

Text, context, intertext*

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Summary

The etymology of the terms *text*, *context* and *intertext* is traced as an introduction to an exposition of their linguistic and poetic post-structural usage. In this respect some problems are indicated. Finally the possible application of deconstruction criticism in teaching pre-graduate students is shown.

The post-structuralist view of the text as process or productive activity is found to be compatible with historical criticism. Since historical contexts are inexhaustible and of necessity textualised, the methodological field of the intertext is advanced as the site of interaction between text, context (genetic and citational), and the critic's strategic re-citing of the text.

Opsomming

Die etimologie van die terme *teks*, *konteks* en *interteks* word nagegaan as 'n inleiding tot 'n eksposisie van hulle linguistiese en poëtiese post-strukturele gebruik. Sommige probleme in hierdie verband word aangedui. Ten slotte word die moontlike toepassing van dekonstruksiekritiek in die onderrig van voorgraadse studente aangetoon.

Daar word bevind dat die post-strukturalistiese beskouing van die teks as 'n proses of produktiewe aktiwiteit verenigbaar is met historiese kritiek. Aangesien historiese kontekste onuitputlik is en noodwendig getekstualiseerd is, word die metodologiese gebied van die interteks voorgestel as die terrein van interaksie tussen die teks, die konteks (geneties en siterend) en die kritikus se strategiese hersitering van die teks.

It is my intention to declare my position in relation to certain contentious literary theories: contemporary theories of text, context, and intertext, to be specific. This territory, the domain of post-structuralism, is hazardous ground, as many will know, and I have no doubt that some of my younger colleagues, more familiar with the traps and pitfalls of the subject than I am, will find much to quarrel with, much to correct, and perhaps much to amuse in my address. If as a result I find my chair lined with thorns instead of silk, why, this is surely preferable to lapsing into a padded somnolence. In the time at my disposal, what follows will be neither a rigorous nor a comprehensive exposition, but it will serve my purpose to isolate a few key issues.

In the last decade a new emphasis on the word 'text' and the related concept of textuality has become apparent in the fields of literary theory and criticism, as well as in those developing areas, adjuncts we might say, of linguistics devoted to discourse analysis and pragmatic theory. The word 'textuality', incidentally, is not a nasty new coinage; it was current in the nineteenth century, although, in that age, it meant the virtue of adhering strictly to the scriptures and not, as in some contemporary usage, the virtue of adhering to nothing at all. It is probably true to say the word 'text' has never

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been as popular in English as it is today, even in the literary domain. In the entire Shakespeare canon, for example, the word occurs only 13 times, and in *The Canterbury Tales*, as far as I can establish, there are 16 occurrences (Spevack, 1973; Tatlock, 1963). The emergence of this term in much contemporary theory as a preferred way of referring to any written or even spoken discourse would suggest a terminological, theoretical, or scientific reappraisal, and it is to this question that I should like to address myself initially.

The words *texte* and *tixte* entered the Middle English lexicon from the Norman French sources *tixte* and *tiste* current in the twelfth century. The Latin origin for the Romance words is, of course, the noun *textus*, first used in a literary context in the first century A. D. by Quintillian to denote the style, structure, or texture of a literary work, but not the work itself. By the Middle Ages the Latin usage had been transferred to denote the Gospels in Holy Scripture, and it is in the broader sense of the scriptures, the Gospels, or a short passage of scripture that *texte* appears in Middle English. But not exclusively, for in the thirteenth century the word is used to denote other, secular writings as well. We read, for example, in Stone's translation of *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*: "The tale of the contentions of the true knights/Is told by the title and text of their works . . ." (lines 1515–16).

