

# ARTICLES

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## Of Melodrama and Academic Discipleship

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Ever since the late 1960s, scholars have faced a troublesome problem: how to judge scholarship and teaching derived from an outlook not their own. When faculty members have convened to examine a doctoral student, screen job applicants, or decide a tenure case, the debate has frequently settled into a contest of formalists judging Marxists judging humanists judging Derrideans, etc. In the past, scholars might have disagreed over first principles of poetry, human nature, tradition, and so on, but they generally shared ideas of what constitutes a good argument, good evidence, and good style. In the 1950s, a myth critic and a New Critic commenced their interpretations with different concepts and goals in mind, but they rarely debated criteria of valid inference, appropriate evidence, and lucid expression. Cleanth Brooks never accused historicist scholars of subscribing to spurious, outmoded conceptions of knowledge. But in the current climate, in which rival commitments run deep into the most basic questions, argumentation itself is up for grabs, justified only according to the frame, the theory, the ideology of those wielding it.

The problem is exacerbated when the material under review adheres to a line of reasoning founded upon a single individual, an authority who presides over the discourse as guide and exemplar. In that case, scholars are compelled to judge the work for its derivations, as a piece of discipleship to be estimated by the standard set by the master. Academics trained to judge works of criticism by their evidence and inferences, or their erudition and eloquence, are caught short when called to appraise this kind of work. Impersonal standards of clarity, validity, and fluency, it is said, do not apply to performances that model those standards on the example of an intellectual figurehead. When *non-disciples* encounter essays that contain ingenious and labored readings of literature and culture, but which seem to conclude with familiar general principles taken from the master, they hesitate, wondering if *that* is the point. They are taken aback when they serve on search committees and read cover letters that begin, "I am a feminist-Foucauldian who applies cultural and discourse analysis to nineteenth-century American women writers." They sigh when they observe clever graduate students embracing Lacanian psychoanalysis before

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having read widely enough to make their commitments informed and flexible. Asked to evaluate master-derived scholarship, members of tenure committees, editors assessing manuscripts for presses, and professors reviewing books for journals must choose either to read the material in the spirit in which it was written—e.g., use Derridean norms for Derridean criticism—or to examine the material on standards of proof and persuasion, which derive from no single master or school of thought. Each option has its pitfalls: the first makes the reviewer himself into a disciple, the second makes the reviewer into an antagonist—at least from the perspective of the one being reviewed.

This is an impasse that hinders academics in their role as referees. In the present state of affairs, in order to approach the particulars of a derivative work, referees are constrained to enter the system of concepts and rhetoric unique to the *x*-ian mode, accepting a host of premises and phrasings as part of the work's *donnée*. They must accept a system of beliefs and methods, a style, an idiom of idiosyncratic terms, favored locutions, and novel affects lifted from the master's corpus and assimilated by the devotee as a scholarly practice. To judge a de Manian study of Rilke's poetry, one isn't supposed to quibble with the theory of figural language assumed by the study. Partisans claim that that is unfair to the work being judged. One can only ask whether the study invokes the theory correctly and wields it shrewdly. If they disapprove of the framework, if they reject an axiom in the master's thinking, readers are disqualified from estimating the details of the study, for the details rest so firmly upon the axiom that the entire argument is invalidated. The master's thinking is a decisive threshold, a criterion that divides readers into those who admit the framework and those who interrogate it. For the terms and premises unique to a master-based school of thought are not hypotheses to be tested, opinions to be proffered, or surmises to be considered. They are founding postulates, ready commandments that *produce* the interpretations that follow. Lacan's epigrams on the gaze beget a reading of Hitchcock's *Vertigo*. Harold Bloom's conception of poetic influence initiates a series of monographs on Whitman, Williams, Stevens, and Pound. These master postulates are generative, allowing new interpretations to arise and be respected as long as the master's repute remains high.

