rest of this essay. Deconstruction is routinely used *against* the texts it studies, but you get a very different critical practice if you use it *with* another sort of textuality, with texts that consent to the movements of deconstruction, foresee them, and play within them—if you use deconstruction with parodic texts. I concede that this is an arbitrary constraint to put in place, but all applications of deconstruction must have a quantum of arbitrariness, as I have attempted to show above. So, let us start at the outside of the onion.

Deconstruction is presented by Derrida and his followers as a theory of all language, or (at least) of all writing. As grammatology soon expands to include speech (nothing more than a pale and derivative form of writing) and any leftover modes of language and thought on the principle that "there is nothing beyond the text,"<sup>14</sup> it bids fair to be a grand theory of everything. One of the more grandiloquent characterizations of writing, taking in just about all of "Being," appears in "Signature Event Context": "I would like to demonstrate that the recognizable traits of the classical and narrowly defined concept of writing are generalizable. They would be valid not only for all the orders of 'signs' and for all languages in general, but even, beyond semiolinguistic communication, or the entire field of what philosophy would call experience, that is, the experience of Being: so called 'presence.'"<sup>15</sup> It is hard to take so large a claim seriously, and I do not propose even to try. This is the sort of willfully contentious Derridean edict that, when taken as a statement of truth, leads to explicatory contortions among the faithful and snorts of contempt from the infidel.

Considering that deconstruction is a theory whose most characteristic proposition is that truths cannot be totalized and absolute grounds cannot be asserted, it seems safer (or, at least, valid) to stake a claim on a more restricted piece of turf. Most (perhaps all) theories of interpretation start as restricted economies, assuming a particular body of texts, issues, and values as a normative context. Medieval and modern hermeneutics developed in response to biblical texts and theological concerns; practical criticism (New or Leavisite) is modeled on the problems raised by the lyric poem; Marxism and early feminism start from the realist novel, psychoanalytic criticism from dreams and fairy tales. The list could be extended, but, however tendentious particular matches in this very blunt list may seem, the fact remains that particular hermeneutic approaches work better with some sorts of texts than others, often for reasons that are approximately genetic. Hermeneutic theory and textual practice develop diachronically and dialogically—over time and in response to each other. Moreover, the body of texts normally gets the first word in the dialogue, so that the theory tends to develop in response to actual problems raised by texts, however grandly abstract its eventual pronouncements may turn out to be.<sup>16</sup> There is, however, an imperial logic to theory that decrees that it should always expand to cover more material. The passage just quoted from "Signature Event Context" is a clear example of this very common tendency. So, the rot sets in when a theory has worked out the seam of its normative context, and the imperial logic of criticism decrees that it must conquer other forms of semiosis in an endless critical replication. The fit between criticism and its object gets worse and worse. The texts need either to be more rigorously selected or more comprehensively reimagined if the theory is to be further validated and take in more territory. As types of writing more distant from the original context are fed to the method of interpretation, the results become reductive (for example, the Leavisite proposition that there are only four or five or six great novelists in the English language—on a bad day, only D. H. Lawrence makes the grade—whose works are great because they express a muscular and organic felt experience not unlike that found in the best metaphysical poems), or oversophisticated (for example, the infinite politicization of courtly Renaissance texts by which new historicists endlessly discover silenced others and Marxist morals), or some combination of sophification and reductivism. At a very simple and pragmatic level, the poor fit of method to genre can be seen in thousands of undergraduate tutorials and classes where long novels are unsatisfactorily discussed for an hour using the residually formalist method of close reading of selected passages. This is a method designed for lyric poems, and works quite well for them, especially when you have time to read and discuss an

entire poem in class. However, it is ludicrously reductive to dispose of *Middlemarch* or *Tom Jones* by scrutinizing a few hundred words of each; it is just that long narratives tend to be treated that way to fit the traditions and exigencies of a literary pedagogy that developed out of a confrontation with the dense textures of verse.

The obvious assumption about deconstruction, especially in its English-language reception, is that it is designed to deal (roughly) with Romantic and idealist texts. That is how it came into the practice of the Yale critics, and there are some remarkable exemplars of this sort of thing in Derrida's readings of Rousseau and Plato, or Barthes's reading of Balzac in *S/Z*. As I indicated above, however, "doing it" to structurally and intentionally naive texts gives a short-lived rush of radicalism then rapidly becomes tediously repetitive, unless it is energized by the pursuit of a moral or political argument or playfulness of Barthesian proportions. Moreover, this image of deconstruction as a hermeneutic terrorizing naive texts obscures a more pervasive modal relation to another sort of textuality that can be perceived in and around its practices and concerns. My suggestion is that the secret sharer of deconstruction is parody. To use deconstruction with parodies is to commit deconstruction *with* consenting texts rather than *against* victim texts, because parodies are already thematically and structurally about the play of absence, presence, and rhetorical illusion. Deconstruction does not discover shocking gaps in the mimetic illusion of parodic texts, because parody is not, in any straightforward sense, mimetic. Parody, as I shall go on to argue, is already actively and consciously engaged in intertextuality, so deconstruction does not provide the simply and negatively critical perspective on parodic texts that it provides on more naively positivist or expressive texts like orientalist tracts and Romantic poems. Parody as artistic practice and deconstruction as hermeneutic method are structurally enough alike to mesh, and they are linked historically as well, for deconstruction is a major member of the body of theory that has developed in connection with the pervasively parodic concerns of modernism and postmodernism. Parody is an ancient art which, if it cannot logically be traced back to the first text, must have started at least with the second or third.<sup>17</sup> However, the twentieth century has, in all the arts, been peculiarly obsessed with those doublings, repetitions, transformations, and sensations of derivativeness that can be categorized as parodic. Postmodernism is praised or damned for being relentlessly parodic, but it is hard to see how (or why) one might draw a line between it and the modernist avant-garde in the matters of quotation with-difference that drive parodic semiosis. And this is also the long moment of structuralism and poststructuralism.