Hence we move to the dominant modern meaning of 'text' as the actual wording of any written document, or the narrower meaning of the authentic, original wording of a written work. It is not surprising, however, that in Medieval and early Renaissance times the scarcity of manuscripts and the labour of copying led to a tendency to identify texts with the manuscripts themselves. In one usage, 'text' denoted the actual calligraphy employed in the manuscript, hence we find in Shakespeare's *Love Labour's Lost* the phrase 'Fair as a text B in a copybook' (a reference to a love letter received by Rosaline – act 5, scene 2). Again, in *Twelfth Night*, when Olivia asks Orsino's messenger Viola 'Where lies your text?', Viola accounts for the absence of a letter with the reply 'In Orsino's bosom', thereby giving the text an expected physical location, and provoking Olivia's astonished response: 'In his bosom! In what chapter of his bosom?' (act 1, scene 5). Apart from the equation of texts with books and other documents, we may note in passing the connotations of reverence, veneration, and authority which derive from the scriptural associations and the emphasis on authenticity.

Further details of the word's descent from the Indo-European root are echoed by modern theorists. Roland Barthes, for example, points out that 'the metaphor of the text is that of the *network*', and he refers to 'its weave of signifiers' (1977a:161, 159). This usage echoes the derivation of *textus* from the Latin verb *texo*, meaning originally 'to weave' a fabric or web. Again, Northrop Frye, concerned with the genesis of texts, remarks: 'the father of a poem is much more difficult to identify than the mother' (1957:98). He goes on to identify the mother with nature or reality, and claims that the father is not the poet but his subject, reminding us that the 'onlie begetter' of Shakespeare's sonnets was not the poet but the master-mistress of his passion: Mr W. H. and the dark lady. Now the Greek root of the Latin *texo* is the stem *tek-*, found in the aorist form (*etekon*) of the verb *tikto* meaning 'to beget'

offspring. A close semantic link with the Sanskrit root *tak-* is established in the verb *taksh* and the noun *takman*, having the literal phrasal meaning 'to make a child'. The progress, then, from the primitive root corresponds to a semantic history beginning at conceiving and child-bearing, shifting to weaving in particular and constructing in general, and thereafter, as a noun, the style of composition, the Gospels and scripture, calligraphy, the physical written document, until the modern abstraction of the wording of a written work is reached.

This schematic outline of the etymology (we say, genealogy) of 'text' is not only of interest *per se*, but it serves to illustrate a technique often used by contemporary deconstructionist critics to prise free the word or signifier from its bondage to a given meaning or signified and thus promote the desired 'slippage', 'spillage', or 'free play' of the text. But I shall return to this heady stuff later and in the meantime turn my attention to the linguists.

In making these necessarily brief remarks on linguistic theory I must stress that I do not share the aversion of many academic critics to formal linguistics despite the dual commitment of those critics to a literature *and* a language (a commitment which was emphasized in the Inaugural address of the present Head of the Department of English in 1964), and despite the relevance of much current work in discourse analysis and text linguistics to the literary domain. The Russian linguist Sergei Gindin points to two important characteristics of texts. He says:

1. A text is a "quantum" of communicative activity possessing relative autonomy (distinctness) and unity (integrity).
2. A text is a higher unit than a sentence and possesses its own structure not reducible to that of a single sentence (1978:261).

The reference here to a 'communicative activity' rather than a physical object or psychological structure accords well with contemporary literary text theory, which views the text as a process or productive activity rather than as a product. Then, too, the attribute of autonomy or distinctness seems intuitively right, but 'unity' is vague. Here we need to turn to western linguists such as M.A.K. Halliday and Ruquaiya Hasan for more clarity (1976). They find the prerequisite for 'textness' (that is, the well-formed text) to lie in the existence of cohesion or cohesive ties amongst the sentences comprising the text. These ties are describable within the linguistic domain and do not lie in the extra-linguistic sphere of pragmatics. Halliday spreads a very wide net indeed with as few as five categories of cohesion: reference, substitution, ellipsis, conjunction, and lexical cohesion.

