Part Four

Toward a Literary Hermeneutics

Briefly stated, there are two basic, and traditional, concerns in hermeneutic philosophy; they have tended to divide the history of hermeneutic theory itself, but they are not fundamentally contradictory. Rather, they seem to reflect different layers of interest. Perhaps the oldest tradition is associated with Biblical exegesis, where the concern is with the interpretation of individual texts and their transmission (that is, with the history of the interpretation of a text). This is the narrower of the basic concerns and has parallels with the New Criticism, although it never ignores historical meaningfulness altogether. It merely tends to restrict its historical perspective by isolating texts in particular historical moments. This tradition is still very much alive; Paul Ricoeur said as recently as 1965 that "we mean by hermeneutics the theory of rules that govern an exegesis, that is to say, an interpretation of a particular text or collection of signs susceptible of being considered as a text." The approach is doggedly scholastic and generally antiromantic; it promotes objectivity in interpretation, a positivistic attitude, and emphasizes the importance of methodology as a series of logically defined interpretive steps that will, of necessity, lead the interpreter to the true meaning of the text. It is well represented by philosophers like Emilio Betti and literary critics like E. D. Hirsch, Jr. Behind these men are the works of Schleiermacher, and to some extent Dilthey and Husserl. Its similarity to the positivistic and methodology-centered linguistics of Chomsky is apparent, even if the stated goals are quite different.

The second basic concern, much younger in its full development (although like all philosophical movements prone to trace its origins to antiquity), reflects much broader interests. Under the influence of Heidegger, and to a lesser extent of Merleau-Ponty, this hermeneutic tradition seeks through the point of view
of the phenomenologists to focus on the fundamental activity of "understanding," in both its epistemological and ontological dimensions. It is epistemological because "understanding" has its base in the self-conscious act of knowing the world; it is ontological because this act of knowing originates in a Heideggerian assertion of being. This tradition often appears to be broadly metaphysical, psychologistic, and idealistic, although such designations must be wary of the Heideggerian "deconstruction" that challenges them. The tendency is to disregard the centrality of logical methodology and the emphasis of the older tradition on apodictic knowledge. Some of its leading exponents are Hans-Georg Gadamer, Rudolph Bultmann, and, more recently, Richard Palmer.

HISTORY AND INTERPRETATION: FIRST VIEW

The exegetical tradition of hermeneutics, the first of the two positions outlined above, defines its primary goal as the establishing of "norms" for determining "right" and "wrong" interpretations. The end is apodictic knowledge, and the methodology, what Emilio Betti calls "historical objectivity," is designed to escape the damnation of subjective (romantic) judgments. As a result, the methodology becomes mired in a relativistic historicism. Betti's historical objectivity is essentially a development of the hermeneutic theory of Wilhelm Dilthey. The interpreter, for Dilthey, must be able to transcend his own personality in order to enter into the consciousness of another being (the author) from another time and place. Only by doing this can one discover the true—and determinate—meaning of the text. "Meaning" must not be allowed to suffer interpolation at the hands of the critic, and in this sense the text is said to be "autonomous," having a meaning locked in time. This version of textual autonomy, obviously, is not New Critical.

The approach can best be grasped by outlining what Dilthey established as the three main areas of interest for hermeneutic theory.

1. *Erlebnis:* simply "life" but in the broader sense of "existential consciousness" or what Richard Palmer translates as "experience."
2. Ausdruck: "expression" or perhaps more literally an existential projection. For Dilthey, expression was the realization of Erlebnis, its objective manifestation in one of man's "gestures": art, politics, philosophy, and many others.

3. Verstehen: "understanding." The crucial element of Dilthey's hermeneutic theory is understanding; it is this capacity of mind that allows us to grasp sympathetically the actual thought process of another mind.3

Dilthey says of this third area of interest: "Understanding is the rediscovery of the I in the Thou; the mind rediscovers itself at ever higher levels of connectedness; this sameness of the mind in the I and the Thou and in every subject of a community, in every system of culture and, finally, in the totality of mind and universal history, makes the working together of the different processes in the human studies possible." For the purposes of hermeneutic theory, we must understand that this I-Thou relationship (the end of all interpretation) is achieved only by passing through the concrete "expression"—the text itself. "Above all . . . the grasping of the structure of the inner life is based on the interpretation of works, works in which the texture of inner life comes fully to expression." The "autonomy" of the text in the exegetical tradition becomes primary, whereas the concept of "understanding" is no more than a basic assumption; the text is an objectified, formed, or structured expression of lived experience, the existential projection of a particular man living at a particular time and place.

Such autonomy is defended, however, at the expense of the interpreter's involvement; the text is free from interpretive superimpositions, but it is lost in the historical moment of its creation. This historical relativism is admittedly the aim of the hermeneutic theory of E. D. Hirsch, Jr. He uses the term autonomy in the sense of Husserl's object of "intentionality." Hirsch quotes Husserl to the effect that "the same intentional object may be the focus of many intentional acts." That is to say, the literary text remains essentially unchanged although it is subjected to a variety of different interpretations. More importantly, the text is the product of the author's creative act, of, in an expanded sense, his "intention." It is on this basis that Hirsch defines the "meaning" of a literary work as the product of the
author's determining will (including all the conscious and unconscious factors of his environment that affect his will). Meaning, then, is historical, determined by the spatiotemporal locale of the author. There is also a secondary meaning for Hirsch, which he labels "significance." It is a "present" meaning arising from the critic's subjective judgment. Despite its basis in the idealistic assumptions of a possible "inter-subjectivity" voiced by Dilthey, proponents of hermeneutics, like Hirsch, insist that the methodology of the interpreter must be objective, scientific, and value free in contradistinction to the critic's subjectivity. Clearly, Hirsch divided interpretation and evaluation in order to focus on the former without the befuddling problems of the latter, but he fails to explain fully what we must all intuitively confirm, that such a theoretical bifurcation of interests has little of the same purity in practice. Can an interpreter really avoid some degree of subjectivity?

The affirmative response to such a question is made by Hirsch as a result of his primary emphasis on methodology. If an exact logical interpretive process can be established, there is little room for subjective wanderings. The methodology makes the interpretation for us if we follow the rules. Meaning becomes, in this positivistic notion, almost identical with the interpretive procedure itself, and the result is an extremely narrow kind of historical determinism. Admitting that his concept of intention is fraught with vagueries, that we cannot know what was in the author's mind as he wrote, Hirsch argues that we must, on the basis of textual evidence, deduce what was most probably his intention. Thus the methodology avoids the charge of "psychologism." Hirsch sees the text as an object in experience, but a determinate object that can be interpreted without conjectures on the psychological condition of the author. The methodology is statistical. Given several variant readings of a text, or a portion of a text, the interpreter's role is to establish "evidence" (including all the known factors of the author's life, his works, his social-historical milieu) that can be used to determine the relative rightness or wrongness of the variant readings. This evidence forms a closed context of possible meanings, and the correct meaning of an individual work is determined by that context. The interpreter can then decide which of the variant readings is most nearly correct by deciding
which of all possible interpretations satisfies the greatest number of determining possibilities.

The methodology is value free because it is wholly quantitative, a result of Hirsch's importation of Husserl's empiricism. It lacks the exactness that the ideal of apodictic knowledge might seem to demand; it delivers only a "high probability of truth," but Hirsch is a practical man in such matters. He would not claim that even this statistical approach is free from the vagueries of evidence gathering. More importantly, the methodology is wholly relativistic, and in the end this denies any true autonomy to the text, that more radical New Critical autonomy. The work must be seen as a product of its times, and art's contribution to the structuring of history is severely undercut. We are confronted here with the picture of an artist spoken by his historical context. Everything is reduced to simple pastness; the context of the work is static and closed, and the continuity of past and present is ignored or even denied.

HISTORY AND INTERPRETATION: SECOND VIEW

Hirsch's understanding of autonomy contradicts my goal in this essay of establishing a historically sensitive hermeneutics. We can quickly agree that any work must be seen as in some sense free from the reader's (interpreter's) determining influence, but it is also free from the illusion of the determining influence of its own historical milieu. Paradoxically, the work is related to both past and present, for only in this relationship can it be said to be truly autonomous (irreducible to either the reader's or author's point of view) and at the same time a part of the continuous flow of such objects in experience that make up the dynamic flow of history. Perhaps, then, it is better to drop the term autonomous altogether, for it is distorting in either its New Critical or relativistic usages. This forces us to a much broader sense of hermeneutics and perhaps a more complicated methodology. The interpreter's approach, I would argue, is inevitably less logical and statistical than Hirsch admits, and flirts with the dreaded "psychologism." We might describe the literary text more accurately as "finite"; it is not "autonomous" because its very nature opens it to a vast world of experience and discourse.
To accomplish such a theory we must return to Dilthey's triadic relationship of Erlebnis, Ausdruck, and Verstehen. In so doing I reject Dilthey's limitation of the latter, "understanding," to the mere process of entering into the consciousness of the author, his lived experience or Erlebnis. Hence, from the beginning I admit that the separation of interpreter's and author's consciousnesses is problematical, but the blending of the two consciousnesses leads us to a broader sense of communication than Hirsch provides through his dichotomy of meaning and significance.

