nary. Trans. Larry Crist et al. Bloomington: Indiana University Press. An enormously useful encyclopedic resource of all aspects of language and semiotic theory in its application to literary studies.

Jobling, David. 1986. *The Sense of Biblical Narrative: Structural Analyses in the Hebrew Bible.* 2 vols. Sheffield: JSOT. Using an eclectic method based on Lévi-Strauss and Greimas, these essays stress the potential of structuralism for practical biblical exegesis.

Lévi-Strauss, Claude. 1963 [1955]. "The Structural Study of Myth." Pp. 206–31 in *Structural Anthropology.* New York: Basic Books. A foundational statement which paves the way for the expansion of structural methodology to include larger narrative structures. It is very schematic, and needs to be augmented by Lévi-Strauss's extended myth analyses, e.g., *The Raw and the Cooked* (New York: Harper and Row, 1970).

Moore, Stephen D. 1989. *Literary Criticism and the Gospels: The Theoretical Challenge.* New Haven: Yale University Press. A comprehensive assessment of narratological and reader-response theories in New Testament studies.

Patte, Daniel. 1990a. *The Religious Dimensions of Biblical Texts: Greimas's Structural Semiotics and Biblical Exegesis.* Semeia Studies 19. Atlanta: Scholars. The most influential advocate of structuralism in North American biblical studies, presenting the work of another important transitional figure in the development and expansion of that methodology.

Propp, Vladimir. 1968. *Morphology of the Folktale.* 2d ed. Trans. Laurence Scott. Austin: University of Texas Press. Classic statement from a founder of the formalist movement and the first to apply a structural analysis to narrative, treating it as a sequence of interchangeable, irreducible units.

Saussure, Ferdinand de. 1959. *Course in General Linguistics.* Ed. Charles Bally et al. Trans. Wade Baskin. New York: McGraw-Hill. Although in some ways now surpassed, the views of the Swiss "founder" of structuralism have continued to influence later structuralists as well as poststructuralist thinkers such as Derrida and de Man.

White, Hugh. 1991. *Narration and Discourse in the Book of Genesis.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. Moving beyond the Saussurean linguistic model, White develops a highly sophisticated semiotic narratology, which he applies to Genesis in a series of original readings.

3

Poststructuralist Criticism

DECONSTRUCTION AND DERRIDA

Structuralism, poststructuralism, deconstruction—these three terms are tightly knotted.[1] Derrida himself has fumbled with the knot on more than one occasion. "When I chose this word [deconstruction]," he explains, "or when it imposed itself upon me—I think it was in *Of Grammatology* [1967]—I little thought it would be credited with such a central role" (1988a:1; cf. Derrida, 1985a:85–86, 142).

At that time structuralism was dominant. "Deconstruction" seemed to be going in the same direction since the word signified a certain attention to structures. . . . To deconstruct was also a structuralist gesture. . . . But it was also an antistructuralist gesture, and its fortune rests in part on this ambiguity. Structures were to be undone, decomposed, desedimented (all types of structures, linguistic . . . —struc-

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[1] If poststructuralism is the genus, then deconstruction is its best-known species. Thus, while all deconstruction is poststructuralist, not all poststructuralism is deconstructionist. Derridean deconstruction has been the most influential form of poststructuralism, at any rate, in the English-speaking world. As such, it receives the lion's share of attention in the present chapter, although Foucault and Barthes also feature prominently. Lacan is discussed at length in chap. 5.

turalism being especially at that time dominated by linguistic models and by a so-
called structural linguistics that was also called Saussurian—socio-institutional,
political, cultural, and above all and from the start philosophical). This is why,
especially in the United States, the motif of deconstruction has been associated
with "poststructuralism" (a word unknown in France until its "return" from the
United States). (1988a:2–3)

Derrida is careful to add: "But the undoing, decomposing, and desedi-
menting of structures . . . was not a negative operation" (3; cf. Derrida,
1985a:85–87). Deconstruction was not destruction, in other words. Rather,
it was a dismantling of structures (philosophical, cultural, political, institu-
tional, and above all and from the start textual) that was designed to show
how they were put together in the first place.

Every system is a construction, something that has been assembled, and
construction entails exclusion. Every system excludes—is, in fact, a system
of exclusions. Deconstruction seeks out those points within a system where
it disguises the fact of its incompleteness, its failure to cohere as a self-
contained whole. By locating these points and applying a kind of leverage to
them, one deconstructs the system. This amounts neither to destroying nor
dismantling the system in toto, but rather demonstrating how the (w)hole,
through the masking of its logical and rhetorical contradictions, maintains
the illusion of its completeness.

In contrast to the source criticism of the Bible, then, the construction that
deconstruction disassembles is not the history of the text's assembly. Rather,
it is the grammar or logic of the text's linguistic organization (its structure)
and the rhetoric of its expression that is dismantled. To deconstruct is to
identify points of failure in a system, points at which it is able to feign coher-
ence only by excluding and forgetting that which it cannot assimilate, that
which is "other" to it. Derrida asks: "what if what cannot be assimilated,
the absolute indigestible, played a fundamental role in the system, an abyssal
role rather?" (Derrida, 1986b:151a).

Poststructuralists tend to distrust systems of every sort; one thinks in par-
ticular of Derrida, Foucault, Lacan, and the later Barthes. Indeed, Lacan's
distrust of systems antedates French structuralism itself. "This kind of
teaching is a refusal of any system," said Lacan in 1953, introducing his
famous seminar. "It uncovers a thought in motion" (1988a:1; cf. Lacan,
1977c:xv). Twenty years later he would still be protesting: "they suppose
me to have an ontology, or, what amounts to the same thing, a system"
(1982b:142). Barbara Johnson has phrased the issue of exclusion especially

sharply: " 'What's the bottom line?' What deconstruction does is to teach
you to ask: 'What does the construction of the bottom line leave out? What
does it repress? . . . What does it put in the margins?' " (1987:164).

Deconstruction's fascination with the marginal, the secondary, the re-
pressed, and the borderline (cf. Derrida, 1988b:44) clearly offers opportu-
nities for various forms of political criticism. Deconstruction's influence on
feminist literary criticism has been especially pronounced in recent years,
and it is beginning to make tentative inroads in feminist biblical criticism
as well (e.g., Craig and Kristjansson; Susan Lochrie Graham; cf. Jobling,
1990:97–98). Derrida has not hesitated to tackle overt political issues on
occasion, the most notable example to date being his essay on apartheid,
"Racism's Last Word" (1985b). Nevertheless, there are marked differences
between Derrida and other "thinkers of marginality," such as Foucault. Allan
Megill observes: "In his opposition to the domineering tendencies of West-
ern reason, Foucault has concentrated on the oppression (in his terms, the
production) of the sick, the insane, criminals, and sexual 'deviants.' Der-
rida's concern with alterity, on the other hand, has been much less concrete
in character, much less a matter of identifiable social groups being oppressed
(or produced). His concern is much more clearly focused on the exclusion
of deviant modes of thought" (276).

According to Megill, however, there is one striking exception to Derrida's
relative lack of interest in social groups: "he has shown a persistent fascina-
tion with Judaism and with the problem of its relation to a predominantly
Greek and Christian culture" (ibid.). More precisely, he has shown a per-
sistent fascination with writing, and with Judaism's own fascination with
writing (Judaism "elects writing which elects the Jew" [Derrida, 1978b:65])
and with the problem of writing's relation to speech in Greco-Christian
metaphysics.

Reviewing Derrida's *Of Grammatology*, Paul de Man notes that it "tells
a story." "Throughout, Derrida uses Heidegger's and Nietzsche's fiction of
metaphysics as a *period* in Western thought in order to dramatize, to give
tension and suspense to the argument. . . . Neither is Derrida taken in by the
theatricality of his gesture or the fiction of his narrative," cautions de Man
(1983:137). Picking up the fallen mantle of Heidegger, Derrida has, over the
last thirty years, been engaged in a critique of Western metaphysics. (The
term *deconstruction* itself, he tells us, goes back to two Heideggerian terms,
Destruktion and *Abbau* [1985a:86–87; 1988a:1].) A report on that thirty-
year war follows, at any rate of its opening skirmishes. Admittedly the report

is a fiction. Absent are the elaborate maneuvers, the strategic retreats, and the ironic self-subversions that characterize the playful if frustrating style of Derrida's battle-plan.