This is the historical ground of possibility for my argument that, while

it has been applied promiscuously to all sorts of texts, for a variety of reasons of internal logic, deconstruction works best (that is, most intimately and creatively) with those works that defy and complicate mimetic assumptions, be they postmodern buildings, *nouveaux romans*, cubist montages, or *Don Quixote*. Parody did not need Derrida to tell it that mimesis is an imperfect and deeply paradoxical proposition in the complex play of presence and absence that constitutes signification. It knows that language differs from things and defers meanings into a prolonged (potentially infinite) play of echoes and substitutions. It has been playing with the conventions of authenticity (which make language as representation work) for centuries. While an aggressive enough deconstructive reading can make any text tell the story of its incapacity to escape the indeterminate play of language,<sup>18</sup> parody invites such reading and faces it without unusual anxiety. From its basic moves, deconstruction frames all writing as parody in the sense that it treats it as caught up in a tissue of echo, allusion, appropriation, and misprision. As a mode of interpretation, it violates the broadly mimetic and expressive assumptions of "straight" writing and reads with the indirections of the "crooked." Obviously, writing does not fall neatly into two objective categories of straight (mimetic-expressive) and crooked (ironic); that is precisely the sort of binary opposition deconstruction teaches us to suspect, and it is more suspicious than most. But the distinction does mark a pragmatic difference between strategies both of interpretation and authorship, and it is a distinction clearly condoned by Derrida:

"`Limited Inc ...' makes uncomfortable reading because it is written in at least two registers at once, for it answers to at least two imperatives. On the one hand, I try to submit myself to the most demanding norms of classical philosophical discussion.... On the other hand, in so doing I multiply statements, discursive gestures, forms of writing, the structure of which reinforces my demonstration *in* something like a practical manner.... This *dual writing* seemed to me to be consistent with the propositions I wanted simultaneously to demonstrate on the theoretical level and to exemplify in the *practice of speech acts*....

At the time, this wish was quite sincere. Today, however, the context having changed, I have decided to avoid writing here in this dual mode. Or at least to try, since it is not always possible, by definition.<sup>19</sup>

This distinction between straight and crooked or single and dual modes is indispensable, and we may use it, if we remember that it works provisionally and does not enshrine an absolute or rigorous division of types of writing.

## II. Linking Parody and Deconstruction

I'd like to go a step further, and assert that parody *is* a form of deconstruction. I want to assert this with all the force that metaphor can muster, with all the tropical force attributed to metaphor in "White Mythology." I'm not just arguing that parody is *like* deconstruction; I'm arguing that they are secretly the same thing. Consider this passage from *Of Grammatology*: "The movements of deconstruction do not destroy [*solllicitent*] structures from the outside. They are not possible and effective, nor can they take accurate aim, except by inhabiting those structures. Inhabiting them *in a certain way*, because one always inhabits, and all the more when one does not suspect it. Operating necessarily from the inside, borrowing all the strategic and economic resources of subversion from the old structure, borrowing them structurally, that is to say without being able to isolate their elements and atoms, the enterprise of deconstruction always in a certain way falls prey to its own work."<sup>20</sup> It is clear that deconstruction, especially as Derrida practices it, nests in the structure of the texts and ideas it criticizes, as a cuckoo infiltrates and takes over the nests of other birds. It operates from inside the arguments of metaphysical texts and systems such as structuralism and phenomenology, showing how they cannot totalize the visions they proclaim, and precisely where they double and collapse. It is not primary thought, always secondary, always "borrowing all the strategic and economic resources of subversion from the old structure." And this is precisely what parody does too. It is preeminently a *genre-bricoleur*, living off the energies and inadequacies of previous writings, "borrowing them structurally" and transforming them with a critical eye. *Don Quixote* is in a deconstructive economy with romance, just as surely as *Grammatology* is in a deconstructive economy with Rousseau's theory of language; and in many similar ways. Umberto Eco's *The Name of the Rose* inhabits the rhetorical structure of the detective story, "operating necessarily from the inside, borrowing all the strategic and economic resources of subversion from the old structure." It does not destroy it "from the outside," and is, indeed, much more complicit with what it deconstructs than the blank idea of criticism suggests. It does not entirely repudiate the detective story, and actually "falls prey to its own work" by becoming a sort of costume detective story in turn; yet the detective story is also ironized and placed under erasure. It looks different after *The Name of the Rose*, and that difference looks very like a play of *diffrance*.

Supplementary logics of criticism, reformulation, and homage are set up in parodies across many semiotic forms, from visual arts to drama, architecture to music, political rhetoric to lyric poetry. For the sake of some coherence of focus, however, I will proceed to draw examples

mostly from parodic prose fictions, though there is certainly no need to confine ourselves to twentieth-century illustrations. *Don Quixote* illustrates this supplementary relationship to its host genre, in that it attacks and ironizes romance, yet also becomes implicated in its logic and energy. Moreover, in its reception it has become a great early modern romance, and the Don himself has developed into so durable a romantic figure that (along with a multitude of filiations through subsequent art and literature) a musical comedy has been written about him—the Man of La Mancha supplements Cervantes' own Don, and (for many) substitutes for the effort required to read the entire book. This complication of the work's dissemination might economically be explained as cultural perversity, but its exact congruence to the play of dangerous supplementation seems to tell much more about the book and its reception. The musical stands for the romance it supplants, mocking and becoming it at the same time. Similarly, Swift's *A Tale of a Tub* is literally unthinkable without the mad Grub Street textuality it both attacks and epitomizes. Its verbal texture is almost entirely made up of the texts it deconstructs, and its mad parodic energy comes from the debased discourses of Modernity (the late seventeenth-century version) rather than the Ancient founts of wisdom it is commonly held to endorse.<sup>21</sup> Sterne's *Tristram Shandy* is a thoroughgoing investigation of the impossibility and absurdity of writing novels, written from within the novel's conventions. While it cavorts in every paradox and mimetic non sequitur it can find, it amounts to something very like a novel, and has even been described by Victor Shklovsky as "the most typical novel of world literature."<sup>22</sup> This is a provocative proposition and seems, even in context, to be at least half a joke, but it does alert us to the very peculiar and intense intimacy that builds up between a parody and its host genre. This relationship oscillates and steadfastly refuses to be stabilized into any straightforward pattern of criticism or logical argument. Parodies *deconstruct* the discourses they invade; they do not blankly *destroy* the discourses on which, parasitically and critically, they live. Instead, both genesis and structure of those discourses appear "under erasure" (visible but problematized and devalued).<sup>23</sup> Indeed, genesis in *Tristram Shandy* (the birth of the hero, a fact which most novels see fit to dispose of in the first chapter) is so thoroughly deferred by the problems that arise in the attempt to construct a realistic narrative that it does not occur until chapter 28 of volume 3, and little follows from it. Parodies can't live with their host discourses, and they can't live without them.