These frameworks enable interpreters to proceed not only by shaping the outlook of disciples, but also by becoming the subject matter of their readings. Not long after translations of *Écrits*, *Surveiller et punir*, and *De la grammatologie* arrived in the United States, numerous books expounding the dense positions of these theories followed, and with great success. Jonathan Culler's *On Deconstruction* (1982) made its way onto dozens of graduate seminar reading lists, and Jane Gallop's *Reading Lacan* (1985) received an Honorable Mention in the MLA Lowell Award contest. Recent expositions of the masters have grown more stylized in their treatment, and more focussed upon the person—

for example, David Halperin's *Saint Foucault: Towards a Gay Hagiography* (1995), Slavoj Žižek's collection *Everything You Always Wanted to Know About Lacan (But Were Afraid to Ask Hitchcock)* (1992), and John Caputo's *The Prayers and Tears of Jacques Derrida: Religion Without Religion* (1997). These expert studies make the master into a topic unto himself. With the master as a field of inquiry, commentators remain disciples even when they adopt an analytical stance toward the master's vision. Though analysis would seem to undermine the founding act of discipleship—identification with the master as an ego ideal—in fact, the critical distance is erased by the commentator's absorption in the master's thought. When Lacan is criticized for emphasizing a masculinist perspective, the mistake is not simply a generic patriarchal bias, but Lacan's patriarchal bias. Arguments against the definition of a text as an unstable play of semantic/semiotic differences attack the *Derridean* definition of the text as such. Judgment applies not to a concept or argument by itself, but as conceived by the master and contextualized in his corpus. The master is the fount of knowledge and error, the centerpiece of interpretation to be explored by sophisticates and disseminated to initiates.

This is not to say that Lacan et al. are nothing more than pretexts for interpretation. In general, disciples approach the master's work with earnest gravity, and believe he has hit upon a truth too important not to be reiterated. When Joseph Allen Boone begins his study of modernism and sexuality with the assertion, "Michel Foucault's *The History of Sexuality* has schooled contemporary intellectuals into an awareness of the extent to which sexuality is a function of power," one realizes that there is no doubting the speculations in Foucault's little volume.<sup>1</sup> Boone embraces Foucault's terms and thematics so enthusiastically that without them his book *Libidinal Currents* would not just be different—it would not exist at all. In *Telling Time*, Carol Jacobs opens a chapter on de Man with "There is no way to say adequately what the significance of de Man might be."<sup>2</sup> The sentence strikes people who do not inhabit a world in which de Man's significance is crucial as odd, but it does serve an inaugural purpose. Though Jacobs's book includes chapters on Rilke, Wordsworth, and others, it deploys a language of temporality, belatedness, structure, and text throughout, indicating that de Man is not only a subject of the book, but a model for its delivery. Finally, a *diacritics* essay by Eleanor Kaufman called "Falling from the Sky: Trauma in Perec's *W* and Caruth's *Unclaimed Experience*" reveals the inaugural capacity of master frameworks with a bluff declaration: "Before complicating this picture and arguing that falling is not necessarily as traumatic as it might seem, I will elaborate a traumatic reading of *W* as seen through the lens of Cathy Caruth's analysis of trauma in *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative, and History*."<sup>3</sup> Without Caruth's trauma analysis, Kaufman cannot even begin. Even though Caruth is not the direct object of the interpretation, she provides the "lens" through which the actual object, Perec's novel, comes into focus.

Within these assertions by Boone, Jacobs, and Kaufman lies a methodological fact about discipleship as it works in academic settings: the master is prized not only because he harbors the truth, but because he facilitates interpretative labor. Conceiving a system or method with its own idiosyncratic vocabulary and habits of inference, the master provides the interpreter with something to argue, with a new approach to old materials, with an adaptive conceptual machinery that reconfigures fields of study. Master frameworks surround objects that seem to have been exhausted of insight after years of explication by trained inquirers and invigorate them, open them to discovery by a new generation of exegetes. By 1990, Henry James had undergone hundreds of sophisticated theoretical analyses focussed on issues of representation, authorship, and consciousness, cutting-edge commentaries that left rising scholars groping for fresh theses. But with the advent of an “epistemology of the closet,” incipient James critics suddenly possessed a viewpoint of their own, an angle of vision radical not just in its politics, but in its break from older epistemologies. Aspiring Jamesians exploring the thematics of homosocial desire needed to pay no attention to Wayne Booth or Lawrence Holland. The working assumptions and concepts of the old and the new were so different as to render the outlooks incommensurable.