This last-mentioned, lexical cohesion, is a tie which includes not only the repetition of words but any other semantic relation, such as synonymy, antonymy, hyponymy, and the looser 'field co-membership' as in 'sin . . . flesh . . . human nature . . . corruption . . . death.' This may seem very elementary, but it is an intricate and difficult task to disentangle a dozen or more strands of cohesive words extending right through a text. Once accomplished, however, the loose strands may suggest a realignment of semantic nodes, or they

may be re-entwined in different ways, often revealing and suggestive of alternative readings.

Other workers in this field, including Stephen Levinson (1983), Teun van Dijk (1977), Michael Stubbs (1983), Gillian Brown and George Yule (1983), find Halliday and Hasan's cohesion too limiting a criterion and advance the notion of *coherence* to account for the fact that features other than those susceptible to grammatical description may be sufficient to establish a well-formed text. These authors point out that incoherent collocations of sentences may easily be constructed despite abundant cohesive ties, and that the lack of coherence may be ascribed, to use Brown and Yule's term, to the absence of 'underlying semantic relations', that is to say, semantic relations which are not explicit or realized in the text but which may be inferred from what is given (Brown; Yule, 1983:195). This is how, for example, by using an extra-linguistic logic of inference and association, one may, as it were, plaster over the gaps and cracks in a fragmented stream-of-consciousness passage from the works of James Joyce or William Faulkner.

It should be noted in this regard that, whereas the linguists are concerned with accounting for 'textness' or textuality in terms of cohesion and coherence – the bonding of textual components – producing ideally a univocal meaning, contemporary deconstruction theory finds textuality in the falling apart of the text, in the manifestation of its endless equivocation and paradoxicality, in its semantic indeterminacy. It is not surprising that the linguists' textual paradigm is spoken and referential discourse, while that of the deconstructionists is philosophical writing and literature.

New Criticism, too, that noble scion of Cambridge close reading techniques developed in the 1920s, while particularly sensitive to irony, ambiguity, and paradox in literary texts, is largely preoccupied with hermeneutic (interpretative) strategies whereby a semantic closure, a determined range of meaning may be established for the text. In this regard, Jonathan Culler's summary of Wolfgang Iser's account of hermeneutical reading is relevant:

Iser tells of the reader actively filling in gaps, actualizing what the text leaves indeterminate, attempting to construct a unity, and modifying the construction as the text yields further information (1983:69).

Deconstruct this statement and we find an assertion that the text *is* fragmented, potential, indeterminate and loose. Interpretation, therefore, creates a radically new text.

Early textual structuralism and semiology is no less affirmative of the closure of meaning than New Criticism, although, in seeking to expose the underlying systems and structures shared by different texts or present in a given text, it is more severely reductive in its effects. Lévi-Strauss, for example, following Troubetzkoy and Jakobson, focuses on binary oppositions and unconscious infrastructures in his studies of myth in the 1950s. He reduces all the versions of the Oedipus myth to the following formulation: 'the overrating of blood relations is to the underrating of blood relations as the attempt to escape autochthony is to the impossibility to succeed in it' (here

'autochthony' is to be understood as the belief in a primitive race springing from the soil) (1955:434). This, Lévi-Strauss insists, is what the myth in all its versions *means*, thereby demonstrating what is, to my mind, the unwholesomely rigid and reductive influence of the Prague School on structuralist method. Nevertheless, the semiologists' espousal of Saussure's postulate of the linguistic sign provides an escape from the doctrine of the irreducible kernel of truth or meaning in a text.

Saussure maintains that the linguistic sign relates a signifier (very loosely, a word) and a signified (a concept or meaning) (1960:66–69). Three features of this relationship are crucial to the shift from semantic monism to semantic pluralism. First, the relationship between word and concept, is arbitrary and conventional not causal and necessary. In other words, those of Jacques Lacan in fact, there is a 'cleavage' or 'bar' between the signifier and the signified. Second, the sign relates a word to a concept, not to external reality. Presumably the so-called real world of objects and events stands in some kind of genetic relationship to the semantic system, but the linguistic sign does not incorporate this relationship. Third, both the signifiers and the signifieds are identifiable only through differences, not as metaphysical essences or presences. As Saussure puts it: 'A linguistic system is a series of differences of sound combined with a series of differences of ideas' (1960:120). Or, we may say, the linguistic system is made up of differential relationships not discrete essences.