A narrow definition would confine parody to a form of very specific ridicule where a recognizable piece of writing, painting, piece of music, or whatever, is imitated in a mocking manner. Clearly this narrow scope is not what I am discussing here, and the genre can and has been

conceived much more broadly.<sup>24</sup> A complex parody can involve not just a particular aesthetic object, but many kinds of discourse within its own structure. In *Gulliver's Travels* there are travel books, biography, children's stories, philosophical arguments, topical satire, and much more in the intertextual soup. A more recent plural text like Julian Barnes's *Flaubert's Parrot* can parody a variety of different discourses in the same body of words, either serially (in the various genres employed in consecutive chapters) or simultaneously (in the way the book is structurally at once literary biography and fictional autobiography). The crucial point for parody is that the body of words is always preloved and redirected. It is never primary or whole or transparently mimetic at any level of authorial desire or readerly response. Parody is crooked, reflexive writing, with the instability of irony inscribed deep in its structure. If we read parody "straight" as sincere expression without relating it to a structure of criticism, we *misunderstand* it.

In 1702, Daniel Defoe published what he thought was a parody of reactionary Anglican polemic in *The Shortest Way with the Dissenters*. He assumed readers would find the argument that dissenters should be executed or exiled self-defeating, and would learn to deconstruct the "high church" rhetoric as immoral, unreasonable, and dangerous. However, most of his initial readers read the piece straight, so dissenters were outraged at what they saw as an attack on them and high churchmen were annoyed to be told that so sensible a tract was supposed to be a joke. Defoe was put in the stocks for sedition, protesting often and unsuccessfully that his parody had been misread. What was meant to resonate ironically within discourse (or warring discourses) had been too readily and naively attached to the world.<sup>25</sup> Literary hoaxes and *causes célèbres* show that parodic language is language in play and that, for parody to work, the players and readers need to understand the rules of the game. The Ern Malley affair illustrates how delicately poised the genre can be at a pragmatic level, and how dependent it is on being processed through the right intertextuality by its audience. During a slow day at the Directorate of Research and Civil Affairs in Melbourne during World War II, two soldier poets of classicizing temper, James McAuley and Harold Stewart, determined to cleanse Australian poetry of the excesses of modernism. They constructed a pastiche of fragments, quotations, and portentous lines, concocted a covering letter from a certain Ethel Malley about discovering these poems among the effects of her recently deceased brother, and posted the lot off to Max Harris, the editor of the newest and most ostentatious local journal championing modernism, *Angry Penguins*. Harris took the bait, read the poems straight, and announced the discovery of a great Australian poet to the world in a special issue of the journal. When

Stewart and McAuley caused the hoax to be exposed in the *Sydney Sunday Sun*, parodic reading of the works of Malley was suddenly and devastatingly activated, and there it might have ended, with both Malley and Harris deconstructed by ridicule. However, a further twist illustrates the potential volatility of parodic language, for another misguided straight reading occurred among some officers of the South Australian police, who proceeded to prosecute Harris for issuing an obscene publication. This resulted in a grimly absurd court case where the prosecuting counsel inspected the poems' language with a daft and obsessive prurience that read them as coded smut rather than as great modernist lyrics (Harris's view, which he maintained until his death in 1995) or as parodic exemplars of a pointless and self-indulgent poetic (Stewart and McAuley's view).<sup>26</sup>

These warring readings indicate that parody is an unstable process driven by the contexts in which readers place particular texts, rather than a set of formal properties. As a cultural practice, parody is language about language, and it resonates within semiotic systems. Derrida's most notorious statement, "*there is nothing outside of the text*," is absurd and dangerous enough if taken as a description of the world. That is the line of argument that denies even a pragmatically functional referentiality for signs, and leads to things like Baudrillard's denial of the Gulf War; it is easily refuted by the old Johnsonian test of kicking the nearest stone.<sup>27</sup> However, as a description of the workings of parody, the idea of nothing beyond textuality is a powerful one. Parody occurs within textuality. It resonates within language (or sign systems if it's painting, drama, or music), without attempting to break out on its own into the zones of pure representation or originality. As is apparent from Defoe's and Harris's fates, it does connect with the world, but not in the primary way claimed by mimetic writing. Parody never claims to represent a full presence; like deconstruction, it is always a play of language before it is a play of meaning.

### III. Two Metaphors for Parody from Deconstruction

(1) Parody is a play of *differance*.