Derrida and other masters granted individuals an identity as professional readers. This is what distinguishes present-day academic discipleship in the humanities from other forms of discipleship, for example, that of religious sects. Here, identity formation coincides with professional formation. The master’s word may mean little outside the university walls, but within academe a subordinate intellectual identity is commonplace and accepted. Whereas forty years ago a scholar who was influenced by *The Verbal Icon* would never refer to himself as a Wimsatt-ian, today a scholar wears such personal badges with a fair degree of solemnity. For an essay to be labeled “Lacanian” causes no harm. The label categorizes the argument into an acknowledged mode of interpretation, with its own concepts and habits of inference. Because the master enjoys prestige in the academic marketplace, the essay gains an automatic legitimacy. The label “This is a Lacanian interpretation of . . .” signifies that the author has studied in the School of Lacan and learned to enact his or her own Lacanian productions. The claim of derivation serves as a union card or entry fee into the forum of humanities research.

The label also instructs readers in how to read the essay, namely, Lacanianly. When evaluators come upon the essay, they must either receive or reject it categorically, *as* Lacanian. Because the disciple’s subscription is holistic, readers cannot say that this aspect of the interpretation is right and this aspect is wrong. Such picking and choosing can occur only when an interpretation is not too system-heavy, when its argument does not seem overly prescribed, as in empirical studies that are directed more by the data they gather than the theories they wish to prove. But with disciple-scholarship, the -ism of the essay

is its enabling framework, which stands or falls as a whole and cannot be implemented at one point and withdrawn at another point. Indeed, as the *diacritics* example earlier reveals, it is the framework which adjudicates the subject matter, not the subject matter which validates the framework. For the disciple, the master framework is simply assumed, not explored or analyzed. For readers and judges, the framework is either afforded or dismissed. Both cases skirt a judgment of the individual essay. Dismissal condemns the essay and every other piece of scholarship that derives from the -ism, no matter how intelligent it may be. But acceptance also precludes judgment, for once one admits the framework, one admits a host of suppositions and evaluative standards as well. Hence the collapse of peer review. For younger scholars struggling to establish themselves, this is one of the more canny features of Derridean analysis, Foucauldian critique, and Lacanian interpretation. Not only do they comprise a set of concepts and beliefs, but they also entail their own peculiar rules of evaluation.

These perspectives replenish the fields of humanist inquiry, providing a storehouse of skeletal interpretations waiting for disciples to flesh them out. Also, they bear the standards by which those interpretations are to be judged. Derrida's early essays delineate complex ontological neologisms like *différance* and embody a critical practice that turns normal evaluative criteria on their head. In a Derridean world, linear arguments are not rigorous; they're naive. Binary logic is not clearheaded, but simplistic, guilty of binarism. Circularity is a virtue, periphrasis a principle, hyper-qualification a necessity. Derridean argumentation moves by dialectical somersaults and phenomenological bracketings to which empirical, logical, historiographical, and pragmatic protocols simply do not pertain. In deconstructive analytics, ordinary rules of evidence and inference are suspended, and often themselves become the object of critique. This epistemological insularity explains why early opponents of Derrida considered his theory and practice not just wrong, but outrageous. Surrounding his seductive aphorisms on text and interpretation with slyly parenthetical side-arguments and coy semi-retractions, Derrida proved too slippery and self-aware to refute. How could a basic correction of one of his misquotations (his distortions of Peirce, for example) apply to a discourse that relentlessly problematized the fidelity of quotation? How could historical facts about speech and writing undermine Derrida's speech/writing opposition when those facts sprang from what Derrida renounced as an ossified positivist historiography? Derrida took away his opponents' weapons of appraisal, converting traditional tools of facts, evidence, validity, and truth into targets of dismantling, leaving no other guides to judgment except Derridean ones.

One must appreciate the tactical success of this disarmament, however fraudulent, anti-intellectual, and stultifying it was. It is one of the bases of Derrida's mastery, as it is of Foucault's and Lacan's, Foucault through an ellip-

tical dialectic that subordinates truth to power, Lacan through an intricate idiom of oracular conundra and pseudo-scientific exempla. This perspectivizing of inquiry frames outsiders as unknowing, and sets the master up as source and measure of all interpretations. One *should* be able to question Derrida and the Derrideans' terms and inferences, to ask whether his conclusions are true or not. Many have and to powerful effect, only to run up against relativist defenses such as, "You are applying an empiricist criterion to Derrida's work," as if *that* discredited the inquiry. This is how the singularity of the master discourse shields disciples from piece-by-piece refutation, rendering them vulnerable only to categorical hostility (opposition to the master). The work becomes representative of the master's thought, and local criticisms are recast as sallies between competing schools.

