

**"The Uncanny" of Freud and
"The Mythomorphic"
of Lévi-Strauss**

— Pre-Concepts of the Deconstructionist Theories —

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ABSTRACT

Here I propose that the "deconstructive" discourse of Derrida, de Man et al—as well as the Nietzschean/Foucauldian discourse of power relations, Neo-Marxism and New Historicism—are essentially violent, destructive discourses grounded in images of agon, war. Rather, we need now to turn away from this end-of-century "darkness" toward regenerative models of poetic meaning which, like Freud's "uncanny," Levi-Strauss' "mythomorphic" and Frye's "great codes," assert the mythopoetic core, the central human meaning (immanent-earthly if not transcendent-heavenly) of poetry. Indeed, our "pre-concepts"—the pre-reflexive, instinctive core meanings/ understandings of poems, here illustrated via works by Ammons and Heaney —are presupposed by all the post-structuralist theories.

KEY WORDS

deconstructive
discourses
mythomorphic
uncanny
core meanings

pre-concepts
mythopoetic
great codes
discourses
regenerative

In this final period of the twentieth century, what we require as the immediate necessity for literary creation and criticism should be the language of poesy, or of Eros, seeing that we have talked too much of the language of battle, of Thanatos, according to Deconstructionism and the newly-risen New Historicism.

The inclination of the will-to-power after Nietzschean philosophy and the Foucauldian power-game has gained such supremacy in French and Anglo-American literary academism that the determining discourse on canon-reformation for reading and writing, via the "Dissemination" and the "Kenosis" of Jacques Derrida and Harold Bloom, has been in full sway these fifteen years. It is such a crazy sound and fury that the awareness of a center, a subject or origin or essential cores, has been lost. We need a Psychic Solstice, a Chthonic Center.

The ominous cause of this nullifying aporia is the so-called "linguistic nihilism" of Paul de Man, the prince of Deconstruction, and the I-am-the-No.1-authority principle of Bloom and Derrida, the megalomaniac ringleaders of Deconstructionism.

But the fact is that however stormy the sound and fury of the idea-battle, there still remain invulnerable the revisionary pre-concepts of literary subject and source, beyond the "much ados" of contention – the Prelogical and the Mythical. Then, is it not time now to settle the accounts of this whole Deconstruction business, to adopt only its regenerative principle as our canon while renouncing its parricidal inclination?

This is exactly the reason why we should call up the onto-generative arch-/proto-figurals, "The Uncanny" of Freud and "The Mythomorphic" of Lévi-Strauss, to refill and re-Kenotize the empty void of subject of de Man and the zero-center, "Foyer Virtuel" (virtual focus), of the Post-Structuralist textual 'presence of nothingness'. And this is all the more necessary for us Asian anti-crisis literary men, for whom to talk of the Poetic and the Erotic is more natural than to enter the destructive nihilo-psychic battle now prevailing in Europe and America. We must remember the fact that even after all strong points and advantages are investigated through Deconstructionist or Revisionist theories, what will abide as essential values are only the "Aesthetic" and the "Good" together with what is "Newer" and "Stronger," and what is "Sweet," which are truly the final meanings and aims of poetry and literature.

Now, let us reflect how far the Deconstructionist hyperbolic theorems have swollen their heads, trampling those precursor visions. When De-

constructionism is the pragmatic antithetical principle, both to dismantle canons of theory and to undo literary philosophies, its determinate function is canon-reformation for "stronger" reading and writing, that is, norm-reconstitution for decoding the literary core and body, "The Prelogical" and "The Mythical." What we see in the transumptive discourses of Paul de Man, Harold Bloom and Jacques Derrida is a Kenotic psychic battle, the "Parricide" and "Crypt-Eating" of anterior texts and theories such as Plato, Kabbalah, Emerson, Rilke, Nietzsche, Freud, Husserl, Lévi-Strauss, Lacan, Barthes and Frye, which not only over-reads their philosophy but also un-writes their history.