The virtue of Hirsch's methodology is that it is simple and logical (much like Chomsky's analysis of linguistic structures). But it generates problems for itself as a methodology. This is most clear in Hirsch's development of a genre theory, his answer to the problem of how we "share" a meaning that is so narrowly circumscribed by the closed context of possible meanings—a context that may well be very remote from our present sense of significance. Hirsch's difficulty here is similar to Chomsky's in explaining communication in language systems, and their solutions are remarkably alike. Both fall back on a general category of shared experiences or capacities. For Chomsky this is rigidly determinative as it takes the form of "innate reason." For Hirsch it is milder, a matter of mere "convention" or "heuristic" devices that take the form of genre types. Both appeals are to the rationalist's argument from "necessity" in order to posit an explanatory general law that will "cover" all the individual variations known as specific expressions.

Hirsch assumes that an author works within a finite category of experience (including the formal and thematic aspects of that category), which he calls an "extrinsic genre." This category can be known by the interpreter whose approach involves the elimination (by statistical probabilities) of all of the implications of the extrinsic genre that are "false" when applied to the specific text. By a process of gradually narrowing the focus, the interpreter arrives, finally, at the "intrinsic genre," which is apparently no more than the text itself as product of the author's determinate intention.

Hirsch has here committed himself to the traditional implications of the hermeneutical or philological circle. Leo Spitzer, however, suggests that the philological circle necessarily involves
both a "psychological" and a "grammatical" dimension. The first risks the damning label of "intuition" or even "mysticism" as it seeks the necessary inner structure of the author's mind via his works; the second restricts itself to the stylistic surface of the text. The psychological dimension pushes toward the irrational but, in combination with the grammatical, has its ground firmly in the finite text of the work. "To understand a sentence, a work of art, or the inward form of an artistic mind involves, to an increasing degree, irrational moves—which must, also to an increasing degree, be controlled by reason." The intuitive aspect of the philological circle springs from the necessary "anticipation of the whole," which enables the interpreter to measure specific details against his intuitive assumptions about the text's unity. Schleiermacher, Spitzer claims, considered this in theological terms as a leap of faith; Hirsch, more secularly, calls it a "guess."

Hirsch's "extrinsic genre" is a broader context than the textual wholes Spitzer is here speaking of; but Spitzer also expands the vibrations between parts and wholes into the realm of social history, and at this point he develops an idea of literary "context" very similar to what I have called "occasion" in part 1. Hirsch is well aware of the basic structure of this methodology, but the influx of the irrational (necessitated by the methodology itself) does not conform to his positivistic and statistical approach. On the deeper level, where a hermeneutic methodology must be developed, we find that an analysis that measures details against the whole, that deep-seated sense of unity and identity that is essentially metaphoric and thrusts toward the prelogical and irrational. The fate of Hirsch's hermeneutics, like that of Chomsky's linguistic analysis, is that its very methodology leads it, in part, away from objectivity.

This being the case, we might wonder why it is advantageous to restrict our interpretive approach to a narrow sense of "meaning" like that proposed by Hirsch. Can we not profitably expand hermeneutic procedure to include the problematical relationship between the reader's subjectivity, the text's finite existence, and the author's historical milieu? Dilthey's triad of *Erlebnis*, *Ausdruck*, and *Verstehen* can then be seen in the author-work-reader relationship I have so laboriously developed above. The
result of such an expanded sense of literary hermeneutics supports Gadamer's assertion that interpretation "is an encounter with Being through language." Nevertheless, the eloquence of this claim should not open it to the charge of mere psychologism or mysticism, for the interpretive methodology remains grounded in the part/whole relationship of finite text and cultural context, work and occasion, and has its concrete basis on the level of grammar. The focus necessarily remains on the text, for it is the finiteness of that text, its movement between past and present, that provides the key to the interpretive act as vehicle for communication between reader and author. There is a sense in which the act of interpretation defines the text, situates it in its cultural context, and thereby defines or situates the text's culture. Murray Krieger calls this an as if critical commitment; but giving credit where it is due, the text can as easily be said to present itself, as one among many texts, to make itself available for interpretation.

Textual interpretation is, then, a profound kind of "translation"—from authorial past meaning into present significance—endowing the text itself with a more comprehensive meaning that encompasses the potentials for both. Translation is not an inappropriate word. Rewriting a text of one language system in another, separate system has long been the interest of hermeneutics. But even this narrow kind of translation must not be seen as the simple transfer of a message from one set of linguistic signs to another, semantically equivalent, set of signs, or as a game of transforming one set of codes into another. Such a semantic transfer is probably impossible; at best it results in so-called literal translations, which are always unsatisfactory. As Heidegger demonstrates in all of his philosophical writings, translation is never an "innocent process." Translation calls into question the very limits of interpretation, for not only must it operate on the informational level encoding and decoding, on the level of signifiers generated within the culturally motivated system of langue, it must also concern itself with the general semiotic functioning that treats of the relationships between signifiers and signifieds, more broadly, between articulation and experience, or word and world. Georges Mounin confines the field of interpretation to the latter operations, to a concern with the function of language as "index," but I hope that approach
will seem too narrow a characterization following my discussion of the problematical interplay of *parole* and *langue*, language and experience.

The translator, by means of striking at the very heart of language's capabilities, the play of signifiers as well as the phenomenological activity of signifying as "intentionality," crosses from his world to that of the author; he establishes communication on the deepest level, penetrating to the very core of the author's existence and making it compatible with his own. Surely this is nothing less than Gadamer's "encounter with Being through language," and it involves an intuition of the potentials of all human consciousness as they are located in the author's horizon of consciousness. The translator must then be able to bring that consciousness to existence through his own consciousness. This is understanding at its fullest dimension and at its most problematical, for it involves not only the gap between language systems but also the historical and cultural differences between the author's world and that of the translator.16

THE HERMENEUTICS OF VERSTEHEN: CONSCIOUSNESS

Through the methodological paradigm of translation we confront the tradition of hermeneutic theory that necessarily involves historical consciousness. Moreover, in so doing we do not find it necessary to abandon interest in the text, or language in general, for the intimate relation between consciousness and language itself—its metaphor/metonym tensions, which reveal the author's encounter with his particular world of temporal flow and discrete moments—becomes a tool for the interpreter as he strives to penetrate to the deep structure of meaning. The interpreter, nonetheless, begins with his own consciousness as he confronts the text, and he is never free of it. As Richard Palmer says of Heidegger: "Understanding is the power to grasp one's own possibilities for being, within the context of the lifeworld in which one exists. It is not a special capacity or gift for feeling into the situation of another person, nor is it [simply] the power to grasp the meaning of some 'expression of life on a deeper level.'"17 Understanding begins and ends in the interpreter's own existential awareness, but always within the context of history.

There is a crucial sense of will (or "intention") in Heidegger's
phenomenology, in the act of consciousness that places the self in history (on another level, in tradition), thereby making the being of self and relationships with other beings possible. “Only as a questioning, historical being does man come to himself; only as such is he a self. Man’s selfhood means this: he must transform the being that discloses itself to him into history and bring himself to stand in it. Selfhood does not mean that he is primarily an ‘ego’ and an individual. This he is no more than he is a we, a community.”18 Man is both, an individual whose very individuality comes to be in a community—in history. Without the context of history he cannot be an individual and without the multiplicity of individuals there can be no historical context.

Art, therefore, can be described in terms of “disclosure,” for the foundation of every individual work (act of consciousness) is what Heidegger calls “Earth,” and it is on the ground of Earth that man builds his World, makes, through an act of historical consciousness, his works. This creative act makes a place in time for the works of man, just as it makes a place in history for man himself. The work of art captures formally the tension of consciousness as it struggles to bring forth World on the vivid but opaque foundations of Earth. The work is, then, part of its World and is composed of and on Earth, but it is also at the same time a situating of World and Earth. It has its freedom as well as its belonging. Heidegger can, therefore, describe the individual work (being) as a strange, violent, disruptive emergence that nevertheless opens up the space/time continuum for the situating of a World that becomes the familiar dwelling place of the individual, a dwelling place that will subordinate the individual, even repress it as it also exploits the Earth for the World’s purposes.19 Heidegger, of course, discusses these complex movements and countermovements as characteristics of language. His sense of the mysterious originality of poetry and its later codification into a poetic tradition is not far from that of Cassirer, even to the use of very romantic terminology to describe the relationship between the primordial nature of emergent being and the cultural/historical context of that original poetry. “The origin of language is in essence mysterious. And this means that language can only have arisen from the overpowering, the strange and the terrible, through man’s departure into being, embodied in the word: poetry. Language is the
primordial poetry in which a people speaks being. Conversely, the great poetry by which a people enters into history initiates the molding of its language.”