Western thought has always based itself on binary oppositions in Derrida's view: transcendent-immanent, intelligible-sensible, spirit (mind, soul)-body, necessary-contingent, primary-secondary, simple-complex, nature-culture, male-female, white-black (brown, red, yellow), inside-outside, object-representation, history-fiction, conscious-unconscious, literal-metaphorical, content-form, text-interpretation, speech-writing, presence-absence, and so on. Such oppositions are founded on repression, the relation between the two terms being one of hierarchical violence rather than equal partnership. The first term in each pair has been forcibly elevated over the second.

The career of the speech-writing opposition, in which writing has been assigned a scapegoat role akin to that of the wandering Jew, has been of special interest to Derrida (himself of Algerian-Jewish extraction). Throughout the intellectual history of the West, speech has almost always been privileged over writing. Derrida singles out Plato, Rousseau, Hegel, Saussure, and Husserl as exemplars of this unease with the written, "specific nuclei in a process and a system" (1982a:94).[2]

But what could be more natural than to privilege speech? As I speak, my words appear to be one with my thoughts. My meaning seems to be fully present both to me and to my hearer, provided I am speaking effectively, affectively. At such moments, the voice, the breath, appear to be consciousness itself, presence itself.

Voice, presence, truth. In the West, speech has always been the paradigm not only for every form of presence but also for every form of truth.[3] All the names used to designate theological or philosophical fundamentals have always designated the constant of a presence: God, being, essence, existence, substance, subject, object, consciousness—the list is very long. Derrida's term for this litany of names and all it entails is *the metaphysics of presence.* He also uses the term *logocentrism* to denote the imbrication of the *logos*

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[2] For Derrida's most sustained reading of Plato in this regard, see 1981a:61–171; for Rousseau (discussed with Lévi-Strauss), see 1976:97–316; for Hegel, see 1981a:1–59; 1982a:69–108, and 1986b; for Saussure, see 1976:27–73, and cf. 1981b:17–36; and for Husserl, see 1978a and 1973.

[3] "This experience of the effacement of the signifier in the voice is not merely one illusion among many—since it is the condition of the very idea of truth" (Derrida, 1976:20).

(speech, logic, reason, Word of God) and the notion of presence in Western thought. "Logocentrism is an ethnocentric metaphysics. It is related to the history of the West" (Derrida, 1976:79).

As lifeless written marks in place of present living speech, writing has often seemed to be an inferior, if necessary, substitute for speech. Cut off from the *pneuma,* the breath, severed at its source from the authorizing presence of a speaker, writing has often been thought to threaten truth with distortion and mischief. An orphan, no sooner born than set adrift, cut loose from the author who gives birth to it, writing seems fated endlessly to circulate from reader to reader, the best of whom can never be sure that he or she has fully grasped what the author intended to say. For authors have a way of being absent, even dead, and their intended meaning can no longer be directly intuited or double-checked through question and answer, as in the face-to-face situation of speech. Writing defaces speech.

Derrida deconstructs this opposition of speech and writing. "The crack between the two is nothing. The crack is what one must occupy" (Derrida, 1986b:207b). But to deconstruct a hierarchical opposition is not simply to argue that the term ordinarily repressed is in reality the superior term. Rather than stand the opposition on its head, thereby inverting it but leaving it intact, deconstruction attempts to show how each term in the opposition is joined to its companion by an intricate network of arteries. In consequence, the line ordinarily drawn between the two terms is shown to be a political and not a natural reality. "Like Czechoslovakia and Poland, [they] resemble each other, regard each other, separated nonetheless by a frontier all the more mysterious . . . because it is abstract, legal, ideal" (1986b:189b). As such it can always be redrawn. Derrida approaches the border between speech and writing by asking: What if the illegal alien, the parasite, were already within? What if speech were already the host of writing? What if the apparent immediacy of speech, the sensation of presence that it evokes, were but a mirage?

Crucial to Derrida's philosophical project is a strategic drawing on linguistics. Ferdinand de Saussure's *Course in General Linguistics* (1907–11)—suitably boosted, of course—is an important part of the Derridean can(n)on. Indeed, Saussure's general significance for French structuralism and poststructuralism alike can hardly be overstated. Barthes, for example, recalls the beginning of his structuralist adventure in the 1950s: "it was then that I first read Saussure; and having read Saussure, I was dazzled by this hope: to give my denunciation of the self-proclaimed petit-bourgeois

myths the means of developing scientifically" (1988a:5). Saussure was a no less dazzling discovery for other structuralists and poststructuralists, such as Lévi-Strauss, Lacan, and Kristeva.

Saussure's sign theory can be summarized as follows. The linguistic sign is composed of a *signifier* and a *signified*. The signifier is the material (acoustic) component of the sign (e.g., the sound "tree"), whereas the signified is its conceptual component (the concept "tree"). That to which the sign points is its *referent* (the object "tree"). But the relation between the signifier and its referent is arbitrary: different sounds designate the same object, depending on the language being used (*tree, arbre, Baum, dendron, 'ets*). What is not arbitrary, however, but indispensable in order that the signifier have meaning, are the differences that distinguish a given signifier from all the other signifiers in the system. The sound "tree" is intelligible to a speaker of English not because of what it is, strictly speaking, since there is no resemblance between the sound (or its appearance when written) and the large leafy object we call a "tree." Rather, the sound is intelligible precisely because of what it *is not,* which is to say "three," "thee," "the," "tee," and every other sound in language. This prompts Saussure to state: "in language there are only differences. Even more important: a difference generally implies positive terms between which the difference is set up; but in language there are only differences *without positive terms*" (1983:118, emphasis his).

Derridean deconstruction can be understood in part as an emphatic affirmation of Saussure's dictum that language is a network of differences joined to a still more emphatic rejection of Saussure's order of signifieds. The signified for Derrida can neither orient nor stabilize the sign. Like the signifier, the signified can be grasped only differentially and relationally, through its difference from other signifieds, other concepts. Indeed, the very distinction between signifier and signified is itself an arbitrary and conventional one, for "the signified always already functions as a signifier" (Derrida, 1976:7). The history of Western thought for Derrida (Saussure's thought included) amounts to the "powerful, systematic, and irrepressible desire" for a *transcendental signified*—an order of meaning that would be originary, self-identical, and self-evident and that would "place a reassuring end to the reference from sign to sign" (49). But this would require a signified capable of being grasped in itself, nondifferentially.

What the play of differences prevents is any single element in language being simply present in and of itself. Each element means what it does only because of its relation to something that it is not, from which it differs. No

element can be simply present; rather, each element is an effect of the traces within it of all the other elements in the system. Nothing is ever simply present or absent. The present is divided from itself (prevented from simply being itself) by the trace within it of what it is not (Derrida, 1982a:13; 1981b:26). And with it is divided everything that has been thought of as a species of presence: God, being, essence, identity, consciousness, self, intentionality.[4] This uncontrollable spillage Derrida terms *writing* (*l'écriture*), not writing as ordinarily conceived, which is to say as a substitute or storage container for speech, but writing writ large or generalized. "Discontinuity, delay, heterogeneity, and alterity already were working upon the voice, producing it from its first breath as a system of differential traces, that is as writing before the letter" (Derrida, 1982a:291).[5] The disseminating flow of this general writing swirls and eddies through the spoken word with unsensed and unsuspected force, eroding the apparently simple, intuitive self-identity of even the most immediate-seeming speech event.

BIBLICAL POSTSTRUCTURALISM

Regina Schwartz has depicted the Hebrew Bible as engaged in a process of loss and recovery, forgetting and remembering, one that militates against origins or teleology and that is explicitly depicted in the biblical "scenes of writing":

Deuteronomy tells the story of the exodus, with a second Moses repeatedly enjoining his hearers to remember and retell the story themselves. But the injunctions of Deuteronomy are forgotten. The text is lost. Even the reminder to remember is forgotten. During a religious reform that included the restoration of the Temple, the lost book is found amid debris, according to the account in II Kings, and with the recovery of the book, the contents—to remember and what to remember— are remembered. This lost-and-found phenomenon recurs for another text: the scroll of Jeremiah. After reading the first twenty-five chapters of Jeremiah, we are told how they came to be, and not to be, and to be again. As each page is read

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4 ". . . presence of the thing to the sight as *eidos,* presence as substance/essence/existence (*ousia*), temporal presence as point (*stigmē*) of the now or of the moment (*nun*), the self-presence of the cogito, consciousness, subjectivity, the co-presence of the other and of the self" (Derrida, 1976:12).