Paul de Man's deconstructionism, a nihilo-epistemological hermeneutics, is an obsessive trial of demystification and de-determination of the absence of textual center in Rilke and Nietzsche, by re-centering and transcending the Lacanian "loss of subject" and the Hegelian "aesthetic center," (*Blindness and Insight, Allegories of Reading*). This is at the same time an enactment of de-historization of his self as literary theme, in order to distance his own Belgian Nazi involvement. De Man's canon-reformation of anti-theoretical reading/writing shows its finality in an "onto-theological hermeneutics" which out-theorizes ontological semiosis, that is, is a method of aesthetic "Decryptage" of the internal "Hypogram" – "monument and crypt" (*The Resistance to Theory*).

Bloom's position of transumptive reading and writing is represented by his notorious "Misreading," a Kenotic emptying-refilling Over-Reading and Over-Writing of "Over-Man," which is also a revisionary "pleasure of influence" as counter-sublime against the repressive "anxiety of influence." His gnostic (and Kabbalistic) "Breaking-of-the-Vessels" principle, namely the parricidal demolition of all precursor theories and dogmas, has developed into a Yahwist determination to "ruin the sacred truths," the strongest "visionary ratio" of subjective meaning, in order to remonumentalize the creator's own "Book of Primal Scene" (*De-Construction and Criticism, Agon, and Ruin the Sacred Truths*).

Derrida has established his cannibalistic principle of the discourse of counter-discourse, "Dissemination", as a method of de-conceptualization to ventrilocate the disciplines of Kant, Hegel, Lévi-Strauss and Barthes (*Dissemination and Difference*). We can see his surmounting of the canon-reformation of un-reading and out-writing, in the proposition of "Ananke," the law of laws, and the strategies of "Crypt-Eating" and "Dissemination," which indirectly reconstitute great literary codes, Saussure's "Transcendental

Signified” and Lacan’s “Zero-Center” (*The Ear of the Other*).

The greatest polemic dispute about Deconstructionism is that it has been condemned as “linguistic nihilism” and “parricidal assimilation.” But even if it is this, we can be assured there are some psychic and chthonic “matrices virtuel”, such as “The Uncanny” of Freud and “The Mythomorphic” of Lévi-Strauss, which are potent effective kernels and sources of literature, not so infirm or fragile as to be easily killed, superseded, or nihilized by verbal controversy.

“The Uncanny,” which is the indefinable mythical power, is what Harold Bloom has adopted, together with the Kabbalistic “Sefirot,” God’s emanation out of an infinite center, for inventing the “Primal Scene” as catastrophe-creation. As Bloom postulates in his recent *Ruin the Sacred Truths*, that “Proust and Kafka, the last exemplars of the sublime, are available to us only as versions of Freud’s uncanny, our conceptual limit for the sublime.” “The Uncanny” evidently indicates the *unheimlich*, unidentifiable locus and source of spiritual life and latent energy of expression, as experienced in D.H. Lawrence’s *Women in Love*. According to this concept, poetry is a re-sacralization, sublimation, ‘ruining the cryptic truths’ in the utmost, to the degree that it is possible as a re-conceptualization of pre/sub-textual vision, out of the ‘source of all drives’ from Chthonic Center up to Psychic Solstice.

We can see this utmost case of “The Uncanny” in the Kenotic poesis of A.R. Ammons, a strategy of emptying-refilling the unwritten, unsaid crypts of precursor-texts with pyramidal psychism. Ammons is one of the strongest of “Strong Poets,” as Bloom has named him. And his “hard writing” and “clear writing” has “Scribbles” in *Worldly Hopes*, is concerned with the “clear thought” of the two insights of Georges Poulet – “sensuous thought which is privileged to move at once to the heart of the work and to share its own life” and “clear thought which is privileged to confer on its objects the highest degree of intelligibility” –