Disciples thrive on this group antagonism. With the peculiarities of the master's work preventing any examination of rival creeds on common grounds of truth or validity, scholarship turns into a contest of faculty members. Academic debates are conceived as battles between insiders and outsiders, the chosen few and the benighted many. Disciples extend their influence into a cause, compensating for their subservience to the master with an aggressive defense of his ideas. Through academic debate and institutional maneuvers (hirings, tenurings, editing decisions, etc.), the disciple's psychological conflict of inferiority and blessedness is externalized into academic polemics that affirm the ephebe and please the teacher. The identification with the master cannot help but intrude upon ordinary tasks of teaching and administration, and discipleship enters intellectual discussion charged with excitement. Recently, a group of faculty at my institution convened to discuss the Comparative Literature curriculum, concluding that Hegel and a few other theorists were to remain essential constituents of the program. I casually noted the moment in the Introduction to the *Aesthetic* where Hegel announces the termination of poetry and the beginning of philosophy ("the prose of the world"), but had hardly finished when a colleague blurted out, "Ah, but remember de Man tells us that we must read that section rhetorically, that one of the subtlest gestures of art is to negate itself, thereby perpetuating itself." The statement had the air of a ritual claim, as if it had been refined in dozens of class presentations, conference talks, and rereadings of de Man's two or three essays on Hegel. Accompanying the clipped logic of this expression was a fervent certitude, a golden expectation that the utterance of de Man's reminder would enfold the group in a silent recognition of the thinker's authority. Her words spilled forth with a cozy clarity, her eyes brightened as we gazed back at her in what she assumed was assent. For this professor, de Man's interpretation was a live catechism. Her belief that the ultimate meaning of Hegel rested upon de Man's divination yielded a sincere surety of purpose, and staged a mini-drama among us that might have been called "De Man—Pro or Con?"

The encounter signified a disciplinary breakdown. The judgment of what Hegel meant with his statement about art was recast as testimony to the master's truth. This intensity of faith in the master's interpretation converts many an academic colloquy into a theater of devotion, a trial of the master's influence. Disciples cogitate so deeply in the shadow of the master that they cannot help steering professional discussions in the direction of well-grooved imputations, citing the master's opinion whether the debate concerns a curricular decision, a job hiring, or a student exam. Uninitiated faculty wonder why a figure-head should become the center of discussion, but whatever question they face—should they subscribe to the cited opinion?—hardly matches the weightiness and drama which the disciple attaches to the citation. Few issues sustain the disciple's attention if they cannot be elided with a thematic, a problematic, or a bare statement taken from the master's compositions. This is the abiding affect of the master's interpretation: the heightening of emotional stakes in professional decisions. Heady and climactic, the master's reading passes through the disciple's voice tempered with import. What the master said about Rousseau is not just another, superior scholarly treatment of the past. It is an interpretation *and* a coercion, a perspective on Rousseau *and* a set of rules for reading Rousseau, culling forth a stirred piety. Foucault's analysis of "Las Meñinas," Derrida's deconstruction of metaphor in Aristotle, Shoshana Felman's Lacanian explication of *The Turn of the Screw*—these were performances that revealed delicate textual dynamics in the subject matter, and also solicited changes in the practice of reading itself. To disciples, the master's commentary renovated the text, impassioned it, touching those whose professional lives rested upon a set of hermeneutical habits. Here was a reading that radicalized reading, that made interpretation into an adventure of insight. Fifty years ago, students of Robert Penn Warren and Earl Wasserman may have felt the same excitement when interpreting Coleridge and Keats, but they did not aim for emulation. For latter-day novitiates, it is the master's activity that counts. The master at his reading desk marked an epochal instruction, a philosophical melodrama of the grand interpreter altering the course of thought. One should approach this scene of writing with a proper awe, or as Wlad Godzich said in introducing de Man's *Blindness and Insight*, "Caution! Reader at Work!"