5 "Then one realizes that what was chased off limits, the wandering outcast . . . has indeed never ceased to haunt language as its primary and most intimate possibility" (Derrida, 1976:44).

to the king, it is torn off and burned in the fire in his winter apartments. Despite this destruction, Jeremiah and his scribe begin all over again. The text persists. Another book suffers the same fate: the Torah. When Moses receives the tablets of the law, before he even begins to promulgate it, he dashes the tablets to pieces. The Torah is rewritten; thus, all we have from the beginning is a copy, one that proliferates further copies. Silencing the narrative, forgetting the past, obliterating any account of it: memory is the Hebrew Bible's way of coping with this ever-pressing crisis of discontinuity. The Book itself is imperiled, lost over and over. And so it must be remembered, recovered, rewritten, and rediscovered over and over. (1990b:46)

This crisis of survival is also dramatized in the Joseph story where it is accompanied by an injunction for moral responsibility. Joseph's brothers abandon him, and they later claim to the powerful Egyptian vizier (Joseph incognito) that they once had a brother who "is no more." They only find Joseph, as it were, when they refuse to abandon their other favored brother, Benjamin. Their new-found responsibility prompts Joseph's memory of his painful past, but that memory ensures the continued survival of the lineage: "Do not be grieved or angry with yourselves for selling me here; for God has sent me before you to preserve life" (Gen. 45:5). Throughout the Hebrew Bible, Schwartz argues, remembering is persistently linked to survival. But she adds the caution, "when we say that remembering is the condition of survival in the Bible, we cannot mean it in any naive sense [for there is no original to be recalled]. With no such thing as accurate memory possible, dependence on such memory would enable no future at all" (53). Rather it is interpretation, re-construction, re-membering, re-writing, or simply writing (in the Derridean sense) that enables continuity.

Writing and scripture also intermingle in two early essays by Derrida on the Jewish poet Edmond Jabès (Derrida, 1978b:64–78, 294–300). Derrida and Jabès merge in these essays; it is frequently impossible to tell where one ends and the other begins. For Derrida and Jabès both, the "situation of the Jew" is "exemplary" of writing (65), because writing is always a matter of exile. " 'The fatherland of the Jews' is a 'sacred text surrounded by commentaries'. The necessity of commentary . . . is the very form of exiled speech. In the beginning is hermeneutics" (67, quoting Jabès, 109). In Jabès's haunting poetry, Derrida discovers a "confluence in which is recalled, conjoined, and condensed the suffering, the millennial reflection of a people . . . 'whose past and continuity coincide with those of writing,' the destiny that sum-

mons the Jew, placing him between the voice and the cipher; and he weeps for the lost voice with tears as black as the trace of ink" (73, quoting Jabès, 41). The lost voice is first of all that of God: "God no longer speaks to us; he has interrupted himself: we must take words upon ourselves. We must entrust ourselves to traces . . . because we have ceased hearing the voice from within the immediate proximity of the garden. . . . The *difference* between speech and writing is sin, the anger of God emerging from itself, work outside the garden" (68, Derrida's emphasis). But to be thrust from the garden is to be forced into the desert, a boundless semiotic "book . . . made of sand" (ibid.). "The garden is speech, the desert writing. In each grain of sand a sign surprises" (Jabès, 169, quoted in Derrida, ibid.).

According to a rabbinic tradition, the Torah existed with God before the creation of the world: "He [the Holy One] looked into the Torah and created the world" (*Bereshit Rabbah* 1:1; cf. Handelman, 1982:37–38, 168). Compare "Reb Derissa" (as Derrida jokingly signs himself—300; cf. 78), as he exegetes Jabès's elaboration of this remarkable tradition: "everything that is exterior in relation to the book . . . is produced within the book." Every attempt to exit the book only leads back into it. "One emerges from the book only within the book, because, for Jabès, the book is not in the world, but the world is in the book" (76, Derrida's emphasis; cf. Derrida, 1976:158). Furthermore, "If God is, it is because He is in the book" (Jabès, 32, quoted in Derrida, 76). Besides the book there is only that which threatens it: "nothing, non-Being, nonmeaning" (76).

Is Derridean "writing" merely a synonym for Jabès's semiotic "sand-book," then, the "desert" that establishes the horizon of all human reflection, the sum of all that is sayable? Or does writing somehow exceed the book and the mirages of presence that it gives rise to (cf. Derrida, 1976:6–26)? One suspects that it does. Derrida's concept of écriture is still under (de)construction in this first essay on Jabès, which dates from 1964. But by the closing pages of the essay, Derrida has begun to write (of) an "original illegibility" (77), which he will later designate with such terms as *archē-writing* (1982a:13), and which, for him, is uncontainable in any book, even a "desert-book" as capacious and treacherous as that of Jabès. (Jabès says of that book: "At noon, he found himself once more facing infinity, the white page. Every trace of footsteps had disappeared. Buried" [56, quoted in Derrida, 69–70].) Although Derrida will not "impugn Jabès for not having pronounced these questions" (78), he is anticipating the tortuous "detours"

that lie ahead—detours that "will resemble those of negative theology, occasionally even to the point of being indistinguishable from negative theology" (1982a:6; though cf. 1978b:297; 1989:7ff.).

DECONSTRUCTION AND READING

Poststructuralist writing has been marked by "a resurgence of interest in allegory" (Ulmer, 1985:88). In his two essays on Jabès, Derrida engages in a neo-allegorical reading of scripture. Whether he looks in the direction of Eden or at Israel's wilderness wanderings, Derrida sees only writing. He has also ventured an allegorical reading of another biblical narrative, the story of Babel:

> the narrative or the myth of the tower of Babel . . . does not constitute just one figure among others. Telling at least of the inadequation of one tongue to another, of one place in the encyclopedia to another, of language to itself and to meaning, and so forth, it also tells of the need for figuration, for myth, for tropes, for twists and turns. . . . In this sense it would be the myth of the origin of myth, the metaphor of metaphor, the narrative of narrative, the translation of translation, and so on.
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> The "tower of Babel" does not merely figure the irreducible multiplicity of tongues; it exhibits an incompletion, the impossibility of finishing, of totalizing, of saturating, of completing something on the order of edification. . . . What the multiplicity of idioms actually limits is not only a "true" translation, a transparent and adequate interexpression, it is also a structural order, a coherence of construct. There is then (let us translate) something like an internal limit to formalization, an incompleteness of the constructure. It would be easy and up to a certain point justified to see there the translation of a system in deconstruction. (1985c:165–66)

Indeed, it would be easy to see there, yet again, a Derridean "scene of writing."

Deconstruction has profound implications for translation, a topic that in turn has important theological dimensions. For Judaism and Christianity, the question of scripture—its nature, meaning, and authority—is inseparable from that of translation. (This is also true for Islam, which refuses to consider translations of the Quran as holy.) Readers of all sorts tend to regard an original work—whether holy scripture or secular writing—as superior to and more authoritative than any of its translated versions. However, as we saw, the Hebrew Bible itself includes the myth that the original

is lost. Moreover, that the Bible as an "original" is "not purely canonical is clear from the fact that it demands translation; it cannot be definitive since it can be translated" (de Man, 1986:82). The original is always "in the situation of demand, that is, of a lack or exile. The original is indebted a priori to the translation. Its survival is a demand and a desire for translation, somewhat like the Babelian demand: Translate me" (Derrida, 1985c:152). Every reading is a translation, a commentary on and supplement to the original text. Every reader is a translator, someone who takes things from their proper place and moves them somewhere else.[6] In this sense, all reading is intertextual,[7] an endless juxtaposition and interchange of texts, a kind of translation.[8]

Deconstruction is suspicious of any view that there is a natural fit between language, world, and meaning. A Babelian intervention, it challenges the erection of any concept of reality unscathed by interpretation, by translation, whether it take the form of a historical reconstruction, a literary reading, a scientific hypothesis, or a philosophical system. To this extent, deconstruction represents a series of critical positions taken against totalizing schemes. But as a reading activity, deconstruction is not reducible to a single concept, method, or technique. Because deconstruction is resolutely nonsystematic, there is no straightforward, universally accepted way of "doing" it. Indeed, one could well question whether there is any one thing to do. According to de Man, deconstruction merely makes explicit what occurs in any reading: "to read is to understand, to question, to know, to forget, to erase, to deface, to repeat. . . . No degree of knowledge can ever stop this madness, for it is the madness of words" (1979b:68). Nevertheless, attention to the inability of philosophers, literary critics, historians, theologians, and exegetes (along with politicians, lawyers, clergy, and so on) to establish fully coherent arguments or systems is one of the features that distinguishes deconstructive reading from other forms of critical activity.

Deconstruction is text-centered. Yet for deconstruction, there is no cen-

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[6] *Translatus* is the past participle of *transferre*, to transfer.

[7] For more on the appropriation of the concept of intertextuality in biblical studies see Fewell whose volume of thirteen essays centers on Hebrew Scripture texts; Phillips, 1992; Aichele and Phillips, a forthcoming volume of *Semeia* featuring exegetical and theoretical pieces; Fewell, Boyarin, 1990a, 1990b; also cf. Plett, 1991.