To unwrite the writing, unweave, ravel out
the woven, unsay the spoken, and make hard
to perceive the seen and known – I go about

to happenstance, loose thread, coincidental
margin and find (if on purpose) by accident

the brook dimpling shallow through rocks and
 think nothing clear on that surface or below
 it! and clouds are a fuzzy subject, running
 together in flat continuums or breaking
 filed away or, best and above it all, simply
 dissolving: but the hard writing, the in-chipped
 and scrawled, the cut and trenched, that must be
 made palimpsest (too much truth already out)
 so that the song that is the song of
 the hurt and lost cannot emerge through
 the singing nor any dark taint light:
 someday, I must read the text
 but not now, let it not be now, not today
 already listing with the grievances of avoidance
 but, weatherwise, transparent: or if I am lucky
 I will so encushion it with the wires of
 verseline, so rustle it with stuttering, or
 burn it down with raving, the polish, that failing
 sight will miss the failing seen or get no
 more from it than a haze of sense: my clear
 writing . . . to confuse, subvert, renounce!
 my babbling, to make dumb, my light, to hide!
 perplexity is such that sometimes it must be
 embraced before it will clear, to the deep
 clear, when it may be put aside, as a bee
 puts aside color, pattern, flight when he reaches
 at the stigma's base the pure nectar:
 as I may put writing aside someday to seek to know.

We can see that the virtue and vice of this poem is in its absolute
 deconstructionism, 'unwriting' and 'unsaying' of the authority-truths, a
 summa of anterior 'intelligibilities', and at the same time in the posture of
 reoccurrence, with agonistic, clairvoyant insight, which intends to return
 to the pre-existential 'heart' of 'the deep clear', 'pure nectar', touching the

“mythical knowing.” The poet here saves himself from the destructive undoing and nullification of antecedent concepts and subjects, which is the vice of the “Hyper-Criticism” of such super-intellectuals as Maurice Blanchot and de Man, “domaining and functioning all alone, somewhere in the void.”

Georges Poulet, the Pre-Deconstructionist of the Geneva School, posits, extending Marcel Raymond, that every literary work is a “double reality” of “The Ineffable,” which is the object at its most obscure, at its cloudiest point, and “The Indeterminable,” the subject at its highest point, the transcendence. When we see Ammons’ “Limits,” we recognize that the poet has really these two dimensions in his spiritual vista, which are the ‘limit’ of ‘unknown’, an indeterminable subject, and the revelation of a retrieved ‘lost song’, that is, “mystery,” an “intangible.” ineffable effability –

Since the
unknown’s
truer
than the
known

and since

mystery
can
make a well-known weed
unreal

and since

bent we
break on
time that lets
everything endure
changed

why not take
liberties
and love
what is not

storm the intangible

for the lore
 song's lost in

These epistemological conceits of Ammons prove that “The Uncanny” of Freud (the mythical substance, indefinable and unidentifiable) and “The Mythomorphic” of Lévi-Strauss (the mythical + the proto-figural body) can be acknowledged as a literary matrix for creation, and that “proto-” substance is more important for poetry-making than “hyper-” discursive linguistic power. And, of course, there is no contradiction between this and the fact that Poulet finally prefers the ‘transcendence of mind’, the ‘subjectivity’ over ‘objectivity’ of literature and the critical attitude.

Only it will be necessary to confirm that the psychic impact which is essential for poetry-making should be in balance with the chthonic impact which is a power to give life-energy to literature and that either way no one can displace this “Uncanny” with too much spirituation or the evasive void of discourse, which we see so often in the same “Strong Poet,” John Ashbery, the city-sylvan of New York, however strong and new or sweet his poetic lines may sound.

“The Mythomorphic” is what Lévi-Strauss has postulated as a matrix of mytho-poesis, which is considered to be a bridge to unite “The Epistemic” and “The Mythological”, in contrast to the “reading of minds” and “reading of bodies” of Jean Starobinski, the predecessor of Poulet (*The Raw and the Cooked*).

