Differences in Memoriam: De Man, Derrida, and Literary Semiology

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Summary

Post-structuralist thought queries the gesture by which linguistics-based semiology equates elements of language with linguisticity itself. Instead of conceiving literature as a mere linguistic transformation whose lack of "worldly" contents marks it off as a "special" use of language, Paul de Man and Jacques Derrida employ this particular characteristic to assess the "truths" of language. Incontestable as it is that no other discourse form is as "baseless" and incapable of directing material life as literature, that very factor ties its destiny to language and *vice-versa*. Literature, like linguistics, shares no *organically necessary* property with the environment that creates and consumes it. For unabashedly announcing the formality of all signs, literature can legitimately aspire to being called the paradigm of semiology.

Opsomming

Poststrukturalistiese denke bevraagteken die gebaar waarmee linguisties-gebaseerde semiologie elemente van taal gelykstel aan linguistisiteit self. In plaas daarvan om literatuur te begryp as bloot 'n linguistiese transformasie, waarby die gebrek aan 'n "wêreldse" inhoud dit afpen as 'n "spesiale" gebruik van taal, span Paul de Man en Jaques Derrida hierdie spesifieke eienskap in om die "waarhede" van taal te bepaal. Onbetwisbaar soos dit is dat geen ander vorm van diskoers so "basisloos" is nie en in so 'n mate aan 'n onvermoë ly om rigting te gee aan materiaal as literatuur, heg daardie einste faktor sy/haar lot aan taal en *omgekeerd*. Literatuur, soos linguistiek, deel geen *organies noodaaklike* eienskap met die omgewing wat dit skep en verbruik nie. Omdat literatuur onbeskroomd die formaliteit van alle tekens aankondig, kan dit regmatig daarna streef om die paradigma van semiologie genoem te word.

1

It is Immanuel Kant who, in a definition that sweeps ashore all the debates that circumscribe the fate of rhetoric, language, and literariness, says rhetoric is "the art of transacting a serious business of the understanding as if it were a free play of the imagination" and "poetry that of conducting a free play of the imagination as if it were a serious business of the understanding" (1987: 190). Kant makes it clear in a nutshell that, even in their "natural" domains, rhetoric and poetry are means of achieving things which they are not. In the absence of rhetoric and poetry, serious business of understanding is conducted seriously and imaginative free play is conducted freely and with imagination. Imagination and understanding are two different forms of knowledge each with an appropriate vehicle: free play and seriousness respectively. Rhetoric and poetry, coming from nowhere (perhaps as effects of imagination, or uncontrolled understanding), contaminate the two domains by crossing their modes of existence and apprehension. As a result, rhetoric evolves by borrowing free play and grafting it onto seriousness in the

business of understanding. Likewise, poetry comes into being by stealing free play from imagination and giving it to understanding.

Obeying the calls of tradition, Kant takes both rhetoric and poetry to be means of persuasion and so carefully formulates his definition such that whereas the possibility exists of inferring that imaginative free play used for understanding creates rhetoric, the chance of claiming the inverse that understanding can be used for conducting the affairs of imaginative free play is denied. Nonetheless, the definition itself suggests that we consider both poetry and rhetoric beyond their psychologistic effects because in persuading they create new subjects and different forms of knowledge.

Writing in a different era and using different terminologies, Richard Ohmann proposes that literature and rhetorical utterances are special varieties of language use which function differently from the regular order of things. According to Ohmann, literature is not abnormal in terms of the linguistic structures it employs. Using speech act terminologies, he says identical locutionary – "acts of speaking of one or another sentence" – and perlocutionary – "acts performed *by means of* uttering the sentence" – rules guide fictional and non-fictional modes of utterance (1972: 50). In other words, literature does not invent a new language in order to constitute its subject and subjectivity. Ohmann, however, finds literature deficient in one respect: literature, in contradistinction to other utterances, does not conform to the dictates of normal illocution – "acts performed in speaking" – in that it does not give believable directions. In his words, "literary works are discourses with the usual illocutionary rules suspended" (1972: 53).

Ohmann argues further that when the reader encounters a fictive utterance, he pretends that it is a regular illocutionary act and then constructs the correlations that the literary utterance may have to a regular one. It is only on these conditions that the reader will be able to fathom the pre-literary, pre-suspension world in the suspended illocution that he now encounters. Thus, gullibility (or believability) precedes comprehension in literature while comprehension precedes gullibility in ordinary speech. This is so because the positive knowledge of the total speech situation with which human beings participate in ordinary illocution is denied the reader in literature. In order to overcome this obstacle, the reader must "assume the felicity of the hypothetical acts, and infer a world from the circumstances required for this felicity" (1972: 55). That is to say that ordinary language acts are known intuitively, but this intuition becomes conscious when literature is cognized. Humans borrow from ordinary language to enter literature so as to return to ordinary language.