It is these attributes of the sign which permit meanings to shift in relation to signifiers, which undermine the alleged directly referential or mimetic function of language (especially in the case of literary texts), and which prevent the closure of the text on a central semantic presence.

Moving on to post-structuralist or deconstructionist theory, we should note first of all Jacques Derrida's direct attack on the traditional logocentric view of textuality (1976). By logocentrism in relation to texts Derrida means chiefly the precedence accorded to speech over writing by linguists and the persistent tendency of readers to locate the supposed 'centre' of the text, to close the text on a determined meaning allegedly *present* at that centre. Despite his approval of Saussure's insistence that both the linguistic signifiers and signifieds rest on a system of difference instead of presence (Heidegger's *Dasein*: 'being-there'), Derrida finds difference alone insufficient to account for the origin and function of textuality. The reason is that difference is itself a passive product requiring a source, and unless this source is a 'being-there', a presence, we are faced with an infinite regression. To resolve this problem Derrida posits a principle, strategy, manoeuvre combining activity with the passivity of difference. This strategy is called *différance* and is spelt with an 'a' as the final vowel instead of an 'e' (1981:24–32). *Différance* compacts the words 'difference', 'differing', and 'deferring' (delaying). *Différance* as process or active principle initiates the language system by 'differing' the world, by writing in the spaces enabling the passivity of difference to become established: edible and inedible, light and dark, heat and cold, sun and moon and stars, and so on. This proto-writing, to use Culler's term, is a necessary condition for the emergence of both speech and graphic writing as we know it.

Since the semantic field is based on differential relations, every meaning ascribed to a textual feature bears with it innumerable traces of absent meanings: opposites, alike, hierarchies, classifications, concurrent meanings, etymological lineages, and the like. Derrida says: 'Nothing, either in the elements or in the system, is anywhere simply present or absent. There are only, everywhere, differences and traces of traces;' and again, speaking of meaning: 'Meaning must await being said or written in order to inhabit itself, and in order to become, by differing from itself, what it is: meaning' (1981:26; 1978:11). This is the source of *différance* as deferral, the refusal to allow the signified to settle into presence, so to speak, but instead to pick its endless way through the labyrinth of the signifieds.

Derrida's deconstruction is not, I must insist, an invitation to indulge in completely free association, to make a text mean anything at all: no, the deferment of meaning is subject to philological findings and linguistic norms, unless the text itself subverts those norms and, in so doing, throws up new barriers inhibiting total licence. There are rules to the game after all, however ephemeral they may be.

But to return to the post-structuralist text, here, fleetingly, are some further axioms and requirements for textuality.

The text is not an object but a process; it exists only in the activity of production. This is not to say that the reader creates the text (otherwise what function do these marks on the page have?) but that he realizes it, or, rather, that he realizes a multiplicity of texts as *différance* begins its inevitable progress through the textual web. Reading is an interactive process; while the reader exercises his freedom, the text imposes its constraints.

It follows that the text is incorrigibly plural, not unitary, 'architectonic', to borrow a word from Barthes.

The text as *le pluriel* subverts classification, calling into question the monolithic system of genre which has descended to us from Aristotle.

The text is an organism: it may grow, change, evolve, decay, even multiply as it is rewritten in successive critical essays.

The laws of the text do not correspond with those of the natural world. To the extent that the literary text is realistic, it dissembles its own nature (Barthes, 1977a:156-64).

This last point concerning the apparent realism of many texts is called the *vraisemblable* by Tzvetan Todorov and others. According to Todorov:

... one can speak of the *vraisemblance* of a work in so far as it attempts to make us believe that it conforms to reality and not to its own laws. In other words, the *vraisemblable* is the mask which conceals the text's own laws and which we are supposed to take for a relation with reality (1968:2-3).