This affective dimension of mastery is not to be underestimated, nor is it to be attributed only to the waywardness of disciples. For, the most influential masters of the humanities, Derrida, Lacan, and Foucault, from the start suffused their interpretative acts with a histrionic hermeneutics, surrounded their assertions with earmarks of solicitous drama and momentousness. Derrida's most famous essay, "Structure, Sign, and Play in the Discourse of the Human Sciences," was a prototype master statement, a tuition that sensationalized interpretation into an anxiety-ridden game of certainty and uncertainty and cast the interpreter as an intrepid voyager into the realms of text and play.<sup>4</sup> As

everybody knows, this lecture, composed for the famous symposium on structuralism at the Johns Hopkins Humanities Center in October 1966 (Derrida could not attend and had the paper read for him), began with a dense formulation of the center/structure problem:

The concept of centered structure—although it represents coherence itself, the condition of the *episteme* as philosophy or science—is contradictorily coherent. And, as always, coherence in contradiction expresses the force of a desire. The concept of centered structure is in fact the concept of a freeplay based on a fundamental ground, a freeplay which is constituted upon a fundamental immobility and a reassuring certitude, which is itself beyond the reach of the freeplay. With this certitude anxiety can be mastered, for anxiety is invariably the result of a certain mode of being implicated in the game, of being caught by the game, of being as it were from the very beginning at stake in the game. (Derrida, 248)

These sentences cap Derrida's disquisition upon the impossibility of closing a text, of determining its significations forever, of appealing to an un-interpret-able signified in order to regulate the play of differences within. Derrida exposes the center/structure model as fraught with contradiction, as a subtle conservation that shelters the center from itself becoming textualized. Although readers must center the text in order to comprehend it, the center has no metaphysical sanction, only a provisional one. Claims to ground the text in an extra-textual reality are to be de-centered, re-implicated in the machinations they seek to subdue. The point has become a given in literary and cultural studies, rendering truth-claims and fact-claims about a text suspect and backward. Old centers which governed textual analysis—God, intention, etc.—now stand as nostalgic strategies designed to contain the insecurities of the "game" or to privilege a discourse. Interpretations striving to limit the meaning of a text—for example, biographical studies of the author's social world—may add information about the work, supply contextual knowledge about genre, philology, or historical content, and raise the plausibility of one reading being better than another. But no study will entirely exhaust a text of ambiguity, polysemy, and play. The more an interpretation strives to center the structure and stabilize the workings of its parts, the more it reveals its ultimate motive, namely, to curtail the play. Such interpretations are anti-interpretative, broaching the text only to de-textualize it.

Derrida's dismantling of the center has proven a mighty requital to empirical forms of textual scholarship, and a solace to younger scholars who feel their belatedness most acutely when trying to publish in well-researched areas. However, the appeal of "Structure, Sign, and Play" lies not only in its dextrous logic and professional convenience. The deconstruction argues for the perpetuity of interpretation and undercuts the grandiose claims of any single interpretation to circumscribe the text, but it in no way diminishes the magnitude of interpretation *per se*. On the contrary, Derrida's description (in its American translation) ascribes to interpretation a critical ardor, a histri-



onic threshold matching the epochal turns of Pascal's wager, Freud's founding analysis of his own dreams, Heidegger's reopening of the question of Being, and other philosophical touchstones. For Derrida, centering is not just an intellectual technique. It founds the "coherence" of thought, the "condition of science." It serves not simply a hermeneutical function, but "expresses the force of a desire." It yields not merely semantic results, but emotive satisfactions, the comforts of certainty. At its heart lies not a truth or a meaning, but anxiety, which Heidegger explored as an encounter with nothingness, but which Derrida here cites with a resounding tricolon on "the game." Sprinkled among these pronouncements are several intensifiers, absolutist tags that accent the momentousness of reading: "itself," "as always," "in fact," "invariably," "the very"—not just "coherence," but "coherence *itself*," not just "from the beginning," but "from the *very* beginning."

Derrida's stylistics turn interpretation into a polarized drama of self and text, whose protagonist at first believes that the antagonist (the text) can be domesticated with a centered reading, and when that *hubris* is exploded, responds with a Rousseauistic nostalgia for the "absent origin" or a Nietzschean "joyous affirmation of the free play of the world" (264). Readers choose either a "fundamental ground" or unrestricted "freeplay." They seek a "fundamental immobility" and "reassuring certitude" or accept "being implicated . . . caught . . . at stake in the game." The text is a philosophical threshold through which the interpreter exercises his or her deepest commitments—and fears. No longer is the interpreter a secondary exegete, glossing in his quiet archive the semantics of canonical sentences. A reader's decisions mark a world view in action, an ontological insecurity exerting itself upon the text, an anxiety that (ever since *Being and Time*) shapes the presuppositions of mental life. What an interpreter does with a text determines what one does with the world, how one behaves, who one is.