Jacques Derrida criticizes Lévi-Strauss, claiming that he hypothesizes these too—abstract metaphysical oppositions, “The Sensible” and “The Intelligible,” as literary arch-forms, and by this has made void all ‘center’ and ‘subject’ in giving priority to only the ‘transcendence’ of the concepts of sign. But in spite of this anti-discourse of Derrida, it is obvious that “The Mythomorphic” can be the very ‘center’ to comprehend the two poles, psychic and chthonic, and the role of poets and critics is to crypt-eat that pre-textual body of ideas and tastes. Meanwhile Paul de Man, who fell deep into semiotic nihilism, insisting on the ‘absence of center’ and ‘void of subject’, is quite wrong (*Allegories of Reading*) since, without making sense of the ‘center’ of ‘subject’, which is the pre-textual mass of “The Mythomorphic,” no creative reading or writing that is a positive, demiurgic ‘de-centering’ and ‘de-mystification’ can be operative.

We can put up the case of Seamus Heaney, the farmer-king of Ireland and Professor of Oratory at Harvard, as a good example of mythopoesis via

Lévi-Strauss' "Mythomorphic," "The Sensible" and "The Intelligible."

Glanmore Sonnets

II

Sensings, mountings from the hiding places,
 Words entering almost the sense of touch
 Ferreting themselves out of their dark hutch –
 'These things are not secrets but mysteries,'
 Oisín Kelly told me years ago
 In Belfast, hankering after stone
 That connived with the chisel, as if the grain
 Remembered what the mallet tapped to know.
 Then I landed in the hedge-school of Glanmore
 And from the backs of ditches hoped to raise
 A voice caught back off slug-horn and slow chanter
 That might continue, hold, dispel, appease:
 Vowels ploughed into other, opened ground,
 Each verse returning like the plough turned round.

We imagine "words of sensing" here in "Glanmore Sonnets" II, *Field Work*, stand for the spiritual capability of the poet for engagement in the outer world, by which he reaches the Chthonic Center, "word-hoard of history" to probe the sensible, and after exploring the "mysteries" and "secrets" in the backs, he "raises the voice" to express the intelligible out of them, as "hieroglyphics" of his own story. As Derrida says the function of poetry is to translate out "the untranslatable," a grandmother tongue (*The Ear of the Other*); the voice and wording of Heaney in this work seem to vocalize the illiterate, mythological spellings by the chanting power of 'vowels', in order to change the "old first place" of ground-meaning into a present primal new scene.

In the same way, Heaney re-enacts the Bloomean Kenosis in *Station Island* as a ritualistic purgation, "emptying-refilling," of his own history of soul, which is a re-fashioning of T.S. Eliot's concept of de-historization of the wasteland of modern man.

Station Island

XI

I plunged once in a butt of muddied water
surfaced like a marvellous light ship . . .

to salvage everything, to re-envisage
the zenith and glimpsed jewels of any gift

What came to nothing could always be replenished.
'Read poems as prayers,' he said, 'and for your
penance
translate me something by Juan de la Cruz.'

That eternal fountain, hidden away,
I know its haven and its secrecy
although it is the night.

But not its source because it does not have one,
which is all sources' source and origin. . .

I know no sounding-line can find its bottom,
nobody ford or plumb its deepest fathom . . .
I am repining for this living fountain.
Within this bread of life I see it plain
although it is the night.

According to Frank Kermode, the only English theoretician, the beginning and the end of literature is "The Religious" and "The Secret." It is exactly these 'living fountains' that Heaney is engaged in pursuing in this poem. Because he has the "secrecy" which is both of "The Epistemic" and "The Mythological," and the conviction that he can "replenish" and refill the empty "sources source and origin" by the anti-Kenosis of spiritual Askesis — it is because of this that Heaney expresses here his revisionistic poetics, to read in and to translate out the psychic 'zenith' and the chthonic 'bottom', so that he "re-envisages" the other real "day" out of the "night" of this century's end. The counterpart of Heaney is Geoffrey Hill, one of the three strong poets of England. Aspiring to witness some "Lost Land" of "zenith," of Psychic Solstice, he confronts the "empty dread," the "dark solstice with frost and fire," unlike the soul's joy, the "living fountain" of

Manna. It is because this zenith-triumphalism of Hill is so strong, with too much sublimating Askesis, that he has too little human "bottom," the mother-land, to "seek the real heart."