Since the *vraisemblable* is that feature of a text which establishes an illusory conformity to reality, to the world as we experience it, I shall turn aside from 'text' for a while to consider briefly the question of context. The Latin verb *contexo* means 'to interweave' or 'to connect', and the past participle *contextus* denotes things cohering or connected together. Hence in our modern

usage the situational context is something that accompanies or is joined to the text. Halliday and Hasan (1976:21), following Malinowski (1949:296–336), regards the situational context as the extra-linguistic factors relating to the text. The question to be asked, he says, is ‘what are the external factors affecting the linguistic choices that the speaker or writer makes?’.

The study of situational context forms an important part of the linguistics-related discipline of pragmatics. I can do no more here than list some of the features of context which are receiving attention at present. Brown and Yule (1983:38–39), following Hymes (1972), mention features such as the speaker (writer), the listener (reader) and their relationship, the audience, the topic, the setting (including time, place, and the physical disposition of participants and objects), the channel of communication (for example, speech, writing, gestures), the code (i.e. language, dialect, and style), the event (for example, a church service, a lecture), and the purpose or intention of communication. Brown and Yule also emphasize the importance of describing what the interlocutors are *doing* in their utterances, i.e. what speech acts (in the sense of Austin and Searle) are performed, what references, presuppositions, implications, and inferences are made (1983:27–35). A great deal of work, most of it relevant to literary scholarship, is being done in this field.

One aspect of context that deserves special mention is the ability of certain words called deictics or shifters to refer directly from the text to the context while remaining semantically inexplicit. The statements ‘Man cannot live by bread alone’ and ‘Gold is a heavy metal’ are fully interpretable within the grammatical system, but the command ‘Load that onto the truck this afternoon’ is dependent on contextual information to establish what is to be loaded onto which truck on which afternoon. In other words, context is often indispensable in order to flesh out the meaning of an utterance. And Derrida, so often reviled as exclusively text-orientated, has this to say in the essay ‘Living On’: ‘This is my starting point: no meaning can be determined out of context . . .’ (1979:81). He goes on, however, to qualify this in an interesting way that I shall come to shortly.

Literary texts are by convention fictional and this is their most striking contextual feature. Unlike spoken discourse, in which the context is logically and ontologically prior to the utterance, the fictional context of a literary text (which may or may not resemble the real world) must be constructed, often painstakingly, from the naming, description, and deixis present in the text. But what, one may ask, of the *real* context in which the text was written (often called the genetic context)? This context may be coded in the text in many ways, the most obvious being the style of writing, the verbal finger-print of the author. But apart from these codes, where is the context? Consider that most intimate and confessional form of writing, the love letter. The panting recipient, reading the missive, fondly imagines she is in direct communication with her absent lover. Of course, this is not the case. The situational context at this moment is that of a reader reading and what she engages is not her desperate lover writing but a text written. The writing context is a past event, and where, pray, does one find a past event? I have never encountered one. It follows that the written text, in contrast to the being-written text, has no

context apart from the being-read one, and that, precisely as in the case of the literary fiction, the genetic context must be reconstructed from the materials at hand.

The attempt to reach out through the text into the void of the past is one of the major problems besetting the historian, who studies not events and facts but texts, contextless texts, from which he strives to reconstruct the historical context. You will gather, that the factual status of written texts is a highly problematic issue, since all texts reach us in a being-read present detached from the being-written past. The verification of fact in the historical text is limited to corroboration and to weighing the evidence in the scales of probability. Even the eye-witness account is subject to this limitation, for, as the witness testifies, say in the judicial forum, that A was murdered by B in such-and-such a manner, he does not *see* the murder he saw once; instead he recites a text inscribed in complex electro-chemical code within the cells of his brain – what we call memory – a text just as devoid of context as the graphological one.