[8] Further on the intersection of translation, theology, and deconstruction, see Aichele, 1991; 1992.

ter to the text. *Text* is not limited to written language. The self is a text; experience is a text; any instance of signification is a text, and as Barthes said, "everything signifies" (1978:63). Text is the product of signifying difference. Text and its related terms (such as *writing* and *reading*) are, for deconstruction, complex, fluid, and powerful metaphors. Whatever a text is, it is not a stable, self-identical, enduring object but a place of intersection in a network of signification. *Intertextuality*—a term introduced by Julia Kristeva—suggests that each text is situated for each reader in an ever-changing web composed of innumerable texts. There is no extratextual reality to which texts refer or which gives texts their meaning; meaning or reference are possible only in relation to this network, as functions of intertextuality.

Deconstructive interpretation for the most part consists of very close readings of specific texts (but only rarely, so far, of biblical texts).[9] These readings have been highly unorthodox as they have rejected certain well-established and central values: the univocity of meaning, the privileging of the author's intention (or any other point of origin), the location of meaning "in" the text, the separability of the text's "inside" from its "outside" (text from reader, text from context), the objective reality of history, and so forth. Deconstruction rejects the notion that the origin (*archē*), whatever its form (the author, God, the signified), should be given any sort of priority; it denies that there is an origin in any substantial sense. (The signified is always another signifier; the author is the product of his or her texts; every writing is a rereading; every reading a rewriting, and so forth.)

As a practice of reading, deconstruction makes explicit what is hidden, repressed, or denied in any ordinary reading. Every reading is blinded by a set of presuppositions about the nature of texts and of reality, and yet without some such assumptions no reading would be possible. Deconstructionists such as Derrida and de Man readily admit that these strictures apply as well to their own readings—that is, that their readings also need to be deconstructed. No neutral or objective reading is ever possible; reading is always interested. Deconstruction rejects all "container" theories of meaning. Meaning is not in the text but is brought to it and imposed upon it. The

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[9] Assorted examples include Aichele, 1985; Barthes, 1988b, 1988c; Burnett, 1992a, 1992b; Clines, 1990a; Crossan, 1980; Derrida, 1982b, 1985c; Fewell and Gunn; Susan Lochrie Graham; Greenstein; Gunn and Fewell; Jobling, 1986b, 1990; Miscall; Moore, 1989b, 1992, 1994; Phillips, 1985, 1994a, 1994b; Schwartz, 1990b.

understanding of the author or of the original audience is not decisive; it is merely one reading among many. Texts may lend themselves more to some readings than to others, but the results of any reading have more to do with the reader's interests than with the text itself. Interpretation is an expression of power, the result of violence exercised upon the text in the act of reading, which is always an act of appropriation, a taking possession.

Against this hermeneutic of violence, deconstruction offers another metaphor to describe the reading process: *play*, with its connotations of free experimentation and endless alternatives. This becomes erotic play, *jouissance*, for a writer such as Barthes. If the written text be subject to the interests and desires of its readers, it is also by its very nature disseminated at large in the world, free of the restrictive control of an author or any authoritative body. The goal of a deconstructive reading is not some sort of decisive conclusion or valid interpretation. Deconstructive readings tend to circle about the textual object, playing with it and teasing it, seeking out the marks and folds that reveal the logic of its construction, the exclusions and deceptions that make it what it is. Although they are often quite respectful, these readings are never reverential.

At points such as this, the distinction between deconstructive criticism and reader-response criticism is important (see chap. 1 above). Although communities of interpretation play crucial roles in determining any actual reader's interpretation of a text, and although some communities may claim exclusive ownership of the true meaning of certain texts (sacred texts, especially), the text is never fully in the possession of any reader, nor is the reader ever fully in the possession of any text. For deconstruction, the text retains the power to elude and overturn every reading—while the reader retains the power endlessly to rewrite the text.

As an illustration of this struggle between reader and text, let us turn to Roland Barthes as he wrestles with an episode from the book of Genesis. Barthes is an important figure in twentieth-century criticism because of his role both as an advocate of structuralist criticism in France in the 1960s and as an outspoken voice of poststructuralist criticism in the later years of his life. Barthes's work underscores the historical and philosophical relation between poststructuralism and the structural analysis of language and culture practiced by Saussure and Lévi-Strauss, among others. Although Barthes is not usually thought of as a deconstructionist (as Derrida and de Man are), his later writings, especially his close and careful readings of texts, offer fine examples of deconstructive criticism.

For Barthes, the question of the text is ultimately a question of scripture, that is, a theological one. Taking his cue from Derrida, Barthes declares:

> To describe systems of meaning by postulating a final signified is to side against the very nature of meaning. . . . Scripture [*l'Ecriture*] is a privileged domain for this problem, because, on the one hand, theologically, it is certain that a final signified is postulated: the metaphysical definition or the semantic definition of theology is to postulate the Last Signified; and because, on the other hand, the very notion of Scripture, the fact that the Bible is called Scripture, Writing [*l'Ecriture*], would orient us toward a more ambiguous comprehension of the problems, as if effectively, and theologically too, the base, the *princeps*, were still a Writing, and always a Writing. (Barthes, 1988c:242, emphasis his)

As we have seen, this view of text as writing poses a serious challenge to a critical desire to "capture meaning," to fix language's function and arrive at the definitive truth of the text. And yet, a traditional metaphysical understanding of theology would posit just such truth.

Barthes opens his essay "Wrestling With the Angel: Textual Analysis of Genesis 32:23–33" by distinguishing between historical criticism ("where the text comes from"), structural analysis ("how [the text] is made"), and textual analysis ("how [the text] is unmade, how it explodes, disseminates" in that "*open* network, which is the very infinity of language") (1988d:247). Barthes states that his goal as critic is not to reduce the text to a signified (historical, theological, or otherwise), "but to keep its signifying power open" (260). For this reason he pays little attention to the results of traditional textual criticism, except for cursory acknowledgment of the documentary hypothesis concerning the composition and redaction of the Torah. Still, methodological distinctions notwithstanding, Barthes's textual analysis finds itself caught up between the structuralist approach of his earlier writings, with its characteristic desire for objective, scientific neutrality, and the poststructuralist interest in the indeterminacy of meaning, the role of ideology in the production and dissemination of the text, and the influence of the reader upon the text, themes that became increasingly prominent in Barthes's later writings.[10] This two-sidedness suggests that the complex relation between poststructuralism and structuralism is not adequately explained as an evolutionary development of the former out of the latter.

[10] This essay was first published in 1972. Its characteristic ambivalence is also a feature of Barthes's other biblical excursion, "The Structural Analysis of Narrative: Apropos of Acts 10–11" (Barthes, 1988c:217–45 [first published in 1969]).

The influence of structural analysis is especially pronounced in Barthes's organization of the narrative plot.[11] In his analysis of Genesis 32, Barthes locates three sequences: the Crossing (of the Jabbok River, vv. 23–25),[12] the Combat (vv. 25–30), and the Namings (vv. 28–33). Each sequence contains a critical ambiguity. In the first sequence, it is unclear whether Jacob has already crossed over the river when the wrestling occurs (v. 23) or whether he has remained behind on the far (foreign) side (vv. 24–25); however, the side of the river that Jacob is on is crucial for determining the nature of the wrestling match and the identity of his opponent. Barthes argues that this ambiguity creates "two different pressures of readability." On the one hand, if Jacob has not yet crossed the river, then a folkloristic reading would interpret the wrestling as mythic trial by combat: once victorious, Jacob can cross the river, achieve his goal. On the other hand, if Jacob has already crossed the river and his household has gone on ahead, the reading is less clearly determined. It would appear that Jacob struggles "to *mark himself* by solitude (this is the familiar *setting apart* of the chosen of God)" (250, Barthes's emphases).

Barthes has located a point where the reader reaches an impasse and must decide whether the story belongs to one of two genres: the archaic or mythic story, on the one hand, or the realistic or geographic story, on the other. However, the text does not offer an unambiguous resolution of this difficulty, and this will in turn have important bearing upon the last (Naming) sequence. A chain reaction has begun with the first ambiguous sequence, a ripple of uncertainty that runs throughout the entire episode.