Had Ohmann stopped here he would have destroyed the basis of his own discipline – literature. To avoid such a consequence he grants literature and rhetoric some privileges that ultimately arise from certain media circumstances that affect literary utterances against which ordinary speech is immunized. He says, "literature ... is a much cooler medium than speech, because less is directly given. Notably, the speaker himself is not present even in a direct recitation or public reading. It is only the poet or the performer who is visible, not the persona who is supposedly responsible for the speech

acts" (1972: 56). Literature is different, then, by virtue of the absence of a living identifiable speaker.

Ohmann separates the writer from the written but does not separate the spoken from the speaker. I think, however, that in ordinary speech as well, the speaker invites us to share his/her illocutionary and perlocutionary goals by means of a locution which, I have indicated, Ohmann says is not different from the fictional. This is to say that speech is a surrogate of its speaker with an implied narrator and, as the author of literature is not present even in a live reading, so is the speaker not present in a "live" speech. Working within a frame of mind that regards poetry and rhetoric as media of understanding, Ohmann suggests that literature appears to be without consequence because the medium of writing has erected a barrier between the maker and the consumer of utterances. Whenever this barrier occurs, the literary disease spreads widely and wildly. To substantiate his point, Ohmann cites a little anecdote drawn from a television commercial:

> A young woman's runaway grocery cart is rescued in the parking lot by a man. She says, "Say, you're George Kirby." He admits it, and goes on to administer a brief encomium to Ivory liquid dishwashing soap.
>
> (1972: 59)

Then follows, for me, the crucial commentary:

> The encounter is plainly fictional, but does George Kirby have no responsibility for the things he says about Ivory? Somewhere at this point, the art of television ad man meets that of Borges, Barthelme, and Beckett coming from the other direction.
>
> (1972: 59)

Ohmann's comment, though cast in the form of a doubt, suggests that it is absolutely undeniable that illocutionary felicity (as determined in speech acts) can be vitiated and corrupted when stretched over extensive communication channels. On the contrary, I believe that it is not this stretching that turns reality into fiction, because even in the so-called non-literate societies the fact of *language* does not allow speakers to be "present" in their speeches – fictional or ordinary.[1] Regardless of the medium, the speaker has always been part of the speaking (the syntax). As such, illocutionary acts, as long as they are dependent on language (or signs in general), are never truly "ordinary". Therefore, blaming fictionality, under the guise of media obfuscation, for the attenuation of a purportedly past locutionary abundance begs the question, and symbolizes a refusal to understand fictionality, rhetoricity and literature-ness as legitimate terms capable of belonging to "ordinary" understanding.

If we compare Ohmann's description and Kant's definition cited earlier, it will be very clear that Kant is more sophisticated. Kant's definition suggests that both rhetoric and poetry turn mode into subject. For him, rhetoric and poetry are, ordinarily, processes of apprehension. Yet in performing their assigned roles, they become subjects worthy of philosophical investigations. If we take Kant on his words, rhetoric results when understanding is approached

with imaginative jollity and poetry is the outcome of free imagination done with deep sobriety. In effect, rhetoric is poetic understanding, poetry is rhetorical understanding, and understanding is poetic rhetoricity. Drawn further, the definition suggests that whenever understanding is carried out with free play, rhetoric is what we experience and not understanding, *per se*, any more. In other words, the supposed end product (rhetoric) is the creator of its supposed enabler (understanding) in free play. In like manner, poetry could be said to have resulted from the activity of an imaginative free play approached with a mission to understand free play itself. Poetry, then, is also a process. The main difference between poetry and rhetoric arises from the subjects they bring into the world apart from themselves. Free play, which is a means in the domain of understanding, becomes a subject in imagination, whereas serious business, which is a means in imagination, transforms into a subject in understanding. Poetry and rhetoric together shake the subjectivity of imagination and understanding and establish the possibility of their own subjectivity.

Kant and Ohmann raise two issues that I want to address in greater detail in this paper. Their works show that the problems of literature-ness reside at the core of signification in general (Ohmann) and the materiality of the medium in particular (Kant). But instead of reducing the literary problem to mere matters of medium, I want to use it to open up the stomach of signification in general. So, in the rest of this paper I will talk about literary and linguistic semiology by way of memories and *différance*. I will then set out some specific components of literary semiology and how they function in texts.

2 Hegel, De Man and Symbol

In contemporary criticism semiology has proved to be a handy tool in making fictionality a genuinely philosophical course of study. Unfortunately, linguistics-based semiology inherits the legacy of the classical opposition of medium and being. It elevates its particular characteristics into linguisticity – that is, that which makes language or signification possible – thereby subjugating other signifying forms – like literature – into variants of itself. With this gesture, linguistic semiologists continue the age-worn classification of literature as a form of colloquial semiology or, using a Speech Act term, everyday, though special, illocution. Some contemporary literary critics have reacted to this subordination and have interrogated the opposition in terms of its origins. These critics contend that linguistic semiology cannot be legitimately regarded as the semiological basis of language in general and literary semiology its derivative because language itself is only another sign. They suggest that literature and language be put on par and that semiology in general should retain the status of the non-sentient, non-spiritual, and non-corporeal foundation of both. In such studies and queries, the dyadic configurations that have hitherto governed the studies of both literature and language are reworked, and semiology is re-defined from both the literary and linguistic points of view.