This is a melodrama hard for professional readers to resist. People who do not suffer interpretation as anxiety or who see pragmatic or metaphysical ways past it regard Derrida's dramaturgy as an immature pretense, but to the professionally insecure the "game" is all-encompassing. Raising interpretation into a dreadful or joyous ontological gambit, Derrida ennobles the analysis of texts and glamorizes the theorist. Reading a poem with Derridean care requires a bold confrontation: truth, meaning, transcendence, and certainty are pitted against interpretation, text, the sign, and desire. Interpreters who embrace this philosophical agon possess circumspection, self-consciousness, good faith, and courage. They face the anxieties of freeplay head on, and forgo the spurious resolutions of the center. This steadfast de-centering mode is the vocation of Derridean readers, the academic practice that in the 1970s evolved into a mission against the false gods of humanism and Platonism, which Derrida had deconstructed in the 1960s. Derrida's critique of the center opened the world to creative and nervous interpretations, and his philosophical theatrics ex-

alted the exercise and legitimated the doer. All of the ingredients of professional discipleship in the humanities were in place. Aspiring scholars and teachers donned an identity—"I am a Derridean"—and joined an activity recognized in the academy as a valid form of inquiry, yet one rehearsing a drama of personal, philosophical, and institutional tensions. Now, when they sit down to read a text, interpreters enter a restive debate of conceptual contraries (meaning vs. text, center vs. play) and academic camps (those who affirm play vs. those who shun it, Derrideans vs. non-Derrideans). In Derrida's vision, interpretation implicates the *very* purpose of reading *itself*. The nature of reading and the contest of readers license interpreters to offer their conclusions not as a determination of the text's meaning, but as the declaration of personal beliefs and institutional affiliation. Interpretation becomes a medium of psychic and academic identity-formation.

Early respondents found numerous logical holes in deconstructive arguments, but Derrida's theory of interpretation imparted just enough hermeneutical wit to impress literary scholars with philosophical ambitions, and enough nimble disquietude to absorb aspiring interpreters. It would not be difficult to find similar sensational characterizations of analysis in Foucault and Lacan. When Foucault presents his celebrated "Discourse on Language," he begins by noting evocatively the problems of beginning, referring to Molloy's voice whispering in his ear "I must go on; I can't go on," and then supposing:

A good many people, I imagine, harbour a similar desire to be freed from the obligation to begin, a similar desire to find themselves, right from the outside, on the other side of discourse, without having to stand outside it, pondering its particular, fearsome, and even devilish features.<sup>5</sup>

Foucault proceeds to highlight the "perilousness" of speech, the "powers" and "dangers" and "ponderous, awesome materiality" of discourse, the exclusions and prohibitions of the powers that seek to control it. Such a description captivates individuals who have experienced speech codes as a threat, media representations as an indignity, judicial rulings as a restraint upon their desire, and gives them an idiom of discursive danger and social suppression in which to recount their history.

Lacan offers an equally melodramatic description when he attributes psychic difficulties to a primordial violence that all things undergo when they are represented in a language. In "The Function and Field of Speech and Language," he writes: "Thus the symbol manifests itself first of all as the murder of the thing, and this death constitutes in the subject the eternalization of his desire."<sup>6</sup> In "The Signification of the Phallus," we read, "the signifier has an active function in determining certain effects in which the signifiable appears as submitting to its mark, by becoming through that passion the signified."<sup>7</sup> Representation as "murder" and signification as "passion"—these are over-

heated terms. One might agree that, in a fanciful extension, the signifier kills the thing by standing for it, and the signified submits to the process as a kind of self-sacrifice. But to take these metaphors too far is to lose one's critical bearings, to give in to a Lacanian affect.

In Derrida, Foucault, and Lacan, disciples discovered that interpretation could be grand, mysterious, risky, and impassioned. Reading turned into an enthusiasm, a renewal of the master's tutelage smoothly adjusted to scholarly articles and classroom presentations. The unique epistemology of the master frameworks protected the affective dimension from criticism, for what did logical and rational norms of inquiry like the principle of parsimony have to do with a Derridean involution or a Lacanian formula? Traditional conceptions of truth and inference broke down into Derridean, Foucauldian, and Lacanian conceptions, each with its own dramaturgy. Disciples enjoyed these schools of thought as an avant-garde academic practice and as a secure psychic investment, a workable combination of the professional and the personal. The masters raised the stakes of interpretation to acute limits, and many professors and graduate students found the framing too sensational, dignifying, and practicable to resist.