In the second narrative sequence indeterminacy proliferates in an abundance of male pronouns: "he touched the hollow of his thigh . . . then he said . . . and he said to him," and so on. The syntax both conceals and reveals the victory of the weaker over the stronger. Jacob's victory reads as an inversion of narrative logic, for the decisive wrestling hold fails and

[11] Barthes contrasts his analysis with the classic structuralist approaches of A. J. Greimas and Vladimir Propp, whose actantial and functional analyses, respectively, have been influential for structural exegesis of the Bible (see chap. 2). Reading in terms of actantial roles, Barthes encounters the paradox and "scandal" that Jacob is simultaneously Subject and Helper and—what is even more ambiguous—that God is both Sender and Opponent, as a result of which he is defeated. Equally, the story's ambiguity fits Propp's functional description of the fairy tale, in which God stands as the Enemy and neither his motivations nor those of Jacob are explained (1988d:256–59).

[12] Barthes's verse numbers follow the Jerusalem Bible.

Jacob triumphs by enduring until daybreak. A symbolic displacement cor-
responds to this reversal of reader expectation; with the giving of the mark,
names change. Out of the anonymity of the pronoun comes both a new name
and the refusal of a name, which turns out to be a blessing. The "smallest
difference" of the signifier becomes significant:

> God . . . is the substitute of the oldest Brother, who is once again defeated by the
> youngest: the conflict with Esau is *displaced*. . . . The Old Testament seems to be
> the world less of the Fathers than of the Enemy Brothers: the elder are ousted in
> favor of the younger. Freud has pointed out in the myth of the Enemy Brothers
> the narcissistic theme of *the smallest difference:* the blow on the hip, on that thin
> tendon—is this not just such a *smallest difference?* Whatever the case, in this
> universe, God marks the youngest, he acts as a counter-nature: his (structural)
> function is to constitute a *counter-marker.* (254–55, Barthes's emphases)

The final sequence manifests ambiguity in the form of transgression, both
within the narrative and between the narrative and the reader. This story
refers in a self-reflexive way both to the narrative requirement of mean-
ing (closure) and to its resistance to closure (indeterminacy). These multiple
traces of ambiguity are marked in Jacob's body, the food taboo, his new
name, divine recognition of his patriarchal significance, and the naming of
the place. Each of these transgressions involves a change in meaning, and
yet even more, a change in the very rules of meaning. According to Barthes,
language itself transgresses and is transgressed in this story (256).

The narrative indeterminacies adumbrated by Barthes's analysis generate
what he calls a "metonymic montage" or "symbolic explosion of the text"
(260). The content of Genesis 32:23–33 is about "crossing over," and at
the same time its form crosses over the boundaries of reader expectation.
Its transgressive representation of transgression exposes the fundamental ir-
rationality of language and leaves the reader with the difficult and finally
impossible task of arriving at a conclusive meaning for the text. This Scrip-
tural text is undecidable. "The theologian would no doubt be distressed by
this indecision; the exegete would acknowledge it, hoping that some ele-
ment, factual or argumentative, would allow him to bring it to an end;
[but] the textual analyst . . . will savor this sort of *friction* between two
intelligibilities" (251, emphasis his).

In summary, Barthes's poststructuralist reading explores questions of lin-
guistic form, narrative logic, and semantic productivity in Genesis 32. He
examines the text's use of pronouns and names, the repetitive narrative

structure, and the semantic irresolution facing the reader by the text's end.
Barthes's style of analysis features the search for multiple rather than singu-
lar meanings, an open rather than closed narrative structure, textual tensions
and ambiguities as an alternative to resolution and clarity. For Barthes, the
reader takes an aggressive role in creating meaning. This implies that there
are no neutral, innocent readings; every reading is an ethical and ultimately
political act.

SCRIPTURAL A/THEOLOGY

Although deconstruction is more strategy than system, more tactic than
theory, it has important implications for theology. What deconstruction
implies is not a metaphysics of absence, as many have said; rather, decon-
struction confuses and undercuts the binarism of absence and presence. In-
sofar as one can continue to speak of reality—much less Reality—within
this postmodern framework, one's language will necessarily be undecidable,
nonidentical with itself. But to say that reality is in some sense nothing but
text, that writing is in some sense prior to speech, is to make substantial
theological claims.

Deconstruction poses a serious challenge to traditional notions of mean-
ing and truth. Other contemporary literary and philosophical theories, while
they abandon univocity and tolerate polysemy, retain a nostalgia for mean-
ing. Deconstruction deflects this desire with a renewed "allegorizing" of the
text—not the classical allegory of a truth hidden beneath the folds of the
text's literal surface, but a "ludic allegory" (Crossan, 1980:97) of surfaces
that play upon one another, of intertextual juxtapositioning. For this sort of
allegory, there are only surfaces. The text is a weave or trace that endlessly
unravels itself. And the interpreter is caught up in the dynamism of the text,
rather than searching for some extratextual reality.

For claims such as these, deconstruction is often charged with nihilism.
Because it refuses to acknowledge any extratextual signified—much less an
eternal Transcendental Signified, Barthes's "Last Signified"—deconstruc-
tion appears atheistic and anarchistic to many. Others have noted a mystical
tendency in deconstruction and have argued that deconstruction is amenable
to mysticism and negative theology in Jewish-Christian thought. De Man
himself maintained that "however negative it may sound, deconstruction
implies the possibility of a rebuilding" (1983:140). But does a move toward
reconstruction risk returning to logocentrism and resubmitting to the meta-

physics of presence, thereby foreclosing deconstruction's radically subversive potential? The reconstructed structure will have to be deconstructed in its turn.

Deconstructive theology is especially associated with the writings of Mark C. Taylor (1982, 1984, 1987, 1990b). Deconstruction, for Taylor, "is postmodernism raised to method" (1982:xx); it is "the hermeneutic of the death of God" (xix; cf. Mark C. Taylor, 1984:6). Modernity (the Enlightenment and its progeny) posits the singular self-identity of the real and the binarism of truth and falsehood that makes knowledge possible in the form of referential language. Postmodernism centers upon the nonidentity and self-referentiality of language that makes any absolute truth-claims impossible. Modernity is characterized by atheism, belief in the nonexistence of God; postmodernism is characterized by what Taylor calls a/theology.[13] The slash mark opens theology to the letter of negation, forming a fractured word, neither a seamless whole nor a binary disjunction.

Taylor argues that belief in the nonexistence of God enabled modern belief in the autonomy of the self, whereas the death of God actually requires the postmodern death of the self. In postulating the death of the self or the subject, Taylor is embroidering a theme that has been especially associated with French structuralism and poststructuralism, one that has elicited frequent charges of anti-humanism. Foucault expresses this theme succinctly: "As the archaeology of our thought easily shows, man is an invention of recent date. And one perhaps nearing its end" (1970:387). In Taylor's post-Christian account, the "death of the subject" is restaged on Golgotha: "Unable to accept loss and anxious about death, the partial nihilism of the modern humanistic atheist is a sign of weakness. For the writer who suffers the crucifixion of selfhood, nihilism is the mark of the cross. On Golgotha, not only God dies; the self also disappears" (1984:33). The theological fiction of the self must undergo a/theological crucifixion.

Earlier we noted Derrida's unease with the concept of the "book." For Taylor, the postmodern is marked by the closing of the book of logocentrism. "The book . . . constitutes a systematic totality or totalistic system," he writes (1987:226), echoing Hegel and his French discontents: Bataille, Blanchot, Derrida. The book is "an organic totality of signifiers closed in and upon itself" (1984:78). "Like God, self, and history," therefore, "the notion of the book is, in an important sense, theological" (76). But the theo-

[13] A term he borrows from Georges Bataille (see Mark C. Taylor, 1987:136).

logical book is also teleological; every good book must form "a complete whole, with a clear beginning, middle, and end" (79). The Good Book, then, would be the book of books, for it begins "In the beginning" and ends in Apocalypse. The Bible is a t(h)e(le)ological enclosure, as its very name signifies. "The Greek biblos refers to the inner bark of the papyrus and designates a paper, roll, scroll, or book. The circularity of the tree trunk and scroll are carried over in the Latin word volumen, which means coil, wreath, or roll" (77).

What would be the effects of a French revolution in the field of the Book itself, in biblical studies? Stretches of Taylor's Erring (1984:103–20, 170–82) supply graphic sketches of that spectacle. Taylor undertakes an a/theological redrafting of Derrida's redraft of Saussure. As we saw, Derrida elaborated Saussure's dictum that linguistic systems are irreducibly relational. The linguistic sign can signify solely by its relation to other signs; it has no innate significance. Neither does it possess presence: "the movement of signification is possible only if each so-called 'present' element . . . is related to something other than itself, thereby . . . constituting . . . the present by means of this very relation to what it is not. . . . But this interval that constitutes it as present must, by the same token, divide the present in and of itself, thereby also dividing, along with the present, everything that is thought on the basis of the present" (Derrida, 1982a:13). To that which deconstructs presence in the same movement with which it constructs it, Derrida gives the name writing (l'écriture).