We must remember here that Heidegger's use of the term origin is special, indicating an abiding power that is always available in language. Language contains the forces of both gathering together and dispersing in conflict, the tension of metaphor and metonymy that makes possible the emergence of the individual at a time as well as the absorption of the individual into the flow of temporality. Poetry, therefore, is not merely a metaphor; it is the force of gathering, violent estrangement, that creates a space for a metaphor, an opening in the fabric of being (context or text) that only a "pure" metaphor in its dynamic enduring could fill, if only such metaphors were ever at hand. In a very real way, as I have argued from the beginning, it is the failure of metaphors, their "impurity," that signifies intention, will, and emergence; on the stylistic surface it is the weakness of the metaphoric unity, its always-openness to metonymy, that best reveals its power. How far, for example, should we extend the unifying claims of "My love is like a red, red rose"; as far as blood and thorns, root rot and aphids? The dissolve is the other side of emergence, and literature most forcefully calls our attention to this powerful interplay. Without it we would have no sense of the timeliness of time, nor of the true dimensions of history.

A FURTHER NOTE ON LANGUAGE

Heidegger's student Hans-Georg Gadamer placed even more emphasis on the linguistic orientation of hermeneutics than did his master. Gadamer extensively developed the distinction between the poetic use of language and the instrumentalism of scientific discourse. Rejecting the latter as a vitiating of the true power of language he says, "everywhere [the] word is seen in its mere sign function, the primordial relationship of speaking and thinking is turned into an instrumental relationship." We are returned once more to the New Critical distinction between poetry and prose, but it is no longer seen as absolute. The denial of that New Critical separatism is justified by a move away from
textual formalism toward the structuralism of human consciousness. This is the expansive sense of formalism advocated by Geoffrey Hartman. Gadamer eschews the formalist analysis, which never sees beyond the autonomous text, never penetrates to the deep structure of consciousness. The essence of language, he claims, is experience (Dilthey's Erlebnis); the poetic or primal use of language springs from the Heideggerian disclosure of space and time.

But we do not here abolish all distinctions between what we have for many years called poetic and philosophic languages. These are, Heidegger expresses it, always in the same "neighborhood"; they are "held apart by a delicate yet luminous difference, each held in its own darkness." They are "parallels" that "intersect in the infinite." The difference between the two is chimerical, now this—now that, a kind of optical illusion not unlike the metaphoric use I made of the "principle of indeterminacy" from quantum theory in part 2. It is a question as to whether we look at poetry as emergence or as object. The former is a poetic way of determining, the latter is a logical or philosophic way of determining. Again Heidegger poses the dilemma:

No thing is where the word is lacking. A thing is not until, and is only where, the word is not lacking but is there. But if the word is, then it must itself also be a thing, because "thing" here means whatever is in some way. . . . Or could it be that when the word speaks, qua word, it is not a thing—in no way like what is? Is the word a nothing? . . . If our thinking does justice to the matter, then we may never say of the word that it is, but rather that it gives. . . . What does it give? To go by the poetic experience . . . , the word gives Being. . . . [This is] the intuited secret of the word, which in denying itself brings near to us its withheld nature.

There is no question that we sometimes (as stylisticians, as literary critics?) see the poetic word as a thing, as a presence that conceals its power to disclose the historical emergence of being. But we must not allow that perspective to solidify; we must perceive poetically, allow the poetic word to deny itself and reveal its powers of "giving," its original function as primordial naming.

In this sense, as Murray Krieger has claimed, poetry contains
its own interpretation and remains to some extent always beyond the grasp of philosophical criticism, on the other side of "wonder," which is disclosed by the actual (perceptible) decomposition of what we have too literalistically designated as the substantiality of metaphor. Heidegger proposes a remarkably expressive formula for this paradoxical interplay between poetry as emergent being, strange, uncanny, and language as the logical or familiar expressing "thingly" permanence. "The being of language: the language of being." Such a phrase, with all of its rhetorical/poetical suggestiveness, cannot help but remind us of similar poetic devices so popular among the practitioners of eighteenth-century "heroic" verse. It is filled with the witty twisting of logic made possible by grammatical inversion, and what emerges is something far beyond a dialectical struggle between the opposed half-lines that face one another across the inarticulateness of the colon. The same words on either side of the caesura do not have the same meanings, but each side necessitates the other to situate its meaningfulness, even as it dissolves that meaningfulness into the "neutral" zone that opens between them. The distance between the word as thing (the being of language) and the word as giving (the language of being) makes possible the Heideggerian idea of poetry as speaking being. In the light of my earlier discussions, we can translate this poetic line into another expression, fully aware of the dangers of translation as well as its intimacy with the methods of interpretation. "The belonging of language: the language of belonging." This translation is not without loss; its distance from the original, however, is precisely the issue. The "belonging of language" is its fallen status as cultural systematicity, as langue, or even further as "literary value." These are the fixities and definites of interpretation, the scholastic rules that form the basis of literary handbooks. They are not without use; they are to be used. The "language of belonging," conversely, is that which defines our world, the familiar, delimiting, even repressive "world of our fathers." It is in part the realm of the function of the giving of identity; for the literary artist, it is the possibility of receiving the deadening "name of artist." Yet even if this version of Heidegger's paradox is sadly degenerate, its very inadequacy as a definition of the interpretive procedure opens up once more the path to "original poetry." In the inarticulate space marked by the colon the "text
for analysis” emerges as neither a composite of culture’s rules nor an expression of the personal (stylistic) struggles of the author. Nor is it possible to conceive of the appearance of this text as a simple dialectic of the two forces, for where is the place of transition, the fading of one into the other? The text is both and neither; it is the locus of the interpenetration of forces that dissolves into questions concerning the power of language to solidify into the thingly words of cultural rules on the one hand and the “given” power of self-assertion (will) that articulates itself as “seeking identity” on the other hand. Concealed within such a text is “being-there,” the force of emergence into and the situation of history.

This is the essential historicity of literary hermeneutics, a historical perspective that must be preserved in its full ambiguity. The text, in its tensional revelation of the battle between the author’s drive toward primal consciousness (being-there) and, in opposition, the systematicity of society, reveals the possibility of history and provides the foundation for communication. The text stands medially between the author’s world and the reader’s world and draws author and reader together in its own unique structure while it asserts its own and man’s being in time. “The claim of the text must be allowed to show itself as what it is. In the interaction and fusion of horizons the interpreter comes to hear the question which called the text itself into being.”

As an event of consciousness the text “claims” a finite “presence” that defies any reduction of it to either wholly private or wholly public status. It is both; it shows itself not as a thing that is but as an opening, a space for being-there. The articulate text preserves the creative act that gave it being and invites the reader to disclose that creative power within it, but that disclosure opens thereupon a broader context, the occasion or World (the enabling horizon of man’s always original emergence as being).

THE “TEXT” AS INTERPRETATION: IN DEFENSE OF ROMANTICISM

In The Order of Things, Michel Foucault characterizes romanticism as the “discovery of man”; he does so in order to attack all the other familiar “isms” that we associate with the romantic period, in particular: subjectivism, humanism,
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Historicism, symbolism, and transcendentalism. Foucault is the defender of the rationalistic "systematicities" of the classical period (the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries) against the irrationality of romantic self-indulgence. There is, despite his denials, a polemical purposiveness—something of a missionary zeal—in his writing. For Foucault the "discovery of man" was not a triumph but a disastrous (and temporary) fall into the decadence of a sinful egoism. It resulted in the cult of the "self," in the claim that the thinking, feeling, speaking "subject" (man) was the measure of all things. Viewed broadly, there is some justification for Foucault's observations on the excesses of romantic theory, but he is, finally, too anxious to make his point and fails to acknowledge the philosophical complexity of romanticism's "discovery." To cite only one example, Foucault seizes upon the concept of organicism and uses it to characterize the romantic way of thinking. This is traditional, but unless one is careful, it is distorting.