In the modern movements towards a redefinition of the sign in literary terms, Paul de Man occupies a front-line position. He repeatedly asks questions about the linguistic origins of literature, and the (in)adequacy of literary language in the service of literary thematics. He consistently finds faults in works that present literature as an aspect of language use that removes pain from cognition. I have selected from his corpus the article "Sign and Symbol in Hegel's *Aesthetics*" (1982), to illustrate how he questions the usually assumed compatibility of literature-ness and linguisticity. This article deals with almost every major issue that has been the concern of literary criticism over time: temporality, symbolism, literariness, and a host of other matters. This essay is also important in at least one other respect: it aims to interrogate critics that cite Hegel's work, especially some parts of his *Aesthetics*, as justification for establishing that literary artifacts are symbols of non-literary entities for which literary language is invented.

According to De Man, tradition dictates that the symbol mediates the interaction of the non-sentient mind and the concrete world. Symbol performs this role because it is a creation of the mind while belonging to the world and, in effect, straddles the mind and its object of cognition. To support this judgment, De Man quotes Hegel that the symbol is "a perception whose own determination (meaning) more or less corresponds, essentially and conceptually, to the content it expresses as a symbol" (1982: 766). In other words, symbols are present to the world, the mind, and the meaning. De Man says if this were all Hegel said about the essence of art, no question would be raised. He adds, however, that Hegel is also the one who wrote that "art is a thing of the past". How can art, De Man asks, be a thing of the past if its paradigm, the symbol, shares the same moments with its referents? That is to say how can art belong to the past if it is a symbol of the palpably present? De Man suggests a solution to this impasse by going back to the *Encyclopedia* where Hegel deals with the relationship that obtains between the subjective mind, the physical world, and the operation of signifying and symbolic forms. In this book, Hegel separates the thinking subject from the perceiving subject and subordinates the latter to the former because thought, like a sign, ingests the world into its own system that is organized differently (in accordance with abstract logic) from the physical world. Hegel thereby declares the sign more intellectual and more objective than the symbol. The sign carries out its intellectual ordering mainly by means of language, for according to Hegel, language "is the labor of thought" (quoted in De Man 1982: 768). Thought does not order the disparate phenomena it encounters according to what we might call "natural" order but instead, it fits these substances into abstractions and generalizations. The thinking mind peruses the world in terms of these generalizations which are then expressed in language or, as I prefer to call it, linguisticity. For these reasons, Hegel concludes that "we cannot say anything in language that is not general" (quoted in De Man 1982: 768).

Hegel gives abstraction a very high intellectual regard because of its objective distance from the raw data it organizes, but the rating is already undermined, De Man says, by virtue of the fact that it has to rely on an equally intellectually strong medium of understandig before it can be

realized. As thought depends more on language to formulate an order, linguisticity and thought as forms of independent abstract formulations lose their independence and objectivity. Every abstraction is always about something else which may, among other things, be just the generalization it organizes. In effect, thought loses the independence which makes it very attractive in the first instance, and the supposed intellectuality of the sign suffers as a result. If we cannot use language (a system of arbitrary signs) without expressing things that are un-linguistic (even if and when these things are generalizations), it is foregone that every language use destroys its autonomy and its signifying power. As an arbitrary system of language necessarily owes its existence to an equally arbitrary system of ordering nature (logic), the presumed autonomy of both systems vanishes. Paradoxically, the union, or intersection of signs (which is what thought or language use is), removes the two systems from an economy of signs and turns them over to symbols.

Building on the independence of each of meaning, logic, and structurality of the pronoun "I", De Man further complicates the question of the relationship between existence and structure. He cites Hegel as saying, "'when I say 'I', I mean myself as *this* at the exclusion of all others, but what I say, I, is precisely anyone; any I, as that which excludes all others from itself'" (1982: 769). For a particular subject to be this "I", such entity must be distinguishable from all other "Is", because the word "I" belongs to a class of pronoun that has nothing to do with a meaning or an individual. This sense of "I" cancels out the possibility of an "I" coming into being. For a particular "I" to be indicatable, it has to first disappear, that is, be a member of a class which is not the same as the individual or the sum total of all the individual "Is" constituting it. In the strictly philosophically logical sense, then, *saying* (meaning) "I" will be an impossibility though one *utters* it. In De Man's words:

> ... the I, on its freedom from sensory determination [thoughtful, general, abstract, and logically coherent], is originally similar to the sign [i.e., arbitrary, autonomous, and coercive]. Since, however, it states itself as what it is not, it represents a determined relationship to the world that is in fact arbitrary, that is to say it states itself as a symbol.
>
> (1982: 77)

Once an "I" is uttered, a deictic sense accompanies it, that is, *this* meaning. As a result, the arbitrary and coercive sign becomes the submissive symbol. Put another way, the intellectual virility of the sign is rendered impotent by a necessary symbolicity, if only temporarily. "To the extent that the I points to itself, it is a sign, but to the extent that it speaks of anything but itself, it is a symbol" (1982: 770), so writes De Man. Although whenever a speaker uses a grammatical structure the resulting utterance is marked deictically, this sense of circumstance cannot coincide with the grammar which makes it possible. Consequently, symbol, contrary to received wisdom, will no longer be a matter of reconciliation but a part as well as a result of signification.