The co-existence and fusion in Heaney of these oppositionals, "The Epistemic" and "The Mythological," is very important, together with his symbolism of the "cracle-tongue of fire" and the "Omphalos," a vocal pump of the earth, suggesting "The Mythomorphic" which will fix the "eternal fountains" of both the high and the deep into one renovated historical stage.

As we have seen, poetry and poetics may convert the "night of history" into the "eternal day" of my story, which is what Bloom and Derrida have postulated in their Revisionistic "Catastrophe-Creation" and "Dissemination." Here is the reason, the necessity of Revisionistic Kenosis—why we literary men should retrieve the "lost song" in this steep period of the Fin-de-Siècle, in order to unwrite and unspell the song of world-love, which is the real erosgraphy. The only critical point we must consider is that this Kenosis should, as we wish, not be that of parricidal assimilation, but that of sacramentalization, or better, of matri-genetic re-situationalization.

I think we can exclude from our consideration the doctrines of New Historicism. The reason is that though New Historicism is regarded as a new literary theory succeeding Deconstructionism, what Stephen Greenblatt, one of its main proponents, poses is a "power-relation" policy following Michel Foucault, and his strategy of reading the meanings of works via outside contexts is not efficient, or valid, even if his way of "re-situating the aesthetic practice" of the Renaissance and Romanticism may seem valid. And it is the same thing with another New Historicist champion, Frederic Jameson, whose target is to schematize the "standarization of the world" by "the desubjectifying dialectic" from the point of view of Post-Marxism. For his method is anti-literary and anti-psychological, applying the judgments of materialistic measurement to inner contexts; it is based on Adorno of the Frankfurt School, whose norm is "objectification of the aesthetic" by an historical "objective spirit."

If anyone proposes the doctrine of Foucault's will-to-power/will-to-knowledge—"where religion once demanded the sacrifice of bodies, knowledge now calls for experimentation on ourselves, calls us to the sacrifice of the subject of knowledge" (*Hommage à Jean Hyppolite*) our reaction to it should be to affirm that compared with him, Jacques Lacan's psychological agnostic paradox is still more interesting—"the subject is a lost object, and the lost object is the support of the subject" ("Of Structure as an Inmixing

of an Otherness"). And still more memorable is Hegelian onto-generative metaphysics, "to name is to call up the world," which is far more significant than Nietzschean arbitrariness, "the power relation is the general focus of philosophical discourse."

As for my conclusion, we should notice the disastrous nature of the deconstructionist discourse of battle and the language of death, and despair over the pre-empting of empty absolute semiosis rather than the "Transcendental Signified" of Saussure and the "Great Codes" of Northrop Frye. Deconstructionist discourse is dangerous and disastrous, because with such abstract targets, Derrida's disseminative principle must generate a disseminating counter-discourse to deface the center-is-a-function theory of nullification, and Bloom's gnostic Kenosis must challenge the nihilo-logical god of abstraction. When we recognize that literature is a matter of subjectivity probing down into objectivity, and that its essential value is in its spiritual "Aesthetic" and "Goodness," what we can acknowledge as the best formulas for critical canons are rather such revisionary propositions as Georges Poulet's "subjective competence," with its determinate synthetic spirit, decrypting both "The Ineffable" and "The Indeterminable," and the psychic "Unverborgenheit" of Martin Heidegger, that is, the disclosure of meaningfulness into the light, the *a-letheia*.

"The Uncanny" of Freud and "The Mythomorphic" of Lévi-Strauss are also useful approaches, more inceptive and profound in denoting the generative source of literature than the models of other critics. After all, we can perhaps foretell that what will abide as our literary centers/subjects will be "Psycho-Gnostic" in the poetic solstice, and "Mytho-Graphic" in the novelistic, chthonic matrix which these pre-concepts of Freud and Lévi-Strauss immanently convey.