Organicism proclaims, as we have seen with the New Critics, the principle of the "folding inward" upon the self, the emergence of all particular phenomena, including man, from hidden, mysterious origins that are the nuclei for each individual organic whole. Thus man can be explained only by a search for origins, by retracing the interminably regressive steps back toward his birth into consciousness. Organicism, however, cuts two ways, a fact that Foucault glosses over. On the one hand, it promotes the worship of unique particularity and originality; in the arts it encourages the cult of "original genius," and it supports an exaggerated respect for the new, the avant-garde, the revolutionary, and even the strange and the grotesque. On the other hand, as it focuses on the particular it also proclaims the universal sameness of all phenomena, since the organic principle operates everywhere and at all times according to the same laws. It is possible, by embracing the paradox, to jump from awe in the face of the particular to sublimity when confronted by the universal, from the immediacy of experientiality to the abstractness of transcendentalism, from the perspective of individual being to the perspective of cultural-historical becoming, from radical existential discontinuity to historicist continuity. It is true that man thus becomes the symbol of all order and the reference
point for all interpretation, but the essential nature of his being is
crowned by the mystery of time itself.

Foucault would carve out for himself a place between the
extremes: neither the individualist nor the transcendentalist, he
eschews the subjective, the particular, and the humanistic as well
as the universal, continuous, and divine. To do so, however, is
not to reject romanticism but to come to dwell within its limits,
to "bracket" the really tough questions in order to focus on the
narrow ones that deal with the myriad systematicities that claim
neither concrete existential viability nor universal justification. It
seems a sterile occupation that forces him to walk a very thin line
at the risk of being continually off balance. If one returns from
Foucault's polemical treatment of romanticism to specific
romantic texts, one is both enlightened and disappointed, for the
strange and frequently ironic revision of eighteenth-century
rationalism in Foucault's modern dress points up the true
complexity of the romantic "vision."

In his post-romantic masterpiece, Sartor Resartus, Thomas
Carlyle embraced all of the romantic "isms" that so offend
Foucault—and much more. The extraordinary hero of this work,
Diogenes Teufelsdrockh, is obsessed with the "discovery of
man" and repeatedly asks the ancient question, "Who am I?"
giving it a full romantic flavor.

Who am I; what is this me? A Voice, a Motion, an Appearance;—
some embodied, visualized Idea in the Eternal Mind?

. . . this so solid-seeming World, after all, were but an air-image,
our Me the only reality; and Nature, with its thousandfold produc­
tion and destruction, but the reflex of our inward Force, the
"phantasy of our Dream. . . ."

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The influence of German romantic philosophy is clear, and if
more evidence is called for we need only refer to the "egoism" of
the Everlasting No and Everlasting Yea chapters, the senti­
mentality of the bildungsroman form borrowed from Goethe, and
the notorious chapter on symbols where Carlyle's transcen­
dentalism comes to full flower. "In the Symbol proper, what we
call a Symbol, there is ever, more or less distinctly and directly,
some embodiment and revelation of the Infinite; the Infinite is
made to blend itself with the Finite, to stand visible, and as it were, attainable there!” (p. 276).

The book is an encyclopedia of romanticisms, but to read no further is to misrepresent both the complexity of Sartor and the romantic period. After all, what does it mean, exactly, to stand in the “centre of Immensities”? If this is a phenomenological question then Teufelsdröckh can be read in terms of Georges Poulet’s description of man in his *Metamorphoses of the Circle*. Man stands alone, in silence, confronted by the multiplicity of the experiential world, which he must mold into an order around himself as center, which he must articulate into meaningful patterns of language. If we take Carlyle’s “work philosophy” a step further we approach the phenomenological theory of Maurice Merleau-Ponty in the idea that “doing” is the measure of man; man thus discovers himself through his “creative,” bodily motions into the world. To slide into Heideggerian language, “work” can be seen as coming into “presence,” man’s achievement of “being-there” in time or history. If we emphasize Carlyle’s transcendentalism we gain another, though not contradictory, perspective, for man as the symbol of God in the world becomes the new Adam, the namer and orderer of life’s plenitude under the auspices of divine law.

These interpretations, among others, are all possible—that is, defensible; they are forms of critical or philosophical discourse that express very much the same romantic idea. Man is “centered” in these theories either as the force or order in a universe that he creates wholly for himself or as a mediator between heaven and earth, but it takes only a moment’s reflection to realize that this “discovery” of man’s centrality has very little stability. Early in *Sartor* Carlyle sets up the course of his discussions in such a way as to call all explanatory systems, all definitions of man, into doubt. Chapter 5, “The World in Clothes,” purports to defend the famous “clothes philosophy,” yet as the sometimes skeptical, sometimes adoring “editor” of Teufelsdröckh’s manuscript plays one system off against another we learn, in fact, that the vaunted clothes philosophy itself is derived from a more general definition of man as the “tool-using Animal.” What we are actually given in this chapter is a half-serious, half-satirical glimpse of man’s confused world of systematics, of the plurality of discourses through which we
articulate humanism. Between the absurdly simplistic idea that man is the laughing animal and the more complex but still inadequate idea that man is the tool user, there exists a seemingly endless field of explanatory systems. If man is the center of all of these theories, he gains from it an elusive presence at best.

Furthermore, in this brief catalogue of theories, to which list we could add endlessly, we find a startling anticipation of the recent systematics of the French anthropologist, Claude Lévi-Strauss. Carlyle's "editor" argues "Still less do we make of that other French Definition of the Cooking Animal: which, indeed, for rigorous scientific purposes, is as good as useless. Can a Tartar be said to cook, when he only readies his steak by riding on it?" (p. 152). Carlyle, of course, had no way of knowing the complexity of Lévi-Strauss's crucial definition of the "raw and the cooked," or the definition of man that emerges from his binary oppositions of nature and culture. But if this dismissal of a proto-Lévi-Straussian theory carries no real force, Carlyle's inclusion of it absorbs even Lévi-Strauss into the mainstream of the romantic obsession with discovering and defining man, and it leads us to wonder whether or not the task has even yet been accomplished.

I am here, admittedly, playing with Carlyle's use of irony, but irony may be the most important characteristic of the romantic and post-romantic eras. While a plurality of defining systems seems inescapable given the cataclysmic nature of the romantic "fall," the adequacy of any one system is always in doubt—is, crucially, always subject to the accidental nature of lived experience, to the additional detail or particularity that will not fit into the system or to the appearance of a rival system. The romantic willingness to dwell between the extremes of particularity and universality, to embrace discontinuity and continuity, insures this vacillating movement and makes history possible. The ironic tone expressed by Carlyle's "editor" toward the definition of man as the "Cooking Animal" turns back upon the "clothes philosophy" itself. It also explains the necessary vacillation of the "editor," who at once shows admiration and skepticism for the philosophical system he is presenting.

The "immensities" that Carlyle speaks of do not define man so much as call attention to his orders, to his uses of language, sign systems, and symbols. Ranging between the extremes of
particular, chaotic experience and universal orderliness, man is capable of defining his "me" only in more or less adequate systems that establish his relation to a world that slips and flows from his grasp. These systems, or "discourses," form what Foucault calls "an immense density of systematicities, a tight group of multiple relations." Sartor, because it is a discourse about discourses, reflects on the inadequacy of any individual system and ironically on itself insofar as it presents itself as a system, but it thereby establishes the firm ground upon which man emerges into being; through his articulation of "self" into a world. Attendant upon this hesitating definition of man, moreover, is the ironic self-criticism of the text, which clearly anticipates the skepticism of a more modern philosopher like Jacques Derrida, who both proclaims the necessity of seeing man as a language-using animal, the necessity of hypostatizing the verbal sign, and also doubts language's power to confer being on man or the world in which he seems to dwell.

Sartor is not merely a treatise on symbolism, transcendentalism, or historicism, although it embodies all of these discourses by distancing them from the text, by removing them to the status of an "other" text that is the object of the text that we read. I submit, then, that the "me" of which Carlyle speaks in Sartor is not easily defined in terms like Foucault's discovery of man. What Carlyle tells us is that romanticism never discovered man, but it did initiate a profound humanism in its ironic awareness of man's historicity as a language-user. Romanticism is not a movement but the assertion of the possibility of movements; it is not the discovery of man but of the positive and negative limits of subjectivity; it is not the worship of continuity but the honest confrontation of discontinuity; it is not a simplistic reduction of language to thought or individual cognition but the awareness of language as both a genuine "tool" and an almost mythical context—each extreme necessary for the emergence of the "me" into the world, however tentative and subject to decay this emergence may be.