In order to justify the interpretation summarized here, De Man seized upon

two words in Hegel. These words, *Erinnerung* ("recollection as the inner gathering and preserving of experience"), and *Gedachtnis* ("a memory in the sense that one says of someone that he has a good memory but not that he has a good memorization" (1982: 772), De Man avers, appear like sign and symbol on the surface but actually are not as close. Rather, they are like perception and thought; the existence of one is explained by the other, *Erinnerung* being the equivalent of thought and *Gedachtnis* that of perception. *Gedachtnis* memorizes the world with neither mnemotechnics nor images, although the process "is not devoid of materiality altogether" (1982: 772). Thought, or *Erinnerung*, memorializes the imageless activities of the mind in the letter or phoneme without paying attention to the memories.

Thought occurs after there has been a necessary movement of the mind from perception through memorization, which is neither a recollection, nor an imagization. This memorization or memoriality is not, as mentioned above, mnemotechnic but inscriptive, notative, and onomastic. Thought can then in this light be characterized as the creation of names (inscription) that memorialize sensory stimulations. Strangely enough, the names and inscriptions do not preserve the body of thought because "memo-making" does not entail the use of wax-like images. As such, the mementoes, so to say, are not logically connected to the form of the process that leads to their creation. Were this so, the mementoes will simply be forms of nostalgic remembrance. The upshot of all these arguments is that "the faculty that enables thought to exist also makes its preservation impossible" (1982: 773). In other words, the meaning of a name does not coincide with that of its bearer. While inscriptions are the material forms of thought, they are not thought.

De Man links memories, memorization, and memorialization to semiology by saying that "in memorization, in thought and, by extension, in the sensory manifestation of thought as an 'art' of writing, we are dealing only with *signs*" (1982: 773). On the one hand, signs must not be forms of remembrance whereas, on the other hand, the scourge of remembrance afflicts memorialization, because all mementoes possess certain values assigned to them mechanically, or systematically, within the sphere of thought. Once these values are allotted, even if they do not signify any more than the name of the sign, this association of name and value makes the sign symbolic, in the classical sense of name and form. Literature, like all art forms, like all signs, belongs to the past as Hegel said. Operating like memorization, they forget experience. Nonetheless, thought, sign, gram, literature, and memorization in general, take on perceivable, symbolic, and recollective forms, but these remembrances are not the cadavers of old existence but assigned values in the group of mementoes. Memorization, expressed another way, erects a permanent barrier in the path of recovery for remembrance.

Jacques Derrida is one other contemporary theorist who emphasizes the necessity of shifting attention from the sign as a fully abundant representation to the understanding of the disruptive capabilities of the materiality of the sign. Thus, as De Man tries to put asunder all the traditional interpretations of Hegel on sign and symbol as the codification of a foregone plenitude, Derrida, in an analogous manner, employs *différance* to query the traditional

philosophical status of Being. While De Man approaches art from the sign-angle, Derrida opens up the significance and signification of being with the neo-semeia he calls *différance*. By combining difference and deferment in one stroke, Derrida joins together several philosophical questions like temporality, spatiality, and being itself.[2] He succinctly characterizes the deferment of a presence which, actually, is not present but the effect of a web of differences. Derrida describes *différance* as "the movement according to which language, or any code, any system of referral in general, is constituted 'historically' as a wave of differences" (1982: 12). *Différance* does not constitute itself outside of differentiation and deferring. That is to say that it has no value prior to the differences it establishes. It "is the non-full, non-simple, structured and differentiating origin of differences" (1982: 11).

How does memorization resemble *différance*? First, *différance* shows that signs are not aesthetically set up on the goodwill and patronage of a presence or a perception that they might signify. Instead, it indicates that an archaeological digging up of the sign will not yield a pristine reappropriation of a deferred presence, just as the moment of apprehension and or constitution cannot be reified and saved away beyond the reach of differences. As Derrida puts it, "the alterity of the unconscious makes us concerned not with horizons of modified – past or future – presents, but with a 'past' that has never been present, and which never will be . . ." (1982: 21). As signs can never exist except as they are symbolized, and symbols can not exist except by the grace of their antithesis, the sign, so is it that signification cannot be except by differentiation (which, in one sense, means that it cannot be). In the operations of *différance* (and memorization), objectivity exists in its medium, and equally owes a good part of its destiny to the medium.