Perhaps it is considerations such as these, that the text, once written, breaks away from the semantic confines of its genetic context and enters the free domain of textuality, which led Barthes in 1968 to proclaim ‘The Death of the Author’ and the irrelevance of his life and times to the text (1977b). But despite what I have already affirmed about the disappearance of the context I must admit that I find Barthes’ position an alarming one. This is because much of the context is frequently recoverable, with corroboration, from a variety of textual sources: letters, diaries, recorded conversations, memoirs and lives by contemporaries, prefaces, pamphlets, newspapers, occasional reminiscences in a variety of journals, and so on. This being the case, the question, to my mind, is not whether we should use this material (of course we should) but how it should be used. Barthes himself answers this question in his attack on the author and contextually orientated criticism. He says:

To give a text an Author is to impose a limit on that text, to furnish it with a final signified, to close the writing . . . when the Author has been found, the text is ‘explained’ – victory to the critic (1977b:147).

The sarcasm aside, Barthes’ argument is slanted, for he refers to a form of historical criticism, long-outdated in the Anglo-American tradition, which seeks to close the text on the issue of authorial intention and authorial pronouncements on the text. That contextual material can be used to the opposite effect, namely to open the text and increase the play of meaning, to intensify semantic pluralism, can be demonstrated by a multitude of examples from among which I choose Browning’s *Caliban Upon Setebos*.

In this monologue Browning takes over the entire setting of Prospero’s isle in *The Tempest* and presents Shakespeare’s monster, Caliban, first thinking and then speaking about his implacably wrathful and capricious god, Setebos. The god has forbidden Caliban, so he thinks, to speak about him or even to mention his name, so Caliban’s discourse is an act of defiance directed against

the god he hates and fears intensely. Caliban's monologue does not merely hug the contours of primitive anthropomorphic theology, however. While the illusion of an aboriginal, semi-evolved human mind at work is skilfully maintained, the text opens out onto the entire forum of contemporary Victorian religious controversy.

At the point in which he breaks into speech, Caliban thinks:

...to talk about Him, vexes – ha,
 Could He but know! and time to vex is now,
 When talk is safer than in winter-time.
 Moreover Prosper and Miranda sleep
 In confidence he drudges at their task,
 And it is good to cheat the pair, and gibe,
 Letting the rank tongue blossom into speech (lines 17–23).

And then he speaks: 'Setebos, Setebos, and Setebos!'

When Browning wrote this poem late in 1859 it was his first creative literary work for over four years. Since the publication of the two volumes of his *Men and Women* poems in 1855 he had not set pen to paper. The reason was his embitterment at the unenlightened and hostile reception of these poems by press and public, poems over which he had expended enormous creative energy and with which he had hoped at last to achieve some measure of recognition. The long, uneasy dormancy which ensued ended as *Caliban* erupted into being. These minimal details suffice to establish a homologous relationship between the text and its context, for Caliban is to Setebos as Browning is to his critics: Caliban, blend of human and beast; the poet branded a barbarous, grotesque versifier; both resentfully silent in the face of the adversary let 'the rank tongue blossom into speech' in defiance of the adversary and the consequences. This relationship does not close, limit, or determine the text in any way whatsoever. On the contrary, by contributing to the plurality of its structure, it enhances the free play of meaning and extends the variety of readings. In short, contextual reconstruction extends the possibilities of textual deconstruction.

This view will be further endorsed by completing the quotation from Derrida advanced earlier. He says: 'no meaning can be determined out of context, but no context permits saturation' (1979:81), and in Culler's paraphrase: 'Meaning is context-bound, but context is boundless (1983:123). Here we have striking confirmation of the indeterminacy of meaning, for with each emendation to, or addition of, a contextual feature (and there is no saturation), there must, if meaning is context bound, be a semantic displacement. Further confirmation is provided by Derrida's reminder that each time a text is cited (i.e. uttered, read) a new citational context is established (1977:I 185): the context of a performance of *Hamlet* in 1603 is quite unlike that of 1984, and the reading context of Orwell's novel *1984* is startlingly different this year from what it was in 1949. M. H. Abrams, in an attack on both Derrida and the American deconstructionist J. Hillis Miller, says:

I would agree that there are a diversity of sound (though not equally adequate) interpretations of the play *King Lear*, yet I claim to know precisely what Lear meant when he said, "Pray you undo this button," (1977:III 433).