The meaning of parody is never a stable entity, even in theory. It is a matter of relation and constant cross-reference between the parody and its model, between the present text and a variety of other texts. We cannot read parody as parody without being aware of how it differs from its model and what it itself purports to be on the surface. The reader's experience of relation is crucial, for parody cannot operate without the

awareness of dialogue between texts and discourses. The ship's captain who insisted that he knew Gulliver well but that he lived at Wapping rather than Redriff may have read *Gulliver's Travels*, but he had not read a parody. Bakhtin's theories of heteroglossia and novelization have been enlisted to explain the function of dialogue in parody,<sup>28</sup> and dialogism is a good model for understanding what happens, especially in relatively sunny works like *Don Quixote* and A. S. Byatt's *Possession*. However, it does tend to give a jolly sense that there is room for everything in the cornucopia of heteroglossia which does not always suit well with the hostilely deconstructive relations many parodies set up between texts. Barthes argues that "writing ceaselessly posits meaning ceaselessly to evaporate it, carrying out a systematic exemption of meaning,"<sup>29</sup> and, while this is an extreme view if applied to all straight and much parodic writing, it captures the quality of many parodies (for example, *A Tale of a Tub*, Margaret Atwood's *Handmaid's Tale*, Kathy Acker's *Don Quixote*, and Thomas Pynchon's *Gravity's Rainbow*) better than a model based on the linguistic plenitude of heteroglossia. Parody is often made up of multiple absences rather than multiple presences, and it often exhausts the discourses it inhabits rather than replenishing them. A way of imagining this basic trope of parody in its negative form is to read it as deconstruction and, more precisely, as a play of *differance*. Again, we have to read past the Derridean proposition that *differance* is a transcendental principle implicit in all language ("Nothing—no present and *in-different* being—thus precedes *differance* and spacing. . . . Subjectivity—like objectivity—is an effect of *differance*, an effect inscribed in a system of *differance*")<sup>30</sup> to read it in a tactical sense as a description of a certain kind of language. If we allow this misprision, we can see that the parodic text differs from its model, but it also displaces and defers it. Compared to straight language (language trying to represent reality or the author's authentic opinions) parodic language is doubled and differentiated. It operates very much like this:

Difference, the disappearance of any originary presence, is *at once* the condition of possibility and the condition of impossibility of truth. At once. "At once" means that the being-present (*on*) in its truth, in the presence of its identity and in the identity of its presence, is *doubled* as soon as it appears, as soon as it presents itself. *It appears, in its essence, as the possibility of its own [duplication].* That is to say, in Platonic terms, of its own] most proper non-truth, of its pseudo-truth reflected in the icon, the phantasm, or the simulacrum. What is is not what it is, identical and identical to itself, unique, unless it *adds to itself* the possibility of being *repeated* as such. And its identity is hollowed out by that addition, withdraws itself in the supplement that presents it.<sup>31</sup>

Again, Derrida makes a far larger claim than I need for the purposes of my argument, but the essential thing here is the image of parodic repetition both adding to and hollowing out its model. Inconvenient though it is to mimetic and expressive ideals of representation, without the possibility of parodic repetition, there could be no communication. Languages are systems where distortion and deferral are always available, and this parasitic possibility is enacted most comprehensively by parody, for parodies exist in a critically deconstructive relation to their models. The point is not that a parody simply overpowers its model, just as the erasure of *différance* does not merely obliterate the concept called up. In parody, as with *différance*, the trope is one of oscillation between positive and negative polarities. Brian McHale has identified this flicker between presence and absence as an abiding characteristic of postmodern fiction,<sup>32</sup> and this anomalous spacing of discourses is also the simultaneous moment of parody and *différance*.

Parodies stand for the things they displace, but they do not merely repeat them, as translations aspire to do, or extend them like imitations. They displace, distort, differ, and defer. Derrida argues that *différance* is both a spacing and a temporization.<sup>33</sup> Parodies distance us from identification with both the model discourse and the parodic text, setting us on a constant commuting between deconstructed and deconstructing poles/venues. We arrive at a "true" understanding of neither text, because each constantly displaces the other. The structure of each is made to differ from itself so that it cannot inhabit a single logical space. And each image is rendered provisional, a temporary relation of mutual hostility and incongruence in the mind of the reader, in which the origin and aims of the host are subverted by the other's. The intellectual structures of alchemy and its mimetic goals and assumptions are employed for the time being as a conceptual structure for Eco's *Foucault's Pendulum*, even as, in the same motion, they are being ridiculed as absurdly disconnected from the real world. The parody ironizes and destabilizes them, but it does not obliterate them. Moreover, the real world begins disconcertingly to lose definition in the face of hermetic relations and displacements. Just as Casaubon's, Belbo's, and Diotallevi's lives are invaded by the "Diabolicals," so the novel is invaded by the logic of the Rosicrucian texts it parodies. This is precisely the way Derrida suggests that the sign works in his essay on "Différance," and I would argue that parodic signs, at least, oscillate in this way.

## (2) Parody "... that dangerous supplement."

The supplement is the trace of *différance* in the structure of a sign which makes full presence impossible. It supplies both what is necessary, and what is extra to a sign (the paradoxical double meaning of the word). In *Of Grammatology*, Derrida pinches a phrase from Rousseau to describe writing as "that dangerous supplement" in relation to speech. He does this in order to unpick the priority we assume of speech (which has the wholeness of a voice informing it) over writing (which logocentric discourse considers to be the potentially misleading signs left behind by a departed vocal presence). Derrida labors to overturn the Platonic opposition that ranks the Socratic voice above alphabetic scribblings. For him, speech offers no authentic self-identity between speaker and meaning. It is just another form of writing, in which previous texts are quoted and stitched together into new texts to suit the present purposes. It is more delusive than the written word at least insofar as it claims a greater fullness of presence and authenticity. In his habitual spirit of paradox, Derrida proclaims that writing (the idea of a text) is the supplement which makes speech possible; and it is also the trace of *différance* (of previous and future texts) which waylays the possibility of a pure or authentic message and pushes the dreams of reference and representation into the endless play of language. As Ellis demonstrates, it is ludicrous to argue as historical facts the propositions that speech had always (until 1966) been privileged over writing (think of all the legal codes and religions of the book) or that speech is impossible without writing (even now, completely oral cultures continue to exist) (*AD* 19-21). Derrida does seem, at some level, to want his readers to believe these assertions as empirical truths, and some of his redactors have even tried to explain and propagate such a belief, but they neither are nor can be facts. Ellis, displaying his wonted lack of sympathy for Derrida's rhapsodic and playful rhetorical style, then asks himself "what is Derrida's argument trying to do?" (*AD* 21), and proceeds, predictably enough, to fail to come up with even a remotely satisfactory answer. Should anyone still wish to treat grammatology as a valid and coherent science of language, these historical fallacies in its most fundamental premises must be recognized as fatal. However, as enabling misprisions that can defamiliarize conventional assumptions and give us access to a view of some language's weirder qualities, the propositions have their uses. A philosophy of language like Derrida's, built largely on paradoxes and puns, is not a likely contender to replace linguistics or historical philology, but it attends better to the evasiveness and inadequacy of words than a positive science of language (committed as it must be to the dissipation of ambiguity) ever could.