Towards the end of "Sign and Symbol in Hegel's *Aesthetics*", De Man notes that memorization allegorizes the impossibility of joining the subject and its predicates or of conflating the sign and its symbols. Similarly, *différance* establishes the fact that a subject *is* only by virtue of not being the other. That is to say that full "being" in the classical sense would itself be subjected to the play of *différance*. Thus, in every opposition each term is the other in *différance*, and the *différance* of the other with absolutely no hierarchy except that of *différance* which is not a third term. In Derrida's words, "one is but the other different and deferred, one differing and deferring the other" (1982: 18).

3 Literary Semiology and Poststructuralism

Literature departments have for too long accepted the findings of their linguistic and psychology counterparts too readily, and most literary critics do not question the given fact that literary texts are signifying forms that dramatize human behaviors in the fictive mode. That is why strong ripples are made when contemporary thinkers like Derrida and De Man – and similar thinkers usually lumped together as poststructuralists – contest such time-wearied claims. Such ripples become too noticeable when it is asserted that language (and by implication, linguistics) has no "natural" characteristic that

makes it superior to other signifying forms, expecially literature. Poststructuralists agree that the signifying power of language and other cognate signs is undeniable but qualify such agreements with the proviso that little is peculiar about such signifying capability especially when the specificities of the literary sign-form are compared to linguistic sign-form. They further claim that language is neither synonymous with linguistics nor with literature.

Consequently, instead of employing literature's lack of "worldly" content to determine its relative worthlessness, contemporary literary theorists use this particular yardstick to assess the relative truth of the claim of language. They accept that no other discourse form is as baseless and incapable of giving ethically followable directions in material life but add that this absolute distrust is what ties literature to language in general and vice-versa. Hence, they say that literature, like linguistics, shares no organic property with the environment that creates and consumes it. Relying on the Saussurean principles of arbitrariness and identification based on no positive terms, they further claim that literature is the truest semiological form. Literature receives this acclaim because it announces, unabashed, the absolute formality of all signs.[3]

After exploring the boundaries that join and separate language and literature, poststructuralists call for a detailed study of the literary dimensions of linguisticity so as to complement the stylistician's study of linguistic dimensions of literature. Fully assuming that nothing exists outside language (after equating language and literature), some of these theorists affirm that nothing exists outside *literature*.[4] Many others stake claims that vary between saying that language is literature-like, literature is being-like, and being is literature-like.[5] As a result, markers of literariness that have hitherto been the concerns of only literary critics now serve as entry points by which philosophers, and literary critics alike, ponder philosophical issues about philosophy itself. These developments pilot my discussion of the issues that have dominated the redefinition of literature. I will, in the rest of this paper, specifically examine fictionality *vis-à-vis* its limitations in reality, rhetoricity and the reliability of literary utterances, literality and the truth of literary figures of speech, historicity and literature. Memorization and *différance*, as "semiological" terms, shall therefore be the guiding spirits of these discussions.

Traditional criticism creates elaborate theories to explain the humanistic values of literature and to rationalize literary texts as top skins beneath which rest profound thoughts that need to be unearthed. In search of thematic preoccupations, critics set up dyadic models like form and content, text and politics, modernity and history. They also quickly dismissed the first term of each of these dyads as the expendable part of literary interpretation because it was believed they are ephemeral. Furthermore, each of the second terms was regarded as the motivator of the first. Thus, form is a construct whose place is determined by the intended effects of content, modernity is preordained by historicity, and textuality functions according to the powers of political determinations. Of course, there have been remarkable eruptions

that advocate greater emphasis on the repressed terms which are the true markers of literary difference.

However, these eruptions often shift emphasis from one pole to the other, when literature is construed as signs, criticism ceases to be apologetic about its object mainly because its constitutive parts are treated as variable differentials. Form, for instance, will not be deemed a graspable entity that subsumes transformed contextual elements but a value created in the interaction of the elements called contents which are on their own also values created in different contexts. Form, then, will no longer be construed as content-adequate or context-specific ways of speaking. That is, intentions and form will cease to be two sensible entities joined together in the literary stratosphere. Rather, intention will be a function of the laws that glue the parts together in the structural totality. In addition, the author's psyche and or historical circumstances, while still important to the overall meaning, will be totally contingent. In so doing, literature will be brought closer to language which, tradition insists, is independent of speakers' intentions. The one great implication these conceptual shifts have for literary understanding is that both *form* and *content* are construed as signs, and neither is truer than the other. Consequently, the tradition that sets up fictionality in negative terms so as to ethicalize content as true and desirable becomes untenable. Let us now examine fictionality from this perspective.