This commitment has introduced a hitch in the practice of peer review. *Non-disciples* who are asked to evaluate a disciple's work confront it not just as a piece of scholarship, but as an academic and psychological phenomenon. Facing an alien epistemology and a curious melodramatic aura, referees feel alienated from the material. Sitting on a search committee with colleagues who set their various masters up as the standard by which to measure job candidates, non-disciples foresee that the selection process will soon develop into a competition of followers. Discipleship separated the discipline of literary studies into sects, each with its own idiom and standards. It solidified the partition through a seductively intense drama of reading, erecting emotional borders between one school of thought and another. But enthusiasts in these camps still occupy the same fields and departments, and must come together to administer a discipline and assess one another. Sectarian thinking may have permitted scholars to identify each other handily and surmise the politics of this or that department, journal, and organization, but it also robbed practitioners of common grounds for decision-making.

This scission disables disciples as well as non-disciples. Along with the psychic needs it satisfied, identification with the master was a pathway into the profession, a formation of readers into certified interpreters. But having joined the professoriate and assumed the responsibilities of their position, disciples discovered that they have no other decision-making criteria but a formative one, namely, their identification. And because their identification with the master is non-transferable, their judgment has at best a weak disciplinary relation to that of their colleagues. They, too, have no grounds for judging work that subscribes to a different set of principles than their own.

One might envision ways of overcoming intellectual differences between colleagues in literature and language departments by insisting that they re-dedicate themselves to scholarly ideals such as independence of mind, observance of logical and empirical standards, respect for learning, intelligence, and liberality. But discipleship involves more than just intellectual fealties. It is a process of identity-formation, and so includes a deep affective component. The master exercises his pull not only on principle, but also through pathos. The consequent melodrama of the interpreter is antithetical to collective professional activities such as reforming a curriculum or conducting a job search. Intellectual disagreements among members of a tenure committee may be arbitrated by the ideals postulated earlier, but affective schisms offer no bases for mediation. A humanist approaches the tenure materials in a mood of high seriousness and regard for tradition, while a Foucauldian queer theorist approaches them in a mood of partisan indignation and enthusiasm for political change. Each person may have good reasons for his or her attitude, but the latter tends to be inflexible, to convert the tenure decision into either/or questions deriving from Foucault himself, with lots of feeling thrown in. Emerson once wrote, "Our moods do not believe in one another." Once professional positions rest upon affective, disciple-like commitments, the same thing happens: humanities colleagues do not believe in one another. Certainly, a thoroughgoing intellectual and emotional embrace of one's beliefs is praiseworthy, but in disciplinary situations, scholars and teachers must cooperate with colleagues who hold different beliefs. The department colloquium, committee meeting, graduate seminar, and undergraduate classroom are settings in which inquirers trade ideas and argue opinions, but the emotional investments accompanying them will not be bartered. Unless these affects are recognized and removed from academic judgment, the impasses plaguing the humanities will only get worse.

## Notes

1. Joseph Allen Boone, *Libidinal Currents: Sexuality and the Shaping of Modernism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998), 1.
2. Carol Jacobs, *Telling Time: Levi-Strauss, Ford, Lessing, Benjamin, de Man, Wordsworth, Rilke* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1993), 142.
3. Eleanor Kaufman, "Trauma in Perce's Wand Caruth's *Unclaimed Experience*," *diacritics* 28 (1998): 44–53.
4. Jacques Derrida, "Structure, Sign, and Play in the Discourse of the Human Sciences," in *The Structuralist Controversy: The Languages of Criticism and the Sciences of Man*, ed. Richard Macksey and Eugenio Donato (Baltimore and London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1970), 247–65. Further references to this work will be cited in the text.
5. Michel Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge and the Discourse of Language*, trans. A. M. Sheridan Smith (New York: Pantheon, 1972), 215.
6. Jacques Lacan, *Ecrits: A Selection*, trans. Alan Sheridan (New York: Norton, 1977), 104.
7. *Ibid.*, 284.