So, if we entertain Derrida's premises, it follows that the supplement of writing is both necessary and dangerous. It makes the sign work, even as it undermines its mimetic claims. It transmits and distorts at once, and we cannot do without it. This is how he describes it:

Writing is dangerous from the moment that representation claims to be presence and the sign of the thing itself. And there is a fatal necessity, inscribed in the very functioning of the sign, that the substitute make one forget the vicariousness of its own function and make itself pass for the plenitude of speech whose deficiency and infirmity it nevertheless only *supplements*. For the concept of the supplement—which here determines that of the representative image—harbors within itself two significations whose cohabitation is as strange as it is necessary. The supplement adds itself, it is a surplus, a plenitude enriching another plenitude, the *fullest measure* of presence. It cumulates and accumulates presence. It is thus that art, *technè*, image, representation, convention, etc., come as supplements to nature and are rich with this entire cumulating function. This kind of supplementarity determines in a certain way all the conceptual oppositions within which Rousseau inscribes the notion of Nature to the extent that it *should* be self-sufficient.

But the supplement supplements. It adds only to replace. It intervenes or insinuates itself *in-the-place-of*; if it fills, it is as if one fills a void. If it represents and makes an image, it is by the anterior default of a presence. Compensatory [*suppléant*] and vicarious, the supplement is an adjunct, a subaltern instance which *takes-(the)-place* [*tient-lieu*]. As substitute, it is not simply added to the positivity of a presence, it produces no relief, its place is assigned in the structure by the mark of an emptiness. Somewhere, something can be filled up *of itself*, can accomplish itself, only by allowing itself to be filled through sign and proxy. The sign is always the supplement of the thing itself.

The second signification of the supplement cannot be separated from the first. We shall constantly have to confirm that both operate within Rousseau's texts. But the inflection varies from moment to moment. Each of the two significations is by turns effaced or becomes discreetly vague in the presence of the other. But their common function is shown in this: whether it adds or substitutes itself, the supplement is *exterior*, outside of the positivity to which it is super-added, alien to that which, in order to be replaced by it, must be other than it. Unlike the *complement*, dictionaries tell us, the supplement is an "*exterior* addition."<sup>34</sup>

I suggest that we should not try to read this as an encyclopedic account of language, but rather substitute "parody" for "writing" and "supplement" throughout the passage. It is a misreading, in a way, but the idea of parody as the dangerous supplement attaching to "straight" writing has a great deal of explanatory power. To anthologize and alter: "[Parody] is dangerous from the moment that representation claims to

be presence and the sign of the thing itself.... The [parody] adds itself, it is a surplus, a plenitude enriching another plenitude, the *fullest measure* of presence.... But the [parody] supplements. It adds only to replace. It intervenes or insinuates itself *in-the-place-of*; if it fills, it is as if one fills a void. If it represents and makes an image, it is by the anterior default of a presence.... But their common function is shown in this: whether it adds or substitutes itself, the [parody] is *exterior*, outside of the positivity to which it is super-added, alien to that which, in order to be replaced by it, must be other than it." A parody brings out the possibility of its own ridicule in a text. It is the deconstruction which is always available. It comes from the margins of a preexisting text or discourse, supplementing it dangerously: giving it what it lacks (its own implicit critique), giving it what it deserves (a vision of its own absurdity), and taking its place (decentering it and overcoming it).

Parody enacts the impossibility of any text, however "straight" its aspirations, managing to totalize and stabilize its own meanings. It could always be written differently—rewritten by a parody which decenters the original and aspires to replace it. Indeed, it *can* still and always be rewritten by parody, which doubles and deconstructs the tropes of authenticity on which "straight" writing depends. Any past or future biography of Flaubert will always be deconstructively supplemented by the gaps, paradoxes, and multiple possibilities drawn out in *Flaubert's Parrot*. Joseph Furphy's *Such is Life* shows just how long and inconsequential a *Bulletin* short story would have to be if it really wanted to represent Australian bush life accurately. After *Gulliver's Travels* we will never entirely trust a travel book again. *Tristram Shandy* shows that the germ of its own absurdity lies more or less dormant in novelistic realism, before that genre's great age in the nineteenth century. After the fact, *Ulysses* repeats the dose on the novel and attaches further supplements to Homer and sundry other discourses. Jean Rhys's *Wide Sargasso Sea* gives voice to a version of the story of Empire that *Jane Eyre* and Victorian Britain preferred to ignore. Thomas Mann's *Doctor Faustus* supplements various versions of German identity, from the pure aspirations of music and theology to the pollutions of Nazism. Parody is the parasite genre that can attach to any other, supplementing it dangerously, living off its mimetic, expressive, or rhetorical energy, and reminding it and us that we are facing words rather than things, rhetoric rather than pure ideas, language rather than phenomena.