Fiction and its eponyms are usually scandalized when critics oppose them (along with form and text) to reality. Reality, in addition, often serves as the representative of a chain that includes content and referent. Thus, reality and content are reduced to referent and literality while fictionality and formality are equated with figurality. Reality is also further considered a supra-textual entity that is recoverable when fictionalized. Whatever the guise, this type of criticism, in Readings's words, "performs the analysis of literary from solely in terms of its becoming-literal in the sphere of the political" (1989: 226). Hence, from Plato to Plekhanov, literature and criticism are evaluated only on the basis of the closeness they ascribe to politics as the ultimate referent: "a referent that is conceived literally as something exterior to the text" (Readings 1989: 226). Politics (the literal referent) and text (figurality) have enjoyed a long history of hierarchized opposition mainly because politics (or literality), which is the higher of the two terms, have always been explained from a standpoint that is neither figural nor textual. It is not very meaningful, I surmise, to claim linguistically that extra-textual meaning or pre-literary autonomous existence (if there is any) takes on a textual meaning without acknowledging at the same time that the pre-literary fits into literary figuration only because the ingesting system finds it adoptable and that once the adoption proceedings are closed nothing else can be extra-literary or extra-textual.

According to Bill Readings, it is only in linguistics that ex-linguistic literality (meaningfulness) has any value at all. Literality is literal only to the extent that language functions by differentiating ex-linguistic referencing and linguistic referencing and by making what is generally called ex-linguistic reference linguistic. In that wise, pre-linguistic existence cannot be grasped or

understood until it is linguisticized, and once this is done it is no more extra-linguistic. Paradoxically, linguisticity exists only by virtue of the fact that it could ingest the extra-linguistic, that is, it can refer to other things beside itself. If this were not so, linguisticity itself would simply be another naturally existing self-referencing entity and thus ex-linguistic. Applied to literary discourse, literality and politicity are erroneously conceived in as much as they are taken to be fully present to themselves. But as soon as we accept that they are not, literality, among other things, becomes a function of fictionality and politicity that of textuality. In such circumstances, distinguishing between the figural and the literal dimensions of a text will not be restricted to the order of literal meaning alone. As pre-linguistic meaning functions as a linguistic device so will literality be a rhetorical gesture and politics a textual gesture.

Readings further says that literality, meaning, and referents are all rhetoric's tropes of the absence of "rhetoric" which in itself is fictional. In that wise, one can say that materialist views of the political as pre-textual are imprecise, and can at worst be a ruse for legitimizing (rather than its proclaimed aim of ending) political domination. If it is true, Readings further says, that politics is absolutely extra-textual and therefore real, then what is real will be absolutely invisible because, as noted above, the ex-linguistic space is a linguistic device. In Readings's words:

> the operation of domination is in defining the political [which is a text of representations], so that power appears to operate in a political vacuum (that is, in no place, nowhere), a vacuum guaranteed by the notion of representation as transparency.
>
> (1989: 230)

These arguments demonstrate that politics and fiction are forms of texts and are so intricately interwoven that one cannot be honestly placed above the other. Fiction, viewed from that angle, is then not a mere cask of political sublimation but also a basis of which casks are made. Both the cask and the sublimated are descriptive values and either of them can attain a prescriptive status. "Everything will be the same but different" (1989: 236), says Readings, and the real (including the material signifier) will not be a strong enough alibi for refusing to assess the importance of the unseen.

I now want to shift focus to another prime marker of literariness: rhetoric. As evidenced in Kant's definition cited earlier, rhetoric is traditionally studied either as the effects certain word-patterning can produce in a particular audience or as the catalog of figures of speech by which such effects can be achieved. In order to make the discipline less subjective, linguists extend its horizons to cover literary idiolects. Literary critics, in the same vein, connect forms of speaking and writing with particular subjects of speech and writing and arrive at genre theories. These pursuits, to quote De Man, are inspired by a "highly respectable moral imperative that strives to reconcile the internal, formal, private structures of literary language with their external referential, and public effects" (1979: 3). The said imperative, of course,

derives from the philosophy of the useful form which theorizes that all forms exist for the sake of certain contents even if they are still unknown. The resultant effect is that what could be summarily called grammatical structures are yoked on to rhetorical possibilities and rhetoric reduced to mere signifieds of grammar. Without first verifying that rhetoricity is compatible with grammaticality, like IBM and its clones, rhetoric is joined to syntax.