Sadly, Abram's claim is empty. The dialogue specifies neither who is addressed nor what button is to be undone. These contextual features will vary in principle from production to production, and so therefore will the meaning.

These considerations lead directly to the idea of intertext. Intertextuality and the intertext are new coinages in English under pressure from the French *intertextualité*. The Latin word is *intertexo* which means 'to interweave' or 'intertwine'. Intertextuality, like textuality, is a strategic concept whereby the intermingling of all texts, including the mental texts of readers, may be accomplished. This vast theoretical space is the site, in effect, of all cultural citations. Derrida says 'If we are to approach a text, it must have an edge.' But he goes on to point out that, once into it, we find the text 'overruns' its apparent boundaries and that 'a "text" . . . is henceforth no longer a finished corpus of writing, some content enclosed in a book or its margins, but a differential network, a fabric of traces referring endlessly, to something other than itself, to other differential traces. Thus the text overruns all the limits assigned to it . . . everything that was . . . set up in opposition to writing (speech, life, the world, the real, history, and what not, every field of reference – to body or mind, conscious or unconscious, politics, economics, and so forth) (1983:84). As the evanescent being-written context dissipates itself into the past, its traces enter the weave of the intertext together with the written text, where they will endlessly confront patterns of reconstruction and innumerable traces of being-read contexts.

The absorption of context into the methodological field of intertextuality is a powerful and elegant strategic device for overcoming the limiting and inhibiting effects in the semantic domain of a naively objective view of the text as finished product gripped by an enveloping reality. 'The (inter) textualization of context', to use Leitch's phrase (1983:123), unleashes both text and context (genetic and citational) in the pasture (wilderness?) of textuality, where not only does the calf lie down with the lion but diverse contexts lie down with one another.

Barthes warns us: 'The intertextual in which every text is held, it itself being the intertext of another text, is not to be confused with some origin of the text' (1977a:160). Despite, in my opinion, the complete validity of inquiring into textual origins, Barthes' point is that the intertext does not establish simply conscious influences, deliberate quotations, allusions, and the like, but that a text is a largely unconscious adumbration of numerous features from the entire field of culture. The intertext is not restricted to linking a work with its past; for example, as I have shown elsewhere in an unpublished thesis, it is not very difficult to read a Freudian text in Robert Browning's poetry of the 1850s and later (Harty, 1981). The proper question to ask concerning the intertext is not 'What did the author know and intend when he wrote a given text?', but 'How do I, as reading subject, adopt a variety of shifting vantage

points within the intertext and in my historical present to throw into relief the intersection and intertwining of the text with other texts and contexts?' It becomes evident that Derrida's notorious statement 'There is nothing outside the text' (or, literally translated: 'There is no outside-text') (1976:158) does not imply that nothing exists except text, but that everything relevant to reading, to textual analysis, including the context, is contained within the intertext (*le texte générale*, as he calls it).

It remains for me to situate myself a little more clearly in relation to the issues I have raised. It will be apparent to you that, in terms of the model I have advanced, we, in departments of language and literature are not concerned with an ideologically-based selection and presentation of isolated masterpieces of literature to be dusted down annually for the edification of awed or bored students. Instead we function within the intertext, not as legislators, curators or custodians but as explorers, adventurers, cartographers, being continually disconcerted, however, by the rapidly changing contours of every region opened up, the wiping out of every route established, and the inaccuracy of every map drawn.