#### IV. Why Parody Usually Turns into Satire, but Deconstruction Mightn't

I have made a case for the proposition that parody and deconstruction are the same thing, but I would like to finish by putting a twist in this argument. It is clear that parody and deconstruction revel in preloved language and disseminations of original meaning and structure. For both, there is a sense in which there is nothing beyond the text. However, while parody is deconstruction, it is not *pure* or *mere* or *entirely textual* deconstruction. There is a risk for deconstruction, as Derrida and others practice it, that it might be entirely consumed by and in the indeterminate play of language and lose sight of the fact that there is more in heaven and earth than is dreamt of in its philosophy. That philosophy and a very great deal of attendant poststructuralist thought depend too naively on a couple of seminal assumptions made at the beginning of this century that have often led to questions of referentiality being bracketed out of theories of language and of literature. The Russian Formalists developed a poetic that treated parodic writing as normative, in the sense that they considered language literary only insofar as it defamiliarized discursive conventions. Indeed, when Shklovsky called *Tristram Shandy* the most typical novel of all, he was referring solely to the book's semiotic structures and deliberately turning a blind eye to the ways that semiosis might connect with meanings and the world. This focus on defamiliarization at the expense of any mimetic or expressive concerns was in the way of an operating assumption for Shklovsky and his fellows rather than a definitive statement about any rigid autoreferentiality in literary language, but it is an assumption that has been much followed, and it has shown an alarming tendency to harden into dogma, among both formalists and those who claim to deform formalism. Paul de Man's insistence, alluded to above, that "[i]t is therefore not *a priori* true that literature is a reliable source of information about anything but its own language,"<sup>35</sup> puts the hard version of this case in deconstructive discourse; it is an operating presumption for much "American deconstruction," and is also retrievable from aspects of Derrida's work. Even more important than this residual formalism has been the shadow of unexamined conformity cast by Saussure's most important enabling hypothesis, the proposition that "in language there are only differences, and no positive terms."<sup>36</sup> As a counter to the relentless historical empiricism of nineteenth-century philology, this proposition was ground-breaking, for it allowed language to be analyzed as a system, in its synchronic aspect. However, Saussure did not mean to deny that language operates diachronically, just that his sort of analysis had to ignore that vector. Too often, Saussure has been

read as putting a hermetic seal on language that renders the notion of referentiality indefensible. As Ellis argues, this is a silly interpretation of Saussure, and it is certainly a silly argument about the way language operates in the world, yet it is one of the most habitual poststructural positions (*AD* 45-66). While it brings with it a reasonable supply of counterintuitive insights, the blindness this line of argument requires is not finally defensible.

I do not propose to defend it. Rather, I propose that parody, as a genre, has already seen its way out of the deconstructive impasse that treats language as an endless and odorless play of differences. For it is true that parody, generically in its forms and linguistically in its textuality, works on fundamental assumptions about the nonreferentiality of language and form very like these, but it normally does so cannily, knowing that language *does* connect with the world, mimesis, and intention, however messily. That is where and why parody nearly always turns into satire. This is not a *necessary* event—pure parody which bombinates endlessly in the void of textuality is at least imaginable—but parody nearly always admits referential impurity. Its first lesson is always to defamiliarize, to show that language forms, distorts, and masks the world, that it is an impure medium, and that pure referentiality is a crazy and often dangerous dream. However, there is almost always a supplementary movement in parody (that seldom accompanies deconstruction) which returns the reader to something resembling the world. Through it, the play of differences in language is also defamiliarized, disrupted by physical realities and social, moral, and political imperatives. For, while the pure echolalia imagined by deconstruction, and enacted in the more aimless moments of texts by Derrida and others, is not critical in any meaningful sense, the comic aspects of parody do generate critical perspectives. These are not the objective critical perspective desired by straw-Plato metaphysics (the sort of dumbly serious logic that deconstruction loves to torment); rather they tend to be an unstable array of critical perspectives dependent on reader competence and response. Through these filters, language connects with both expression and mimesis, always ironically and never entirely earnestly. Political implications may (usually will) follow from this, but they will not necessarily be of any particular color.

Parody knows that reference occurs, *despite language*. It shows that there can be no monolithic Scriptural reality, on the one hand, and on the other that there are things beyond texts and which texts cannot control the construction or operation of. The Don fights with real windmills. *Gravity's Rainbow* represents a real world war and its aftermath—the point may be that the world has become surreal, but experience (physical, emotional, even moral) does not evaporate merely

because it becomes conceptually problematic. Parody does not provide the easy consolation offered by the trick with mirrors that mere deconstruction plays when it suggests that everything that can be deferred and deconstructed (which is everything) is mere absence. Dublin is textualized in *Ulysses*, but its sounds and smells and the people in it continue to exist even as they become mythopoetic wraiths, infinitely deferred in the parody. Those who follow the story around the streets and pubs of Dublin on Bloomsday are not mere gulls of naive realism. They know what they and the book are doing (at least for the first few pints). In another register, *The Handmaid's Tale* pursues an urgent political argument about individual liberty in the face of communal, military, and linguistic oppression, through the body of a parody of science fiction; a diminuendo of multiplying absences is precisely not what occurs in Atwood's work. Though the logic is altogether more paradoxical and supplementary, the *fatwa* shows how the verbal play of the *Satanic Verses* attaches to textual and material reality. The argument that the novel "is just a fiction" has never been an honest or a good defense for Rushdie, because he was clearly writing about India, Britain, and Islam. The text operates in a way liable to offend a fundamentalist because it relativizes sacred narratives (and not just Islamic sacred narratives—it works over several of the cherished narratives of Englishness, empire, and liberalism), and it does not treat them with anything like the respect they think they deserve. Parody is not serious or even polite in the face of claims to the sublime, but it is not just a joke. Indeed, it is logically and philosophically opposed to the absolutist claims and mimetic frauds sublimity depends on. Consequently, *The Satanic Verses*'s intimate deconstruction of the claims of revelation (showing carefully the way these come apart in practice and under the pressure of material facts and desires) is a critique of absolutism and the blind faith it demands. This is a big issue that impinges on political, religious, and personal life, and the book should be defended on those grounds rather than on the spurious proposition that it is a fiction and therefore not real. As David Lawton has recently argued, the book blasphemes, but not against God (who has Eternity to settle the score anyway). It blasphemes against fundamentalism and the flawed yet deathly image of perfect order and authority it must construct so as to assert itself.<sup>37</sup> Parody does important critical work here that sober critique could never hope to achieve. It is not just Rushdie that the *fatwa* seeks to discipline and destroy; it is the spirit of doubt, ambiguity, and criticism. Those of us who care about these principles have a lot more to defend than a maverick novelist.