De Man leads the critical movement which, by refusing to consider rhetoric as persuasion, challenges the purposivity of rhetoric and subsequently presents it as a fundamental means of understanding the literary dimensions of language. Rhetoric is one literary factor, according to De Man, that, strictly speaking, is not linguistic in the narrow sense. In order to highlight the non-logical (non-linguistic) aspects of rhetoric, De Man puts rhetorical questions to grammar and grammatical questions to rhetoric, and concludes that rhetoric and grammar, regardless of tradition, do not mutually support each other. In studies like De Man's, rhetoric is treated not as a presentation procedure of speech acts, or the effects such acts produce, but as an important key to understanding signification. In a nutshell, de Manian criticism underscores the fact that the traditional classification of literature as the expressive form in which truth is not the organizational motive actually foregrounds the fundamental ability of language to direct its own use. Rhetoric, as the emblem of literariness, "radically suspends logic (syntax) and opens up vertiginous possibilities of referential aberration" (1979: 10). According to Nietzsche:

> it is not difficult to demonstrate that what is called "rhetorical", as the devices of a conscious art, is present as a device of unconscious art in language and its development. We can go as far as to say that rhetoric is an extension (Fortbildung) of the devices embedded in language ... No such thing as an unrhetorical, "natural" language exists that could be used as a point of reference: language itself the result of purely rhetorical tricks and devices ... Tropes are not something that can be added or subtracted from language at will; they are its truest nature.
>
> (Quoted in De Man 1979: 105)

Since literature is that use of language that flaunts the separation between usage and possible reference, and language is ostensibly the ultimate sign, it may not be too far from the truth to assert that literature is the paragonal use of language. Furthermore, if what defines literature's ability to be paragonal is the fact of its rhetoricity, that is, its ability to constitute its existence in a system of tropes where all elements can take up different functions and values with no center of value assignation beyond the names given the tropes, linguisticity may in turn be seen as composed of tropes. Put another way, rhetorical understanding, from the theoretical perspective, is the affirmation of the capabilities of signs to refer without an ultimately identifiable positive referent.

De Man also proposes a different way of examining the psychological perspective of rhetoric (and by extension literature and language) by comparing two aspects of classical Greek education; the *trivium* (rhetoric, grammar, and logic) and the *quadrivium* (geometry or the study of space,

astronomy or the study of motion, arithmetic, that of numbers, and music, that of time). As the quadrivium describes the world, so does the trivium describe language (or how to express the discoveries of the quadrivium). Logic (substitute syntax), because it shares mathematical rigor with the quadrivium, joins the form of expression to the tools of observation. Thus, logic is modeled as the articulation of a linguistic conceptualization which demonstrates that syntax (or the logical in language) is the litmus test of all referencing. Therefore, for many grammarians and logicians – from Aristotle to Greimas – "the grammatical and the logical functions of language are co-extensive" (De Man 1986: 14) and, grammar an "isotope of logic". According to De Man, if literary theory or semiology in general continues to seek its justification in grammar, it will continue to anchor the justification for the existence of literature outside literary signification. In order to set literature on a truly semiological track, De Man suggests that literary theory should break the cycle of logic and grammar by foregrounding rhetoric. He says that the need for rhetoric to be made a prime factor in discussing the trivium (or linguisticity) is made more poignant by the fact that, while logic and grammar are fully meaningful only in the light of the real world, rhetoric has confined itself to language alone.

4 Metaphor and Figurality

Prior to discussing how understanding takes place in the literary environment I have been drawing, I want to discuss one of the tropes from which rhetoricity, fictionality, and even semiology derive. By so doing, I want to point out that figurality, parodying the old definition of an atom, is the smallest indivisible part of a literary sign. Figures and tropes are the primary carriers of what semiologically counts as literature. They are the disablers of logical and metaphysical totalizations. Figures are the means by which fiction coerces ex-fiction reality into a signifying form. They constitute the primary modules of transformation by which "literal" signs become literary signs. If fictionality is analogous to signification and figurality the bedrock of fictionality, I surmise that figurality may legitimately be the basis of signification itself. Among these figures, history of criticism shows, metaphor is the *primus inter pares*.

It is with such temperament that De Man declares in "The Epistemology of Metaphor" that "all philosophy is condemned, to the extent that it is dependent upon figuration to be literary and, as the depository of this very problem, all literature is to some extent philosophical" (1978: 28). While it may be true, this citation implies, that the place of literature is determined in and by philosophy and thereby makes literature a tenant of philosophy, it is also unequivocally true that there can be no landlord without a tenant, and as a result both mutually define each other. So, when Condillac says abstractions come into being when the mind ceases "to think . . . of the properties by which things are distinguished in order to think only of those in which they agree . . . with each other" (quoted in De Man 1978: 20), De Man interprets him to be

saying that the structure of abstraction is nothing more than the metaphorical process.

Although the study of metaphor has reached a gargantuan height in the sheer number of titles in the bibliography, there is no consensus among scholars on metaphoric value. While some say that metaphors convey knowledge about metaphoricity and signification in general, some say they are transformations of the truth of simile. The two schools argue in the courts of positivity wherein metaphor's fate is determined by the yardstick of truthfulness. So, when one says patent negativity is false, the other says it is a truth about positivity itself. It seems as if the scourge of literal meaning afflicts all efforts directed at making figuration (exemplified by metaphor) assert an epistemological worthiness. According to Paul Ricoeur:

> a word receives a metaphorical meaning in specific contexts within which they are opposed to other words taken literally; this shift in meaning results mainly from a clash between literal meanings, which excludes a literal use of the word in question and gives clues for the finding of a new meaning which is able to fit in the context of the sentence and to make sense in this context.
>
> (1974: 99)

Metaphor, in other words, is an escape to the outside in order to return to the inside. During these movements the prime mover from the inside continues to be *meaning*. The question however remains to be answered whether meanings are not other names.