Following Derrida's thread, Taylor stitches Derridean écriture to scripture (cf. Derrida, 1978b:64–78). "In the liminal time-space of scripture," writes Taylor, "hard-and-fast oppositions are shattered and every seemingly stable either-or is perpetually dislocated." Scripture is a "divine milieu" that "is neither fully present nor absent. . . . It neither is nor is not." This paradoxical divine milieu "is not thinkable within the terms of classical logic" (1984:117, quoting Derrida, 1981a:153). Linguistic signs are commonly believed to designate concepts, or actual objects in the world, but insofar as signs are unintelligible apart from other signs, "the sign is a sign of a sign" (Mark C. Taylor, 1984:105). Words, writing, scripture are not so much about something as they are that something itself. "To interpret God as word is to understand the divine as scripture or writing." But scripture thus reinscribed no longer affirms the transcendent; rather it subverts it, giving birth to a thoroughly incarnational christology: "the divine is forever embodied." Incarnation thus reconceived "is not a once-and-for-all event,

restricted to a specific time and place" (104). Writing is bodily or incarnate. In scriptural a/theology, materiality precludes transcendence: "word is made flesh and flesh is made word" (106). What becomes of God, then? Here Derrida steps in with an uncharacteristically forthright remark: "Language has started without us, in us and before us. This is what theology calls God" (1989:29).

Traditionally, theology has been concerned with revelation. It has sought the uncovering (*apokalypsis*) of truth. Deconstructive a/theology would be an/apocalyptic, however, an "apocalypse without apocalypse" (Derrida, 1982b:94) for which the text does not reveal but is revealed—as text, writing, scripture. A deconstructive a/theology would unveil its own nonpresence in the dispersed materiality and violence of textual inscription, in a dissemination beyond the metaphysics of historical univocity or structural polysemy, in a fundamental undecidability. This theology would uncover the "not-itself" which lies unnamed at its own center, its nonidentity with itself which it forever excludes. It would necessarily be fragmentary, a collection of remains, the debris of theologies that have been and the portent of theologies to come.

FOUCAULT AND HISTORY

To date, deconstruction in biblical studies and in theology has lacked an overt political framework. Indeed, poststructuralism in general is charged with having little interest in historical or ethical matters. The dazzling needlework of a Taylor, for example, would seem to offer little to a reader whose primary concern is with issues of social justice. Arguably, however, readings such as Taylor's have helped to create a climate of greater interpretive freedom in the academy. That feminist or materialist readings even get a foot in the door owes much to the deconstructive insistence that "marginal" readings are not only to be tolerated, but welcomed (cf. Jobling, 1990:97).

The aim of a text such as Taylor's *Erring* might be said to be that of "show[ing] people that a lot of things that are part of their landscape—that people think are universal—are the result of some very precise historical changes." This quotation is not from Taylor, however, but from Michel Foucault. Foucault continues: "All my analyses are against the idea of universal necessities in human existence. They show the arbitrariness of institutions and show what space of freedom we can still enjoy and how many changes

can still be made" (1988:11). This approximates the suggestion that readings such as Taylor's have a de-constricting effect on tight institutional structures. In other respects, however, Taylor and Foucault are worlds apart.

From the publication of his first book, *Madness and Civilization*, in 1961 until his death in 1984, Michel Foucault combined an approach to historiography that was uniquely philosophical with an approach to philosophy that was resolutely historical. Historiography and philosophy conspired in his writing to keep each other perpetually off-balance. Whether Foucault's ostensible object of study was the history of madness (1961), the emergence of modern medicine (1963), the emergence of the human sciences (1966), the birth of the modern prison (1975), the birth of the author (1977c), or the history of sexuality (1976; 1984a; 1984b), there was a more fundamental issue that always preoccupied him, one that might be formulated thus: discourses of knowledge conspire to produce that which they purport to describe.

Foucault's 1966 book, *Les mots et les choses* [Eng. trans. *The Order of Things*, 1970] investigated the birth of the modern human subject and issued a challenge to students of the human sciences to rethink their topic, "man." Foucault attempts to show that the instruments that have been developed to study "man" have in fact invented him. "If those arrangements [of knowledge] were to disappear as they appeared," he writes, "if some event of which we can at the moment do no more than sense the possibility—without knowing either what its form will be or what it promises—were to cause them to crumble, . . . then one can certainly wager that man would be erased, like a face drawn in sand at the edge of the sea" (1970:387).

Foucault's critique of the Enlightenment *epistēmē*—his term for the total set of relations that enable and delimit knowledge in any given period (1972a:191)—has important consequences for what is still the dominant force in biblical studies, namely, the historical-critical method(s), which emerged as a result of the Enlightenment's disruption of earlier forms of exegesis. Foucault's work demands a rethinking of the history of biblical studies as a disciplinary practice (Castelli, 1991a:40). No longer would biblical scholars approach their field as historians such as W. G. Kümmel have done, showing how the gradual refinement of methods enabled a progressive and inexorable matching of scholarly description to historical fact—facts anterior to discourse, awaiting discovery. Foucault joins Derrida when it comes to facts: "There is nothing absolutely primary to be interpreted, since fundamentally everything is already interpretation; every sign is . . .

but the interpretation of other signs" (Foucault, 1967:188).[14] A Foucauldian "archaeology" of biblical scholarship would approach it as a discourse of knowledge. It would ask when and how a new field of objects for investigation—authorial intentionality, originality, sources, influences, *Sitzen im Leben,* and so on—came to be constituted (cf. Foucault, 1977c). It would ask when and how a new class of experts—"biblical critics"—came to be legitimized. It would ask questions concerning the construction, circulation, and regulation of a new kind of knowledge. It would examine one more cog, an important one, in "the prodigious machinery of the will to truth" (1972b:220).

For Foucault, the will to truth and the will to power always work hand in glove. In his later work, Foucault increasingly addressed himself to the question of power (e.g., 1977a:26ff.; 1977b; 1978:92–97; 1980; 1982a; 1989a). Under Nietzsche's tutelage, he shifted from "archaeologies" of knowledge, centered on language and discourse, to "genealogies" centered on power and bodies. He abandoned the quest for deep structures (always a covert quest, in his case) that animated his earlier work and moved into a phase that is generally labeled *poststructuralist* (cf. Dreyfus and Rabinow, xii; Harland, 155ff.; Megill, 220ff.).

"Power" came to assume an ineffability in Foucault's thought that evoked the role accorded to "language" in earlier works such as *The Order of Things*—which is to say that it all but eluded definition. Arising from nowhere, power is present everywhere: "Power's condition of possibility . . . must not be sought in the primary existence of a central point, in a unique source of sovereignty . . . ; it is the moving substrate of force relations which, by virtue of their inequality, constantly engender states of power, but the latter are always local and unstable. The omnipresence of power: not because it has the privilege of consolidating everything under its invincible unity, but because it is produced from one moment to the next, at every point" (1978:93). Power circulates everywhere within the social body. Indeed, it is coextensive with the social itself.

Foucault's reformulation of power should give pause to any political or liberation theology constructed around a vision of eventual freedom from power. Specifically, Foucault challenges as utopian any notion that social transformation has to do with liberation from power (Castelli, 1991a:44–

[14] Foucault's stance is a Nietzschean one, as he would have been the first to admit.

45). For Foucault, power is both pervasive and invasive. Even when it engenders counter-discourses, power tends to colonize them. And it always gives rise to such discourses. "Where there is power, there is resistance, and yet, or rather consequently, this resistance is never in a position of exteriority in relation to power. Should it be said that one is always 'inside' power, there is no 'escaping' it, there is no absolute outside where it is concerned" (1978:95). Insofar as Foucault advocates a response to power, he seems to suggest that it should be as fluid and differentiated as power itself, endlessly dissolving and reconfiguring itself. For example, when asked what might replace the present system, he can only reply: "I think that to imagine another system is to extend our participation in the present system" (1977b:230)—implying that any new system must produce new oppressions, reproduce old oppressions. (The same suspicion of systems, accompanied by insistence on constant movement, characterized Derrida's critique of logocentrism, as we saw earlier.) Does such a vision of resistance, resolutely nonvisionary, necessarily lead to political paralysis? Or could it also lead to a new kind of empowerment (to use a term that has lost its innocence with Foucault)?