So, parody and the illusions we build with words impinge on material reality, and reality impinges back. The genre routinely loops back into something like mimesis, though it is a mimesis aware of the gulf between

words and things, which the illusion of language bridges. It is not clear that pure deconstruction, though it runs on principles scarcely distinguishable from parody, is equipped to deal with such realistic issues, because it keeps deferring meaning into the play of language and keeps undermining the grounds on which propositions stand, as too metaphysical. It is easy to see that Rushdie employs deconstructive methods in *The Satanic Verses*, and necessary to defend him for it, but it is harder to imagine what a rigorously deconstructive defense might look like. In the rhetorical flux surrounding the book, how would such a defense begin to take a position that is not always already paralyzingly unstable?

Despite the note of accusation, I want to leave this as a genuinely open question, and propose to end this essay by recounting a parabolic story. In Swift's *A Tale of a Tub*, three brothers represent respectively the Roman Catholic Church, the Church of England, and the Nonconformist sects. The third brother, the Calvinist Jack, is the most textually obsessed. He is in the habit of reading the "Will" of the father (that is, the Bible) incessantly, and applying pieces of it to all sorts of extraneous and miraculous uses (such as bandages, medicines, and so forth). He treats it in an idolatrous manner as a master text which holds the solutions to all mysteries of faith and daily life, and he reads the world as a poor imitation of the textual truths contained in the Will. His attachment to the Will is by no means an innocent or sincere expression of faith, however. It is an act of aggression and a pursuit of mastery through which he seeks to reimagine the world only so that he can be tyrant over it. And, because the world remains recalcitrant in many ways, it rapidly recedes in Jack's mind before the power of the Will, which can be bent hermeneutically into any shape his will desires. In the world of textual truth/delusion, he is omnipotent by virtue of his strong reading, and he prefers it that way. Any information to the contrary insults his faith and must be reasoned away. Consequently, Jack is in the habit of walking around town with his eyes closed, following not the carnal and lying perception provided by eyes, but the more sure guide of divine inspiration. The parodic text makes it clear that this will not work. With the confident faith of one who believes in nothing beyond the inspirational text, Jack "would shut his Eyes as he walked along the Streets," and the habitual result was that, "he happened to bounce his Head against a Post, or fall into the Kennel."<sup>38</sup> This is the satiric wisdom of parody. Whether Jacques and the deconstructive brethren are wise enough to resist the siren calls of complete hermeneutic dominion in the sunny realm of textuality and avoid such a drubbing, only time will tell.

## NOTES

1 Jacques Derrida, *Limited Inc.*, ed. Gerald Graff (Evanston, Ill., 1988), p. 43; French ed., tr. Elisabeth Weber (Paris, 1990), pp. 87-88. While I have worked primarily with English translations of Derrida's texts in this essay and will proceed to quote them only in English versions, I have checked all direct quotations against the French texts and give references to the appropriate sources. Occasionally I have essayed corrections and/or introduced French words in brackets where I find the translations unsatisfactory, and I accept a share of any responsibility for distortions that translation may have introduced.

2 Derrida, *Limited Inc.*, p. 44; French ed., p. 88.

3 Gregory L. Ulmer, "Of a Parodic Tone Recently Adopted in Criticism," *New Literary History*, 13 (1982), 546.

4 See, for example, Tony Jackson, "Nihilism, Relativism, and Literary Theory," *SubStance*, 24, no. 3 (1995), 29-48, and Gordon C. F. Beams, "Derrida Dry: Iterating Iterability Analytically," *Diacritics*, 25, no. 3 (1995), 3-25.

5 See Mark Edmundson, *Literature against Philosophy, Plato to Derrida: A Defence of Poetry* (Cambridge, 1995).

6 This pattern of hermeneutic evolution conforms perfectly to what Gerald Graff has described as the "routinization of criticism" in "Rags to Riches to Routine," ch. 14 of *Professing Literature.. An Institutional History* (Chicago, 1987), p. 240.

7 For an exposition and defense of this method of deconstruction, see Jonathan Culler, *On Deconstruction* (Ithaca, 1982); for an eloquent, detailed attack on it, see John M. Ellis, *Against Deconstruction* (Princeton, 1989); hereafter cited in text as *AD*. I surround "radicalism" with scare-quotes and qualify it with a dismissive adjective because "radical" is a word that has come to be used so lazily and ubiquitously that it often signifies little more than a desire on the writer's part to be considered exciting and up-to-date.

8 The allegation that he is about to understand and disagree with an eloquent argument from Hillis Miller about the impossibility of conveying meaning in language strikes me as the unassailable part of M. H. Abrams's argument in "The Deconstructive Angel," *Critical Inquiry*, 3 (1977), 425-38.

9 Paisley Livingston, "From Text to Work," in *After Poststructuralism: Interdisciplinarity and Literary Theory*, ed. Nancy Easterlin and Barbara Riebling (Evanston, Ill., 1993), pp. 91-104, shows economically how little there is up this particular garden path. See also John R. Searle's provocative assertions that a great deal of deconstructive literary theory has been flawed by a confusion between ontological and epistemological questions, and by Derrida's "pre-Wittgensteinian" refusal to accept that a concept can be a concept and admit of any impurity or imprecision (John R. Searle, "Literary Theory and its Discontents," *New Literary History*, 25 [1994], 637-67).

10 Ellis makes this extrapolation with a careful hostility in chapter 3 of *Against Deconstruction* and, though slanted, his arguments, particularly about the banality of "soft" versions of deconstructive doctrines and the absurdity of "hard" versions, do not seem groundless. Jackson, in "Nihilism, Relativism, and Literary Theory," makes a less hostile case that Derrida does approach nihilistic relativism in his constant focus on indeterminacy, which makes his occasional assertions that metaphysics remain indispensable look lame and lonely; for Jackson, though viewing Derrida as a nihilist is a misunderstanding, it is a very understandable misunderstanding.

11 This list is meant to be illustrative, and is a long way short of being definitive. The specific texts referred to are Gayatri Spivak, "Translator's Preface," in Jacques Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, tr. Gayatri Spivak (Baltimore, 1976); Culler, *On Deconstruction*; Christopher Norris, *Deconstruction: Theory and Practice* (London, 1982; rev. 1991), and many other works, for example, *The Truth about Postmodernism* (Oxford, 1993); Vincent Leitch, *Deconstructive*

Phiddian, Robert 1997. Are Parody and Deconstruction Secretly the Same Thing? 'New Literary History', vol.28, no.4, 673-696.