I wish to touch on just two major cruxes of my discussion in summing up: interpretation and context. I have set myself against hermeneutic methodology to the extent that it seeks to establish the central, unitary meaning of the literary text and implies that meaning is a presence rather than a strategy of deferment. It is impossible to abolish interpretation *per se*, however. We use it unconsciously in ordinary conversation, for example, to establish with amazing rapidity and accuracy a speaker's meaning. No one who insists on deconstructing polite conversation will long retain his reputation for sanity. And there seems little point in enjoying the infinite play of deferred meaning in one's motor car manual. Even in reading literature we cannot evade the question 'What does this mean?' In deconstruction methodology, however, the meaning elicited is endlessly deferred, while in the hermeneutic variety it is refined to the point of closure, rather, of alleged closure. The decision whether to interpret or deconstruct is often unconscious and seems very much bound up with the degree of complexity and practical considerations in the language situation.

As far as context is concerned, I stand firmly by the view that a text's historicity (both fictional and real) must be absorbed into the intertext (*le texte générale*) if it is to exercise its necessary function in either interpretation or deconstruction. Far from minimizing the historical factors in textual scholarship, deconstructionism provides sensitive and powerful techniques for accommodating the historical perspective without inhibiting the function of *différance* in reading.

From the teaching point of view, I would not recommend exposing beginning students to deconstructionist theory, but I do think they should be imbued with its spirit. To combat their life-long exposure to the doctrine of the single, correct meaning of any utterance, I should suggest a carefully controlled heuristic programme for disabusing them of this fiction. In the meantime tutors should be very tolerant of their charges' determination to crack the cipher of the text, those tutors, that is, who themselves have had the

good fortune to be liberated from the tyranny of the same ideology. After this, the virtues of historiology should be inculcated at every opportunity. I have sensed too, in developments on both sides of the Atlantic and across the Channel, the possible beginnings of a trend for Departments of English and other languages to move away from the tired trilogy of poems, plays, and novels to texts in general. Whether this would mean the *teaching* of non-imaginative literature or equipping students to deal with such texts by means of a broadly based text theory, I do not know. But, in either case, the presupposition is that academics keep a firm interim eye on developments in general text theory.

Finally, and briefly, let me advance the possibility of a metaphysical presence or centre beyond or beside the intertext. The intertext is a methodological field and cannot be said to exhaust all reality. Even proto-writing (inserting the spaces in the experience of the real) requires a 'given' to be acted upon, and this domain of the real must mediate in some way between the subject's experience and the intertext. It is when critics try to place the metaphysical centre within the intertext that the dynamic plurality of textuality is threatened by semantic presence. Frye, for example, writes: 'Criticism as knowledge . . . recognizes the fact that there *is* a center in the order of words . . . Either . . . criticism is . . . an endless labyrinth . . . or we have to assume that literature is a total form (1957:117–18). Here Frye is implicated in a recognition of the labyrinth, which he then obliterates with the fictions of centrality and total form.

T. S. Eliot, in his late very religious phase, did not claim that he had found the still centre of things that he longed for, and the following extract from "Burnt Norton" suggests that he would not have located it in the text:

. . . Words strain,
 Crack and sometimes break, under the burden,
 Under the tension, slip, slide, perish,
 Decay with imprecision, will not stay in place,
 Will not stay still. Shrieking voices
 Scolding, mocking, or merely chattering,
 Always assail them. (v)

In so much of the plurality of human experience there seems to be a reaching out for a stability and a presence not found here, otherwise, why the repetition of so many acts? – the Christians' endless re-enactment of a meal; the lovers' insatiable capacity for erotic *jouissance*; the reader's interminable deferment of meanings scavenged from the cracks and fissures of textuality. We may say, respectfully rewriting scripture: 'the word is being made flesh and dwells among us.' How and when the stretch towards total communion, total *jouissance*, total meaning will be fulfilled, if at all, I cannot say. Meanwhile, in the challenging and dangerous existential engagement with intertextuality, and in the shadow of the *tour abolie* of the text, I join chorus with Eliot in *The Waste Land*.

These fragments I have shored against my ruins. (430)

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