Foucault's reformulation of power also impels a reconsideration of the Bible. Many of the New Testament texts, for example, deal with problems of social formation and social order. They are concerned with establishing the boundaries of the group, as in Acts 15, and with maintaining order within the group, as in the Pastoral Epistles. They are concerned with disciplining the body, as in 1 Corinthians 7, and with questions of authority, as in 2 Corinthians 10 (Castelli, 1991b). And although particular technologies of power are located by Foucault in modern centralized societies, these technologies are based on claims to self-evidence and truth, just as the discourses intended to regulate power relations in the early Christian communities legitimized themselves by claims and appeals to truth (Castelli, 1991a:46).

Because of early Christianity's marginal status, discursive strategies for constructing and regulating power relations seem to have been all important, as other forms of power (military, political, economic) were largely unattainable. The efficacy of such strategies resided not so much in threats of physical force, but in equally coercive threats pertaining to the individual's access to salvation. Foucault has argued that the emergence of Christianity was marked less by a radical change in the ethical code than by the creation and dissemination of new power relations. He has termed this new form of power *pastoral power* and offers the following definition of it:

1) [Pastoral power] is a form of power whose ultimate aim is to assure individual salvation in the next world.

2) Pastoral power is not merely a form of power which commands; it must also be prepared to sacrifice itself for the life and salvation of the flock. Therefore, it is different from royal power, which demands a sacrifice from its subjects to save the throne.

3) It is a form of power which does not look after just the whole community, but each individual in particular, during its entire life.

4) Finally, this form of power cannot be exercised without knowing the inside of people's minds, without exploring their souls, without making them reveal their innermost secrets. It implies a knowledge of the conscience and an ability to direct it.

This form of power is salvation oriented (as opposed to political power). It is oblative (as opposed to the principle of sovereignty); it is individualizing (as opposed to legal power); it is coextensive and continuous with life; it is linked with a production of truth—the truth of the individual himself. (1982a:214)

In the New Testament, pastoral power manifests itself in the competing soteriologies of the evangelists and letter writers. It also manifests itself in the conception, inherited from Judaism, of martyrdom both as witness and as victory—an inversion of conventional power relations, suppression becoming exaltation (Castelli, 1991a:47). And it manifests itself in the claim of God on the life of the individual: the insistence on personal faith and repentance.

Power circulates within social networks but passes through structures where it is concentrated, defined, and deployed; these structures are social institutions. Foucault has studied institutions such as hospitals and prisons, but for the study of the New Testament the pertinent institution is the *ekklesia,* the church (Castelli, 1991a:48). Although it appears that no unified institution bearing that name existed in the period with which we are concerned, the image of a unified institution is present nonetheless as a nascent ideal in certain New Testament texts (notably, the Pastoral Epistles).

Foucault's analytic of power is especially focused on the minutiae of its workings (Deleuze, 1988:25ff)—its micro-technologies—whether in the hospital, the prison, the confessional, or the bedroom. He insists that power is exercised more often than not in quotidian, mundane ways; that bodies and populations are regulated less through the exercise of brute force than through micro-shifts in the production of truth; that power flows both ways

between subject and sovereign, prisoner and jailer, patient and physician, defining each of them. This is not to deny the reality of physical coercion, but rather to suggest that the exercise of power is not limited to nor coextensive with the concept of repression (Foucault, 1977a:219–20; 1977b:215). A Foucauldian analysis of early Christianity would focus on the minutiae of its discourses, practices, and institutions, on its policing of bodies and relationships, on the accidents through which those discourses came to assume universal dimensions—dimensions of naturalness, internalized by entire populations—producing a unique regime of knowledge, truth, and power (Castelli, 1991a:48–49).

An important facet of this development concerns the question of who was invested with the authority to speak and who was deprived of it, a question that is linked in turn to the issue of deviance. This is an issue that always fascinated Foucault. Throughout his career, he struggled to show how the "deviant" in all its diverse guises (insane, infirm, criminal, perverse) is created and exists specifically so that the norm (rational, healthy, moral, normal) can be defined. The naming of the "other" is what enables the manufacture of identity, and that naming is always violent. Foucault writes of "the prodigious machinery of the will to truth, with its vocation of exclusion" (1972b:220).

This same scapegoating process can be observed in the texts of the New Testament—and in the history of their interpretation. Take the Pauline letters, for example. To what extent have the echoes of other voices in these letters been drowned out simply by being labeled *the opponents,* the biblical scholar's equivalent of the term *other?* To what extent does the term *opponents* connote the normativity of Paul's own discourse? And to what extent does such Pauline commentary become an extension of Paul's own discourse, a testament to its cooptive power, and a repetition of its gesture of exclusion? A Foucauldian reading would attempt a different rendering of the multiple voices echoing within the Pauline corpus. It would attempt to rearticulate competing interpretations of truth in terms other than those of norm and aberration (Castelli, 1991b).

In the larger scheme of things, canon formation, whether Jewish or Christian, represents a drastic solution to the problem posed by the existence of alternative forms of knowledge. Impelled by such archaeological finds as the Dead Sea Scrolls at Qumran and the Gnostic library at Nag Hammadi, biblical scholars have labored to restore long-suppressed voices. But for the

most part, such scholarship has yet to come to terms with the elaborate system of exclusions and inclusions that *its* discourse establishes. It has simply reenacted, on another level, the exclusions whose effects it aims to redress.

The complicity of any analytic of power with power itself helps to explain a facet of Foucault's work that is frequently overlooked. Allan Megill writes: "Foucault's 'analytic' [of power] ought to be read in ironic rather than in literalistic terms. It may certainly suggest to conventional historians, sociologists, and anthropologists ideas capable of animating their researches. But it is not itself worthy of our literal belief, for the whole question of its representational truth is not so much left in abeyance . . . as ordered off the stage forever" (248). Hayden White would concur: "[Foucault's] own discourse stands as an abuse of everything for which 'normal' or 'proper' discourse stands" (1979:93). In other words, its preferred subject matter is not only deviance; it is itself a deviant discourse. "It *looks* like history, like philosophy, like criticism, but it stands over against these discourses as ironic antithesis" (ibid.).

Foucault himself would go even further. As early as 1967, referring to *The Order of Things,* he announced: "My book is a pure and simple 'fiction': it's a novel" (1989b:20). Every author, even a historian, "constitutes that of which he speaks" (ibid.). Like all good fiction, however, Foucault's books are capable of unsettling the reader. The realization that they are fictions may be especially discomfiting for historians, as Vincent Descombes notes, "and difficult for them to admit insofar as their own work presents the same external features as that of Foucault: a seductive construct whose play of erudite cross-reference lends it an air of verisimilitude" (117). Foucault short-circuits the inevitable pretensions to truth of his own discourse by building into it an implicit acknowledgment that any configuration of the data is necessarily contingent; it could always have been configured otherwise. It is here that Foucault comes closest to Derrida: the bottom line is always bottomless, for both of them, and as such can always be redrawn. And so "the work of the intellect is to show that what is, does not have to be, what it is" (Foucault, 1989c:252).

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[15] For an exception see King, which includes feminist perspectives on Gnostic texts.

READING THE FUTURE

Does it follow that the "bottomless bottom line" means the denial of all meaning, the loss of history, the negation of the subject, the rejection of value, the absence of ethics, the impoverishment of spirit? Are the impulses that propel poststructuralism forward but the dark underside of other "positive" postmodern impulses that, by contrast, seem to quicken rhetorical, feminist, and ideological criticisms and empower readers to speak affirmatively to and about the world in which they live? Does poststructuralism simply drain away certainty and understanding, leaving us in that peculiar position of affirming only the negative? These are not altogether ridiculous concerns especially for readers of the Bible.

If we are to believe its harshest critics (e.g., Hirsch; but cf. Harrison, 19–70), poststructuralism is coterminous with nihilism, namely, the denial of all truth, of meaning, of authorial intent, of reference, of reality, and more. All too often, however, these critiques amount to little more than popularized (if not caricatured) reports three or four times removed from any primary source (although Harrison is a major exception). The great irony here, of course, is that it is Derrida, Foucault, Barthes, and others who are so frequently charged with ignoring the letter of the text, meaning, and history by readers who themselves do not wrestle with their writings and the history of ideas within which poststructuralism stands. Simplistic sloganeering is an inadequate response to the complex theoretical issues poststructuralism raises. But before succumbing to apocalyptic woes, we would do well to recall how disturbing the emergence of positivist historico-critical criticism was for the literate readers of the Bible in the eighteenth century (cf. Frei).