Carlyle's concept of the "me" is a complex proposition. It is the "self" or "individual," alien, alone as the "only reality." It is Teufelsdröckh, the shy, withdrawn scholar, whose origins are mysterious and whose future is unknown. Carlyle's "me" is also a borrowing of Coleridge's echo of divine consciousness, and this
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typical romantic vacillation between particular and universal parallels precisely the extreme limits of the clothes philosophy. Clothes (as linguistic signs), on the one hand, carve up the undifferentiated chaos of the experiential world into Kantian space-time categories, yet clothes (as symbols) must be pierced through so that we may experience the divine "One." Is this far from "the being of language: the language of being?" Who, then, is Teufelsdröckh? He is, most obviously, the hero of a work that Carlyle called a "kind of Didactic Novel." As the dilettantish professor of "Things in General" he clearly satirizes the tradition of German idealistic philosophers who were universal system builders; as a consequence, the systematic nature of his own philosophy is subject to ironic doubt. There is, of course, no real distinction between Teufelsdröckh and his clothes philosophy; to speak of one is to speak of the other. He, like his philosophy, is a "mighty maze"; his being never becomes distinct because "a noble complexity, almost like that of Nature, reigns in his philosophy" (p. 148). He is boundless in the way that his philosophy is boundless; a professor of things in general, he is all things in general. He is at best a metaphor, a "name," which has a peculiar kind of presence in the text but no "thingness" nor "centrality." "Teufelsdröckh has . . . contrived to take-in a well-nigh boundless extent of field; at least, the boundaries too often lie quite beyond our horizon" (p. 148).

If Teufelsdröckh provides no heroic center for Sartor, he has a more profound function, within the text and beyond it. Carlyle tells us that this book "contains more" of his "opinions on Art, Politics, Religion, Heaven, Earth, and Air than all the things" he had written to that time. Such a pastiche cries out for form because it has neither the neat Aristotelian plotting of a novel nor the rigid logical development of a didactic tract. What is needed, of course, is a clothes philosophy. Thus Teufelsdröckh's all-encompassing philosophy suggests a total orderliness or finite structure of "surplus" explanatory power that would be adequate to all occasions; it is the illusion of order surrounding the multiplicity of "things." The clothes philosophy, even as it is ironically distanced, casts, through the ghostly presence of Teufelsdröckh, a semblance of universal orderliness over Sartor; and Carlyle's text, like the clothes philosophy, asserts itself as a "Library of General, Entertaining, Useful or even Useless
Knowledge" (p. 149). It is no doubt the prototype for that very similar library that Borges named "Babel." Borges negatively and Carlyle directly situate "man" in that library, the former out of the necessity for motion, emergence that also situates (opens the space for) the library, the latter out of the historian's need to recognize that man "is" only because he "belongs." "The being of language: the language of being": the belonging of language: the language of belonging. Teufelsdröckh, without origins or ends, who dwells nowhere and everywhere, surveys a boundless world of men and books, of men in books. "The joyful and the sorrowful are there; men are dying there, men are being born; men are praying,—on the other side of a brick partition, men are cursing; and around them all is the vast, void Night" (p. 138).

Like all characters in literary works Teufelsdröckh comes to be a character by virtue of the text itself, but there is obviously a significant difference in the way Carlyle uses this device in Sartor. Because Carlyle's hero must in some way exceed the boundaries of his text while he also remains within it, Teufelsdröckh is both the namer and the named, the author and the character; through Carlyle's series of frames within frames (Teufelsdröckh's philosophy, Hofrath Heuschrecke's letters and tracts, the editor's manuscript, and Carlyle's text), through the overlapping and intersecting of discourses, it becomes impossible to determine which frame contains all of the others, which text is the encompassing one. Each ironically comments upon the other, and where inadequacies are revealed in one discourse another seems to fill the gap. Moreover, and this is crucial, there is room for even more, for even greater experiential particularity (which supports the illusion of Sartor as completely adequate discourse), and for other discourses (perhaps the reader's, or Lévi-Strauss's, or Foucault's). This is the structural basis for Sartor's rhetorical appeal and the force behind its quintessential hermeneutical assertiveness; Murray Krieger, borrowing from Rosalie Colie, has, after all, defined the "art of interpretation as the filling of gaps." 35 The reader, like the editor, is confronted with a demanding task, the measuring, one against the other, of two orders of "immensities": one of experiential plenitude and the other of discursive systems each projecting beyond itself a universal adequacy.

The purpose of such a centerless text is not to define man;
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Carlyle has postponed indefinitely the wonderous "discovery" that Foucault speaks of. Even though the text has no center, all "subjectivity" has not necessarily been abolished. The irony of such a centerless system is that it seems to demand subjectivity. The textual "black hole" is not a void but a vortex; it is the possibility—even necessity—of a "virtual" center, of a voice that speaks being. It is not merely space, openness, dispersion, emptiness but the gathering into greatest density, solidity, being within openness. The text seeks to draw us into man's most human activity, the author's act of articulation, and if successful it reveals to us therein the textual limits of the author's subjectivity. Sartor is autobiographical (as well as biographical) insofar as it shows the presence of Carlyle engaged with his world, and, through the text, engages the reader in the author's vision. Without the presence of his voice, the activity of his articulation, we would have no text, but, equally, without the reader's engagement, which completes the communicative transaction, the author's voice would remain silent. The reader's attention, therefore, is drawn not to Teufelsdröckh nor to Carlyle, but to the text as act, as system bounded by and encircling the density of life, which opens outward into the terrifying onrush of pure temporality yet closes against this chaos by asserting its real presence as text. Unlike Foucault's "anonymous" discourses, Carlyle's Sartor breathes with the life of Carlyle's world. It is truly work. Carlyle argues, "Hence, too, the folly of that impossible Precept, Know Thyself; till it be translated into this partially possible one, Know what thou canst work at" (p. 238).

As "work" it also demands much from its reader; the act of interpretation is, like the dynamic nature of the text, a continuing process with no guarantees of total understanding. The text of Teufelsdröckh's philosophy comes to us, we should remember, not as an ordered treatise but in six paper bags containing scraps of paper and labeled with six zodiacal signs, and, once again, Carlyle uses this device to reflect his own text. There is, perhaps merely fortuitously, a parallel between Teufelsdröckh's six bags and the serial publication of Sartor. The hint of universality in the zodiacal signs is undercut by the fact that there are only six used, just as the hint of completeness in Sartor is undercut by its fragmentary appearance in print. More significantly, however,
Carlyle has here anticipated Ludwig Wittgenstein's "zettelistic" method of constructing the text of his *Tractatus*. The reader of such a text, like Carlyle's editor, is called upon to actively participate in the forming of it. The myriad explanatory and interpretive schemes of the text speak for the possibility of all interpretation, and the order of it stands for the possibility of any order. The range of Carlyle's text is deliberately broader than that of Wittgenstein; Carlyle is not willing to bracket the realm of symbolism or transcendentalism, but both men have a clear sense of the presence of the subjective and the call for interpretation.

Carlyle's text whirls precipitously from the ridiculous to the sublime, from political and social commentary to pure philosophical speculation, from detail to system so that the reader, dazzled by the range of thought and feeling, is caught up in the spectacle of life's fullness. What emerges is not Knowledge in the sense of conventionalized structures of order but the very activity of knowing, and this plunges the reader into the profoundest kind of communication. Quoting Novalis, Carlyle says that "it is certain my Belief gains quite infinitely the moment I can convince another mind thereof" (p. 272), but the term convince need not be taken to mean "domination." We need to be convinced only of the richness of the Belief, of the dynamic and searching nature of its activity; that is, the great writer convinces us not so much by the content, the what, of his discourse but by the process, the how, of its saying. We are not bound to believe what he believed but as he believed, to be awakened to the extraordinary force of his engagement as man, his commitment as writer, whereby he projects himself into (and, because of his originality, out of), his own historical point in time.

The romanticism that promotes such a theory is itself a daring philosophical commitment. It has been both fondly and derisively characterized as a fall from grace, and, in a way, so it is. For the romantic like Carlyle, through the irony of his discourse, there is an implicit admission that the Word of God has fallen to the level of man's language. It is, then, man who creates man and his world through his acts of articulation. But this creation is thereby subject to time itself, which necessitates a continual reproduction of the "me," a continual recreation of man's world. As Teufelsdrockh bemoans, a man must always "thatch anew" the
very being he gives himself. This is the punishment man suffers
for his fall into language, and it is, unfortunately, almost always
accompanied by the sin of pride as man discovers that he is the
only measure of his achievements and failures.

Modern man has, I fear, been unable to rid himself of the guilt
accompanying his fall. Forced to rediscover himself at every
moment, he finds himself with a most difficult role to play, and
one cannot blame him for his recent efforts to deny his
subjectivity, to remove his guilt-ridden "me" into the collective
anonymity of laws and systems. This so-called ego loss, as a
breaking down of the psychosocial structures of repression that
define the ego, has sometimes set for itself a too easy enemy, for
the romantic egoist never really confronted the outrageousness of
repression that his self-assertiveness concealed. The romantic
concept of being did become rigidly dialectical, rigidly committed
to the universality of the psychosocial paradigm of master and
slave; and this the modern theorist of ego loss could well
disassemble into its more complex and meaningful suggestiveness,
but ego loss in any more confining sense comes at great
sacrifice, comes only with the loss of man's articulating powers,
his voice—only with the loss of true being to a world of
accidental, anonymous systematicities. If man has already killed
God, he is now in the process of destroying himself, of
dehumanizing his very being in a desperate effort to shake off his
guilt.