## PARODY AND DECONSTRUCTION

Criticism: *An Advanced Introduction* (New York, 1983); Kevin Hart, *The Trespass of the Sign: Deconstruction, Theology and Philosophy* (Cambridge, 1989); Geoffrey Bennington, *Legislations: The Politics of Deconstruction* (London, 1994).

12 Geoffrey Bennington, "Deconstruction and the Philosophers (The Very Idea)," in *Legislations*, pp. 11-60, provides a picturesque and excessive example of this "evil ministers" line of argument, casting so many anathemas on Derrida's myriad misrepresenters that it leaves the sanguine reader to wonder if anyone (except Bennington) has ever understood Derrida adequately.

13 Hart, *The Trespass of the Sign*, p. 147.

14 Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, tr. Spivak, p. 158; *De la grammatologie* (Paris, 1967), p. 227.

15 Jacques Derrida, *Margins of Philosophy*, tr. Alan Bass (Chicago, 1982), pp. 316-17; *Marges de la philosophie* (Paris, 1972), pp. 376-77.

16 It is possible, of course, for a theory to be promulgated as a program for a textual practice that is then followed (for example, [post modernist avant-gardism and Soviet social realism], or for a theory to become so formalized that it dominates practice (for example, many Renaissance sonnets and much Byzantine iconography), but these reversals of order are unusual. Anyway, the issue of priority is less important than the point that actual theory and actual practice develop in long-winded dialogue out of concrete problems and desires.

17 For a wide-ranging survey of the issues involved in parody, see Margaret A. Rose, *Parody: Ancient, Modern, and Postmodern* (Cambridge, 1993).

18 This is classically Paul de Man's position and method, characterized bluntly thus: "It is therefore not *a priori* true that literature is a reliable source of information about anything but its own language" (Paul de Man, "The Resistance to Theory," *Yale French Studies*, 63 [1982], 11).

19 Jacques Derrida, "Afterword: Toward an Ethic of Discussion," in *Limited Inc.*, p. 114; French ed., "Postface: vers une éthique de la discussion," p. 206.

20 Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, p. 24; *De la grammatologie*, p. 39.

21 I argue this case at length in my *Swift's Parody* (Cambridge, 1995).

22 Victor Shklovsky, "A Parodying Novel: Sterne's *Tristram Shandy*," tr. W. George Isaak, in *Lawrence Sterne: A Collection of Critical Essays*, ed. John Traugott (Englewood Cliffs, NJ., 1968), p. 89.

23 For a parallel discussion of parody as a process of erasure, in the Derridean sense, see my *Swift's Parody*, pp. 13-19.

24 See Rose, *Parody*, and Linda Hutcheon, *A Theory of Parody: The Teachings of Twentieth-Century Art Forms* (New York, 1985) for maps of this expansive territory.

25 See Paula Backscheider, *Daniel Defoe: His Life* (Baltimore, 1989), pp. 84-105, for a description of the controversy.

26 For a full account of the affair, see Michael Heyward, *The Ern Malley Affair* (London, 1993).

27 "After we came out of the church, we stood talking for some time together of Bishop Berkeley's ingenious sophistry to prove the non-existence of matter, and that every thing in the universe is merely ideal. I observed, that though we were satisfied his doctrine is not true, it is impossible to refute it. I never shall forget the alacrity with which Johnson answered, striking his foot with mighty force against a large stone, till he rebounded from it, 'I refute it thus' (James Boswell, *Life of Johnson*, ed. R. W. Chapman [Oxford, 1980], p. 333).

28 Hutcheon, *A Theory of Parody*, pp. 69-83, is a good place to start in this large body of critical industry. Bakhtin's own work focuses constantly on these issues, and a starting point here is the essays gathered in Mikhail Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays*, ed. and tr. Michael Holquist and Caryl Emerson (Austin, Tex., 1981).

29 Roland Barthes, "The Death of the Author," in *Image Music Text*, tr. Stephen Heath (London, 1977), p. 147; "Le mort de l'auteur," in *Le bruissement de la langue* (Paris, 1984), p. 66.

30 Jacques Derrida, *Positions*, tr. Alan Bass (Chicago, 1981), p. 28; *Positions: Entretiens avec Henri Ronse, Julia Kristeva, Jean-Louis Houdebine, Guy Scarpetta* (Paris, 1972), p. 40.

31 Jacques Derrida, *Dissemination*, tr. Barbara Johnson (Chicago, 1981), p. 168; *La Dissemination* (Paris, 1972), p. 194. The English translation has missed a line in this passage, which I have inserted in square brackets in my own translation. The two sentences from which the excision has come read: "*Il apparaît dans son essence, comme* la possibilité de sa propre duplication. C'est-à-dire, en termes platoniciens, de sa non-vérité la plus propre, de sa pseudo-vérité réfléchie dans l'icône, le phantasme ou le simulacre."

32 Brian McHale, *Postmodernist Fiction* (London, 1987), pp. 99-101.

33 Derrida, "Différance," in *Margins*, pp. 7-9; *Marges*, pp. 7-10.

34 Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, pp. 144-45; *De la grammatologie*, pp. 207-8. I have removed the word "there" from the first line of this passage (between "representation" and "claims") as there is no warrant for it in the French text and I cannot make grammatical sense of the sentence with it in place; I suspect that it is a typographical error.

35 de Man, "The Resistance to Theory," p. 11.

36 Ferdinand de Saussure, *Course in General Linguistics*, tr. Roy Harris (London, 1983), p. 118; *Cours de linguistique générale* (Paris, 1965), p. 166.

37 David Lawton, *Blasphemy* (Philadelphia, 1993), pp. 177-88.

38 Jonathan Swift, *A Tale of a Tub*, ed. A. C. Guthkelch and D. Nichol Smith, 2nd ed. (Oxford, 1958), p. 192.