It is true that in one sense poststructural criticisms signals an end— not the end of meaning but the end of privileged and protected notions of text, meaning, truth, reader, and more; but in another way the critical gestures of Barthes, Foucault, Lacan, and Derrida could hardly be more traditional. Firmly indebted to the Western philosophical and literary traditions, their writing draws energy from these very same classical resources even as they question its standards of meaning. Against the backdrop of a tragic century that has seen two great world wars and the Holocaust, and now a "New World (dis)Order," poststructuralism may be regarded as a not-surprising theoretical response to a world fraught with indeterminacy, a world where the Enlightenment's humanizing project is suspect to some degree. In the terms of one of poststructuralism's most perceptive critics, the search for

"real presence," which has characterized the Western intellectual and spiritual experience, is in great jeopardy, and the great traditions and texts—like the Bible—which instanciated purpose and meaning, no longer have the same currency. Just how are we to read the Bible the same way after Auschwitz and Buchenwald (Levinas, 1990a)?

If poststructuralist methods mirror in some appropriate ways the brokenness of Western culture today—the bankruptcy of the academy, the demise of the renaissance intellectual, the abandonment of tradition, the turning away from historicism—is that *all* that poststructuralism does? Or does it indeed make a contribution in concrete ways to the social fabric of "lived relations" (Althusser)? It may well be that biblical critics will find by means of engagement with poststructuralist theories the incentive to reexamine the question of history and historical criticism. Already the critical effort identified as "New Historicism" suggests that "a poetics of culture" (Veeser) is indeed possible as a direct result of the need to pull "historical consideration to the center stage of literary analysis" (Veeser, xi). The work of Foucault and, to a lesser extent, Derrida is playing an important role in this effort.

The significance of New Historicism for a biblical scholarship that has cast its lot methodologically and ideologically with positivist history and science may be far-reaching. The force of New Historicism, in part, is in placing historical inquiry in direct contact with literary and cultural theories. The result is a different type of critical encounter with theory than the naive (and often shallow) appropriation of literary theory characteristic of biblical critics who poured the new wine of reader-response or narratological categories into the old wineskin of redaction criticism. A reexamination of the relation of the text, its reading, and its reader through the lens of poststructuralist theory may serve as a bridge which enables traditional critics to see that traditional historical criticism may yet be salvageable, but not before an ideological critique of scholarship and of culture occurs.

A second area where poststructuralist discourse may prove important for biblical studies is on the question of ethics. We have mentioned the way Derrida and deconstruction has been roundly condemned for demoting the question of ethics (and also history). For a biblical scholarship whose critical work is tied institutionally either to the church or the academy, the poststructural critique of meaning offers an important resource when raising questions about the status of its reading and writing. What is at stake is a contrast and conflict between competing understandings of "ethics." The ethical question doesn't necessarily disappear in poststructuralism; rather

its content and practice is assessed on different grounds. Its primary aim now is "the dissolution of the form of ethics associated with repression and violence" (Siebers, 32). In the words of Julia Kristeva: "Ethics used to be a coercive, customary manner of ensuring the cohesiveness of a particular group through the repetition of a code. . . . Now, however, the issue of ethics crops up wherever a code (mores, social contract) must be shattered in order to give way to the free play of negativity, desire, pleasure, and jouissance, *before being put together again*" (1980a:23; cited in Siebers, 32).

Derrida's own effort to rethink the foundations of ethics through a different kind of acutely self-critical engagement with method and literature (see 1988b:11–154; 1992a:1–29) that searches for a more originary understanding of the relation of text, context, and commentary returns not only the issues of epistemology and metaphysics but ethics to the circle of concerns that biblical scholarship has not thought sufficiently about since Bultmann. Levinas promises to become an important figure in this regard (see Critchley). Biblical scholarship might discover in the combined energies and critiques arising from feminist, womanist, and ideological criticisms in conversation with poststructuralist interests the opening for a Bultmann-style effort to place historical, theological, literary, and metaphysical discourses in a different conversation with one another again. In contrast to Bultmann, however, the desire for a global synthesis for the modern world has given way to a more regional and local concern to make the Bible speak to particular postmodern worlds. The extent to which biblical scholarship will find in poststructuralism resources for historical and ethical reflection will depend also upon how willing it is to undertake the self-critique demanded of its own historical methods and ethical practices.

RECOMMENDED FURTHER READING

Barthes, Roland. 1974b. *S/Z*. Trans. Richard Miller. New York: Hill & Wang. A close, textual analysis of Honoré de Balzac's novella *Sarrasine*. More than any other, this book bridges the gap between classical structuralism and poststructuralism.

Castelli, Elizabeth A. 1991a. *Imitating Paul: A Discourse of Power*. Louisville, Ky.: Westminster/John Knox Press. A Foucauldian reading of selected Pauline texts combined with a feminist critical perspective.

De Man, Paul. 1979a. *Allegories of Reading: Figural Language in Rousseau, Nietzsche, Rilke, and Proust*. New Haven: Yale University Press. A series of intricate, deconstructive readings, frequently imitated but seldom surpassed. De Man's most important book.

Derrida, Jacques. 1976. *Of Grammatology*. Trans. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak. Baltimore:

Johns Hopkins University Press. Derrida's most influential work. The detailed translator's preface offers one of the best overall introductions to Derrida's thought.

———. 1981a. *Dissemination*. Trans. Barbara Johnson. Chicago: University of Chicago Press. Three lengthy essays, including an important deconstructive reading of Plato's "Phaedrus" and reflection on the writing of the literary work.

Foucault, Michel. 1977a. *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*. Trans. Alan Sheridan. New York: Pantheon. Examines the emergence of the "disciplinary technologies" that shape and "rule" modern life. Perhaps Foucault's most accessible book and, in the opinion of many commentators and Foucault himself, his most successful.

———. 1978. *The History of Sexuality: An Introduction*. Trans. Robert Hurley. New York: Pantheon. Argues that sexuality was "invented" in nineteenth-century Europe. A book that has become central to the new academic field of gender studies.

Harari, Josué V., trans. and ed. 1979. *Textual Strategies: Perspectives in Post-Structuralist Criticism*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press. Includes important essays by Barthes, de Man, Derrida, Foucault, and others on a broad range of theoretical topics.

Harland, Richard. 1987. *Superstructuralism: The Philosophy of Structuralism and Post-Structuralism*. New York: Methuen. An excellent introduction to a wide range of structuralist and poststructuralist thinkers that addresses the epistemological foundation common to both.

Jobling, David, and Stephen D. Moore, eds. 1991. "Poststructuralism as Exegesis." *Semeia 54*. Atlanta: Scholars. Ten poststructuralist readings of texts drawn from the Hebrew Bible and New Testament.

Kamuf, Peggy, ed. 1990. *A Derrida Reader: Between the Blinds*. New York: Columbia University Press. Twenty-two selections from Derrida, each introduced by Kamuf, along with a helpful general introduction.

Moore, Stephen D. 1992. *Mark and Luke in Poststructuralist Perspectives: Jesus Begins to Write*. New Haven: Yale University Press. One of the first book-length treatments of Gospel narrative from a poststructuralist perspective. Mark and Luke in intertextual dialogue with Derrida, Lacan, and Foucault.

Phillips, Gary A., ed. 1990. "Poststructural Criticism and the Bible: Text/History/Discourse." *Semeia 51*. Atlanta: Scholars. Ten essays that address theoretical and exegetical topics emerging from poststructural critique of history and discourse.

Rabinow, Paul, ed. 1984. *The Foucault Reader*. New York: Pantheon. Twenty-two essays, book-excerpts, and interviews, with a general introduction by Rabinow.

Sturrock, John, ed. 1979. *Structuralism and Since: From Lévi-Strauss to Derrida*. New York: Oxford University Press. One of the best set of short introductions to Barthes, Foucault, Lacan, and Derrida in print.

Taylor, Mark C. 1984. *Erring: A Postmodern A/theology*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press. A book that explores deconstruction's contribution to theology. A major work with implications for other religious studies subfields.

4 ▌ Rhetorical Criticism

Come now, let us reason together, says the Lord.
—Isaiah 1:18

Only through rhetoric does science become a social factor in our lives.
—Hans Georg Gadamer (1988:279)

Over the past twenty-five years we have witnessed an explosion of publications on the rhetoric of biblical texts. The rich legacy of Western rhetoric, which has been neglected by scholars for several centuries, is now being reclaimed. As a result, rhetoric is no longer being reduced to a study of the biblical writer's style. Rhetoric as the use by biblical writers of commonly accepted rules and techniques for persuading their audiences of certain viewpoints, or for reaffirming them, is now being recovered. The revival of rhetorical criticism, conceived as a set of rules and techniques sanctioned by the scholarly guild, should enhance the interpreter's approach to specific texts, to the Bible as a whole, and to the process of interpretation. Our goal in this chapter is not only to survey the fields of classical and contemporary