But is this not a greater sin than any dreamed of in
romanticism? Rather than an acceptance of the accidental it is a
removal of the terrifying threat of time to a meaningless,
atemporal set of laws, structures, or systems of propositions that
give us "orders" without "things." Romanticism, on the other
hand, transforms accident into necessity, and, therefore, accident
is never only a matter of chance but is also a principle of
systematicity itself, very much in the sense that the term is used
in musicology. "Accident" is the insertion of a foreign element
into a natural (naturalizing?) context, a willful alteration of the
key signature that breaks the pattern without resulting in chaos.
It adds complexity, depth, richness, and "meaningfulness" to the
passage. The foreign element is not naturalized by the dominant
system of which it has become a functioning part; it is part of the
totality of the piece yet is outside it; it is, then, a willful
accidentalism that expresses the very possibility of change, of the unexpected and strange made compatible but not merely familiar.

Such accidentalism is the very essence of the literary artist's creativity, and indeed his being. It opens all systems to his challenge and gives space for the emergence of his voice in his text. For the literary artist there are no movements, only the possibility of movement, and, therefore, his act of articulation is not historical but expresses the very possibility of history. Joseph Conrad, addressing this problematic sense of literary creativity argued: "Fiction is history, human history, or it is nothing. But it is also more than that; it stands on firmer ground, being based on the reality of forms and the observation of social phenomena . . . . 37 There is nothing easy about this creativity, for it defies systematic reductions, critical impositions, and scholarly stagnation. Nor can it easily resolve itself into a self-satisfied egoism. In the full irony of Heidegger's paradoxical/poetical formula, one gains one's individual being-there only dependently. Interpretation of man's literary efforts to express this multiform being, moreover, demands a risky participation from the reader, the wagering of his own subjectivity against its rediscovery; but given this, the reader penetrates beyond interpretation into understanding, into a true historical communication. Furthermore, by opening outward to both life's fullness of particularity and the endless range of man's systematicities, the artist, and the texts through which he expresses himself, cannot be confined within narrow limits. The greatest literature strives to achieve a modestly privileged position in culture at large so that it is an acculturating object. Literature above all of man's endeavors expresses not so much the irreducibly human but rather the motion of humanism.

TEXT AND CONTEXT IN INTERPRETATION

The crucial issue in Foucault's rejection of romanticism is finally not the triumph or failure of the "discovery of man" but the means available for any definition of man. We find in his polemics the limits of this defining activity; man can be characterized either historically, as only a moment in time, or abstractly, as only a collectivized, dehumanized "we." To put this
same dilemma in other terms, man can be defined either existentially, as a fragment of the manifold of experientiality subject to the destructive force of temporality, or rationally, as a fragment of an orderly structure arranged spatially across the flow of time. The former tends toward history and the latter toward myth, but in fact, these two perspectives are not as distinct as the infamous debate between Jean-Paul Sartre and Claude Lévi-Strauss seems to indicate. Both men are prisoners of their own terminology, for in the effort to carve out a stable position each falls victim to man's fundamental inability to separate the concepts of space and time. It is, moreover, the refusal to make such a separation that marks Carlyle's Sartor Resartus, that informs his two orders of immensities and makes his text an exemplary literary act.

The portion of the structuralist movement that has evidenced a militant antihumanism and antiexistentialism handicaps itself in its polemical pose. The general concept of system, derived in part from Saussure's insight into the diacritical nature of the system of verbal signs, plunges man into a world of structural relationships without beginning or end, into what Foucault has called the "already begun." For Derrida such a system can have no privileged center that guarantees man a world of meaningfulness and value; hence, man's human condition is a revamped version of the old existentialist conundrum of condemned freedom, only what remains is not Sartrian "nausea" but Nietzschean "freeplay." As with Foucault's "relativistic systematicities," there is no room for the subject and no place for existential meaningfulness. There is no Hegelian, transcendental telos, no Freudian privileged unconscious nor Jungian archetypal guarantees, no Cassirerian origins, no Marxian idealism or materialism; all the ideological demigods of our modern world have been pulled down, and man is left with the significance (if meaninglessness) of the system, or its manifestation in linguistic codes. Hugh M. Davidson, however, quite accurately characterizes Roland Barthes's structuralist universe of linguistic codes in a way that also reveals the significant flaw that emerges within the extreme structuralist position. The systematic nature of language codes, like the concept of system itself, "sounds and is . . . quite mechanistic, but Barthes has found a way to animate the machine. His main concern has shifted from structure to
structuration, seen as an autonomous activity with a life of its own, almost independent of men, for, as he has said, man is no longer the center of structures." That this "machine" is an idealized projection and its "animation" is too often merely illusory, I hope I have been able to demonstrate in my discussion of Chomsky's activity of transformation in part 2. Yet the possibility of motion within the system/machine speaks of the necessity for an animating force that the system/machine generates within itself. It is the Heideggerian opening for being or the humanistic flaw that breaks the silence of Borges's great "useless" library. Failing to give attention to this opening, structuralist writing frequently evidences a serious ennui, a placid acceptance of the world that structuralists have defined for themselves, and a frightening, almost neurotic, antipathy to the personal. As a result, structuralist critics struggle desperately to write themselves out of existence.

I hasten to add here that Foucault represents an extreme position in this movement. In many respects his protest is not unlike that of the Anglo-American classicist writers of the early twentieth century. T. E. Hulme, T. S. Eliot, Ezra Pound, and W. H. Auden, also attacked romanticism for its fragmenting individualism and its egotistical hubris. They emphasized the importance of belonging to the tradition, of comparative literary studies (as opposed to nationalistic historicism), and, as we have seen in part 3, they developed a poetic style and theory that is not unlike the structuralist theory of the impersonal writer. But these classicists were finally no more than anticipators of the newer classicism that defines Foucault's approaches to culture. For Eliot the tradition was always infused with the "individual talent," and the general emphasis on comparative study was narrow if not eccentric. The impersonal stance of the writer, moreover, was never fully antiexperiential. The ideal of existential commitment, moral responsibility, and historical development pervades Eliot's poetry. It is still the artist, holding to a man-centered, post-Kantian universe, who must strive for the vision of the saint. If Eliot finally embraces a system of universal significance, it is an orthodox, Christian scheme dominated by a god devoted to man and not to the expansive cosmos.

Foucault's concept of the "already begun" and Derrida's
parallel idea of the freeplay of language codes (both men's militant antihumanism and antisubjectivism) clearly reflect the influence of Lévi-Strauss on the human sciences, but Lévi-Strauss is far less radical (as Derrida laboriously points out), far less narrow in his perspective. Rather than a sweeping dismissal of romanticism, his polemical focus has been directed primarily against a specific development of romanticism: against the subjectivist vision of French existentialism. This has been a favorite target for Foucault as well; his concept of the already begun inverts the infamous idea, articulated by Sartre, that "existence precedes essence." The effect of Foucault's argument is to rob existentialism of the crucial emphasis Sartre wants to place on the necessity of individual commitment and responsibility, of the very possibility of willed progress or revolution, but it is Lévi-Strauss who most instructively engages Sartre in debate. For Lévi-Strauss, the idea of the already begun is more pervasive than the somewhat restrictive cultural concept advanced by Foucault; it springs from his early discussions of the idea of "mana" and is developed into his general theory of the "zero-signifier" or the idea of a "surplus of signification" that I discussed in part 1. Man's existence, or perhaps better stated, man's self-consciousness, is preceded by a kind of "essence," Lévi-Strauss argues, in the form of a structured cosmology. It is not clear whether this precedence is merely a matter of a preset in the mind (an innate structuring capacity) or a system much vaster than man into which he is born but over which he has little command. In either case, the structuring potential for meaningfulness engulfs man with a systematicity far more powerful than his finite consciousness.

It is perhaps easier (and surely appropriate) to describe Lévi-Strauss's concept by contrasting it with Cassirer's more romantic idea of "mana." Cassirer defines "mana" as a "supernatural power." "In this light, the whole existence of things and the activity of mankind seem to be embedded, so to speak, in a mythical 'field of force,' an atmosphere of potency which permeates everything, and which may appear in concentrated form in certain extraordinary objects, removed from the realm of everyday affairs, or in specially endowed persons, such as distinguished warriors, priests, or magicians." This field of force Cassirer sees as anonymous and pervasive, present in many
societies no matter how remote from one another in time and space. It is the "background against which definite daemonic or divine images can take shape." On this level, Cassirer is not far afield from Lévi-Strauss who sees mana as a floating signifier, an indeterminate potential meaningfulness that makes possible our lower level concentration of its power into particular, nameable concepts. Both men agree that this power is beyond mere words; it is a mystical realm of silence.

But at this point the two diverge sharply. Cassirer thinks of mana in mythico-religious terms. It is the ground of consciousness that emerges along with man's first traumatic awareness of the self as separate from the all-embracing and anonymous other. Mana-consciousness has both a positive and negative aspect; it is expressive of the desire for oneness, for a return to the comforting womb of Nature on the one hand, and of repulsion, separation, and taboo on the other. It is a virtually irrational sense of loss and gain, which for Cassirer is a condition of consciousness that can be transcended only at the other extreme of man's full development by his powers of rational projection. Language, we should remember, operates between these extremes, between the poetic level of pure metaphor and the prosaic level of logical metonymy. For Lévi-Strauss mana is not a condition of consciousness but the prior context for consciousness. The floating signifier (mana as a field of force) is discovered by man, as infinitely functional, when he comes to consciousness (an ever-present awakening, not a historical event). As a result it remains an anonymous context that confers on man no privileged position in the cosmos. Rather than focusing attention on man as the language user who struggles to transcend himself (and his language through language), Lévi-Strauss reduces man to a mere part of the grand schema that precedes and survives him. This leads him specifically to reject all those subjectivist philosophies of reflexive self-consciousness that attribute to man the responsibility for creating his world (Cassirer) or the responsibility for projecting a better world (Sartre).

On the crucial issue of man's active role in the universe, therefore, Lévi-Strauss and Sartre find themselves grasping diametrically opposed points on a spinning wheel, but one
cannot help noting that these points are positions without
particular privilege on the same circle. Despite their differences,
both espouse very similar propositions with regard to man’s
present condition as man. Lévi-Strauss’s cosmological vision
posits that man was born into an a priori systematicity; only
man’s self-delusion has caused him to fall into egoism and
selfishness, and has bolstered him with the false hope of progress.
Man is enslaved by his institutions, not the least of which are
those evolved from the structure of language; he is trapped by his
culture, which is no more than a corruption of his egalitarian,
economical, and ecological myths. Sartre finds man in the
middle stages of his development from savagery. Contrary to
Lévi-Strauss’s lingering Rousseauism, Sartre sees man’s natural
state in a Hobbesian perspective, as warring and exploitative.
Man’s freedom from a priori values and meanings (like Ivan
Karamozov’s claim that without God all is legitimate) allows him
selfishly to exploit others in order to satisfy his own need, to fill
his preternatural lack. Culture has become, then, a systematic
enslavement of the many by the few. For both Sartre and Lévi-
Strauss man is enslaved, and for both, some remedy must be
found in an ideal world.

If there is a real difference between these views it arises from
their prophetic implications. Lévi-Strauss seeks for man a
freedom not inferior to that posited by Sartre; only, for Lévi-
Strauss, that freedom is freedom from Sartre’s historicism and
dread of responsible choice. Sartre argues that man is uniquely
man “because he is able to be historical” (wherein history is no
prior condition for man); man is uniquely man because he can
project for himself a future that is better than his present.
Sartre’s fear of Lévi-Strauss’s anthropology is one with his fear of
all gnosticism. He challenges man to free himself from the
enslavement of his institutions, to transcend himself and
ultimately his bound historicity. If he is somewhat pessimistic
about man’s chances, it seems more to reflect a distrust of easy
solutions and totalizing, fatalistic systems, than the “mythizing of
history” charged to him by Lévi-Strauss. For both men history
carries a burden of suffering.

Yet I am tempted to argue that, despite their many differences,
the terms of the existentialist-structuralist debate have actually
drawn the two men closer together. Sartre argues persuasively that the true role of his existence philosophy is to act as a dialectical challenge to Lévi-Strauss’s anthropology.

Anthropology will deserve its name only if it replaces the study of human objects by the study of the various processes of becoming-an-object. Its role is to found its knowledge on rational and comprehensive non-knowledge; that is, the historical totalization will be possible only if anthropology understands itself instead of ignoring itself. To understand itself, to understand the other, to exist, to act, are one and the same movement which founds direct, conceptual knowledge upon indirect, comprehensive knowledge but without ever leaving the concrete—that is, history or, more precisely, the one who comprehends what he knows. This perpetual dissolution of intellection in comprehension and, conversely, the perpetual redescent which introduces comprehension into intellection as a dimension of rational knowledge at the heart of knowledge is the very ambiguity of a discipline in which the questioner, the question, and the questioned are one.48

Lévi-Strauss, unlike some of his followers, has never wholly left the ambiguity of his discipline. In Tristes tropiques, perhaps his greatest book, he seeks to write himself out of existence in a positive action, by an intense self-consciousness that allows him to dissolve his self in comprehension without denying the countermovement that introduces comprehension into his very subjective experience. The structuralist methodology of Lévi-Strauss does not deny existence any more than Sartre’s existence philosophy ignores the comprehensive abstract knowledge of anthropology. The following passage from the Scope of Anthropology reveals the extent to which Lévi-Strauss’s definition of a “pure anthropology” finds its articulation in personal, particularized experience.

Of all the sciences [anthropology] is without a doubt unique in making the most intimate subjectivity into a means of objective demonstration. We really can verify that the same mind which has abandoned itself to the experience and allowed itself to be moulded by it becomes the theatre of mental operations which, without suppressing the experience, nevertheless transforms it into a model which releases further mental operations. In the last analysis, the logical coherence of these mental operations is based on the sincerity and honesty of the person who can say, like the explorer bird of the
fable, "I was there; such-and-such happened to men; you will believe you were there yourself," and who in fact succeeds in communicating that conviction.  

Those who attack the philosophers of existence by claiming that experience is an illusion are themselves deeply deluded by their vision of orderliness. There is no such blindness in the philosophy of Lévi-Strauss.

I return now once more to my claim that literature is a privileged form of discourse. This is not to say that literature has any direct line to Truth nor that the literary work encompasses more of life more accurately than other human endeavors. My claim is essentially a modest, if important, one: that literature is a peculiar kind of human endeavor that can be defined only in terms of its own experiential value. It is a part of the totality of human history and Knowledge, coextensive with many other parts, yet irreducible in its insistence on its own finite existence. It is the purpose of literature, however, to constantly remind us that we belong to a complex world of meanings and values where choice and responsibility are the burdens of our humanity. No system, no totalized structure, however grand, can relieve us of our humanity. If Lévi-Strauss teaches us that man dwells in a world that was not intentionally made for man's benefit, we are admonished even more strongly that man must assume his commitment to himself and that world, and Lévi-Strauss has provided not a refutation of Sartre nor a denial of the privilege of literary humanism, but a plea that man and the literary endeavors he so persistently projects must accept the role assigned to them. In such a world no action is trivial.

Specifically in part 2, and frequently elsewhere in this essay, I have associated literature with the realm of language itself, as occupying a middle position between Cassirer's two extremes of conscious activity: the lower level of ineffable, indeterminate experience and the upper level of ineffable, determinate, and transcendental knowledge. Literature embraces the conflict between these realms within the freeplay of metaphor and metonymy, risking the irrational obsession with particulars on the one hand and the rational obsession with universals on the other hand. It sways between the radicalism of anarchy and the radicalism of conservatism, but it is never wholly one or the other. It is wrong, I believe, to confuse literature with pure
perception, philosophy, myth, or history, but it is blindly narrow to forget that literature, as a quintessential testing of language’s capacity for meaning, touches all of these realms of experientiality and discourse. Literature is not, therefore, mere language; it is not a particular kind of game played by an eccentric manipulator of language’s codes. Literature has a privileged role among all discourses precisely because it embraces, at all times, the extreme possibilities of self-consciousness and anonymity.

This is why neither a pure romanticism nor a pure classicism, neither an existentialism nor a structuralism, is adequate to a fully developed literary hermeneutics. It is more instructive to look at the impurities of such theories, for here one senses the deeply humanistic urges in both Sartre and Lévi-Strauss reaching toward one another. Even if literary discourse is not “mirrored” experience, nor history, nor myth, it may be said to be a profound imitation of all three. The literary artist is far more self-conscious than the philosopher or historian, far more so, for example, than the exaggerated picture of the objective, scientific anthropologist painted by some misguided followers of Lévi-Strauss. (It is this critical self-consciousness, the lure of metaphor, that infuses Tristes tropiques with its powerful literary qualities.) A fear of “literariness” has led Barthes and Foucault to posit ideal worlds and to blindly live in them; it has distorted the creative talents of John Barth into the writing of novels about novels. These men have failed to learn one crucial lesson taught by the structuralist ideology that they, in their different ways, espouse—a lesson forcefully emphasized by Derrida. We are all victims of language’s enslaving tendencies; we are trapped by the “prison-house” of language,50 bound off from reality and truth by what Sartre calls our fetishizing of the “word.” All language, I believe, reaches toward authentic experience at one extreme and toward totalizing systematicity at the other, but it is confessedly inadequate to both. Literature, by its very nature, resists fetishizing by calling attention to itself as both a possibility for articulation to experience and as a fragmentary, degenerate medium that resists such articulation.

In his recent study of what he calls “structural autobiography” Jeffrey Mehlman argues rather convincingly that Sartre’s philosophy represents a kind of egoistic martyrdom. In The Words Sartre’s obsessive concern with his “lack of a father,” his
lack of a "supergo" as he calls it,51 disguises a mode of philosophical self-justification. It is a form of psychic "resistance" to the Symbolic Order (the Oedipal father-function), which intensifies and explains the egoism of Sartre's perspective as pour soi. The missing father, the missing cultural order that the father symbolizes, results in what Sartre calls the overpowering of de trop, the "contingency" of experience that Sartre's alter ego, Roquentin, reacts to with "nausea."52 Mehlman has clearly identified certain philosophical and psychological excesses in Sartre's thought, but those excesses are, in fact, countered in the later developments of Sartre's philosophy. The old existentialist idea of man's alienation, the necessity of commitment to the subjectivity of the "other" was essentially a static dialogistics, although one impregnated with experiential meaningfulness. Sartre has now evolved a more complex sense of this dialogue by transforming the old binary confrontation into a trinary structure of communication. The self-other conflict takes place only in the context of identifiable sociohistorical structures. Fredric Jameson, speaking of the Critique de la raison dialectique, describes the importance of this advance. "By showing that interpersonal experience can never precede group experience, it immediately forces the argument of the Critique to transcend the individualistic level at which the analyses of Being and Nothingness had been undertaken, and moves at once to the ways in which the solitary individual tries to overcome his ontological and socio-economic weakness by the invention of collective acts and collective units."53 Of most importance here is the overthrow of the rigid "existence-precedes-essence" formula of the early philosophy. Essences creep into this new schema in the form of cultural-historical structures, and if Levi-Strauss is correct, such experiential-historical systems are always in an organic relationship with the universalizing mythic structures that are pervasive in human society.

The tensions besetting the individual subject, therefore, are both personal (I-thou dialogues) and collective, and at present I see no way (and no need) to resolve them or collapse them into a unity. This is the basis of man's finitude (a rather orthodox definition of man that both Sartre and Lévi-Strauss profess), and it is this finitude that the finite literary text reproduces. Every literary artist (the term is unavoidably honorific) is necessarily
committed and revolutionary, but commitment and revolution mean neither existential aloneness nor militant iconoclasm. If man is trapped in the prison-house of language, enslaved by his cultural institutions, it is the freplay of signifiers within the structure that enables the anonymous to give way to the emergence of being—even to the thrust toward identity (whatever the mixed blessing such a confirmation bestows). One cannot simply renounce one’s position in culture, and one must not live blindly and anonymously in culture’s givens. The former is a willful denial of finitude, a dehumanizing surrender of the particularity assigned to man by a world he did not create but of which he is a distinct part. Such a denial is an expression of the sinful pride of romantic egoism wherein man loses both his sense of belonging and his power to alter the terrifying state of his existential alienation. This is the fate of Faulkner’s Ike McCaslin; his blindness to the consequences of his withdrawal from life traps him more forcefully than ever in the perpetuation of the very evils he sought to end. No matter how admirable his goals as they are presented in the abstract, they are impotent at best—and destructive at worst—when they achieve no being through action. On the other side one cannot “decide for” ego loss, for anonymity; any such decision is an assertion of the ego, however faintly so. We should again recall Borges’s dilemma in “The Library of Babel”; his convincing demonstration that man cannot articulate his own nonexistence without breaking the silence of that nonexistence. Once more I will call on Heidegger to describe the situation. “Saying [in the sense I have used the term langage, as system or design] is in need of being voiced in the word. But man is capable of speaking only insofar as he, belonging to saying, listens to Saying, so that in resaying it he may be able to say a word. That needed usage and this resaying lie in that absence of something in common which is neither a mere defect nor indeed anything negative at all.” From the point of view of the “subject,” we cannot “know” the nature of langage (Saying); that is a transcendental view like Wittgenstein’s idea of logische Raum. That is, also, “not a defect . . . but rather an advantage by which we are favored with a special realm, that realm where we, who are needed and used to speak language, dwell as mortals.”

Our discussion here returns us one more time to Faulkner’s
story "Pantaloon in Black" whose pivotal function in the text of the novel illustrates the very principle I am trying to define. As the reader juxtaposes the worlds of Rider and the sheriff, he experiences the tension between the individualized hero (whose identity cannot be reduced to generalized history) and the sheriff's stereotyping of that hero into an anonymous cultural pattern. Through the agonizing struggle of Faulkner's metaphorical/metonymical style, an agony that reproduces the profound feelings of his hero, the moments of expansive meaningfulness held precariously against the inevitable flow of time, we see Rider emerge as a particular, individual being out of the buzz and flux of the world in which he dwells. The sheriff's reductions of this hard-won identity are irritating, and morally reprehensible, but they are the means through which we experience Faulkner's purposeful "accidentalism," the insertion of a particularized, individual element into a systematic world that can neither absorb nor reject it. This is the "gift" of language, that its place of dwelling is for all men, that belonging is truly egalitarian. The sheriff's troubled questioning is evidence of this intrusion and serves to intensify our awareness of Rider's heroic "presence."

Moreover, sweeping across the full range of language's capabilities, from defamiliarized, metaphoric individuality to demythologized, metonymic anonymity, "Pantaloon in Black" is a paradigm of the "finite text." Literature's privileged finitude will allow us neither the illusion that the work is a discrete, organic object with symbolic pretensions nor a game of transforming existing codes into pale shadows of themselves. Literary discourse is a radical version of what Ricoeur calls a "language-event"; it is temporally specific (finite), proclaims a subjective voice, reveals the world of endless systematicities as its background, and addresses itself dynamically, hermeneutically, to a reader.

The finite text is not, of course, simply ephemeral. It is not an object in any literal sense. Its finitude, its Heideggerian coming into being, derives from its holding in tension two infinities of different orders. Literature resists the infinite particularities of discrete metaphors by embedding them in the infinitely expansive orderliness of metonymy. Such a text is the result of a delicate balance, of the creative labors of the writer manifest in
his style. At this point, therefore, we must abandon the narrow conception of hermeneutics (with its comforting scientific methodology) advocated by Ricoeur, Betti, and Hirsch. The text, itself inadequate to experience, to the orderly discourses of history and to myth, nevertheless offers itself as a focus for them all, and as a consequence, interpretation defies precise methodology. Literature's privileged functioning invites rather than closes off the vast worlds of moral and political action, scientific and philosophical thought. It tests the potential meaningfulness of all systems by speaking them to particular experience, and threatens its readers with an awareness of "immensities" of radically different kinds. If the text has no ontic status, it is surely ontological; if it embodies no single system of knowledge, it is nonetheless epistemological in its design.

Among the immensities of man's world, literature can achieve the enduring qualities of its finite being only through its weakness. Not in its dependence on ink and paper, but in spite of its dependence on these materials, does the dynamic force of the work rise to the status of text; in the act of articulation literature's privileged status is earned. No longer can we think of literature as an ideal ordering of life's chaotic plenitude; it is frequently that, but it is also and always a challenge to its own ordering powers. In this it presents us not life, but an experience that belongs to life; its privileged status comes not from its power to sum up and round off experience, but from the fact of its difference. Literature belongs to culture but it is not merely a reflection of it; it belongs to language but it is not merely language. It is the rightful place of human action, the place of the articulation of the freedom to be and to belong, and of the concern that all men owe to this ideal of freedom. This power of weakness Shakespeare, perhaps the most enduring writer of the western world, knew well.

Since brass, nor stone, nor earth, nor boundless sea,
But sad mortality o'ersways their power,
How with this rage shall beauty hold a plea,
Whose action is no stronger than a flower?
O! how shall summer's honey breath hold out
Against the wrackful siege of battering days,
When rocks impregnable are not so stout,
Nor gates of steel so strong, but Time decays?
O fearful meditation! where, alack,
Shall Time's best jewel from Time's chest lie hid?
Or what strong hand can hold his swift foot back?
Or who his spoil of beauty can forbid?
O! none, unless this miracle have might,
That in black ink my love may still shine bright.

Sonnet 65

Here the personal experience holds its own in the dynamic qualities of the poet's art, in the fragility of the poem as substance, for that ink and paper are no more than a rough but essential manifestation of the true poem, the power of feeling and thought, personal experience and abstract idea, the "trace" of one who was (and "is") there, the mark of Friday's footprint.