Traditionally, the name a metaphor assers (what I call its figurative meaning which is never present) is not true (that is, its so-called literal meaning). It is also a received truth in the same tradition that similes are true both figuratively and literally and actually are, in addition, the literal meaning of a possible metaphor. Hence the simile, "Olú is like the horse in a coloring book", though figurative, will be said to be the literal meaning of the corresponding metaphor "Olú is a horse in a coloring book". All similes, therefore, are said to be literally true and all metaphors literally false. What puzzles me, however, is why we do not always state the corollary that all metaphors are figuratively true and all similes literally false. That is to say that we need to maintain a consistency in defining the categories of truthfulness. Once we do this it immediately becomes inappropriate to oppose literal and figurative, or metaphor and simile under the rubric of meaning.

Literally speaking, both simile and metaphor are figurative, whereas, speaking figuratively, simile cannot be properly figurative, especially when meaning is the determining criterion of figuration and literalization. At the grammatical level as well, metaphor is certainly neither the figuration of a simile nor of a literality. Remembering that meaning and saying are not positively delimitable, metaphors, I reiterate, simply mean what they say. For example, it would be traditionally correct to say that the statement "Folásadé is like a zebra" is meaningful and "Folásadé is a zebra", is not because both "meanings", " Folásadé" and "zebra", belong to entirely dissimilar beings. It is very wrong however, as traditional interpretation claims, that "Folásadé is a zebra" is the same thing as saying "Folásadé is like a zebra". More

appropriate will be the idea that "Folásadé is a zebra" means she *is* one in several respects.

This treatment of metaphor is akin to Derrida's criticism of Aristotle's insistence on the imperialism of names and being. Derrida says that Aristotle, differentiating human language from animal sounds because one is sound productive of meaning and the other is not, neglects the fact that, even in human language, there are whole words made up of meaningful letters but are bereft of meaning that can be called their own, for instance, syllables, conjunctions, articles, and in fact, articulation itself. These classes, along with "everything that functions *between* signifying members, between nouns, substantives, or verbs" (1982: 241), are simply neglected, and when considered they are assessed by the degree to which they help meaning and names come into being. In like manner, Folásadé's zebra-icity is reduced to the animal itself without due regard paid to what puts the zebra in place. One major consequence of reasserting the existence of intermediaries is that we shall be forced to grant an important place to figuration in literary understanding so that when a poet calls on his readers to "grab a falling star", we know that stars do not necessarily reside in the sky and grabbing does not necessarily require a hand with five fingers.

5 History Contra Allegoresis

In the discussion that followed Derrida's paper, "Structure, Sign, and Play in the Discourse of the Human Sciences", at the now anecdotal 1966 Johns Hopkins symposium on structuralism, Charles Morazé remarked that:

> concerning the dialogue of the past twenty years with Levi-Strauss on the possibility of a grammar other than that of language – I have a great admiration for what Levi-Strauss has done in the order of a grammar of mythologies. I would like to point out that there is also a grammar of the event – that one can make a grammar of the event. It is more difficult to establish. I think that in the coming months, in the coming years, we will begin to learn how this grammar or rather this set of grammar of events can be constituted.
>
> (Derrida 1970: 269)

Many critical thinkers will agree with Morazé, though only a few will want to put it so bluntly. More important, for our purpose here however, is the fact that the tenor of Morazé's remarks is reproduced at the core of the critical debates on the relevance of semiology-centered theories of literature to history. According to one view, true foregrounding of rhetoric occurs only when concepts are turned inside out to make them show their absolute other that, like the silent difference between two phonemes, is irreducibly non-phenomenal and structured. In practice therefore, literary semiologists merely demonstrate the textuality of discourse without accounting for discursivity or textuality. Such efforts are effete because they merely make the literary text reflect back on to itself. In order to get out of that trap, fictionality, rhetoricity, and figurality (asdefining elements of literature) must be opposed to the non-literary phenomena against which and in conjunction

with which they come into existence. Rhetoric destabilizes grammatical univocity and thematic coherence with the alogical powers of figuration, but in order that a rhetorical reading does not turn itself into another metatotality, Rodolphe Gasché says it should, ". . . [re]deconstruct the totalizing effects of the rhetorical dimension of a text" (1983: 44). In such exercise, "a literary text [is] always both thematic and the simultaneous deconstruction of that thematism" (1983: 44), because both syntax and theme memorize and memorialize one another. In other words, rhetorical reading demonstrates how the rhetorical and syntactical structures of an utterance subvert instead of simply confirm the text's reference. In order to prevent the subversion from becoming a stable reference it is resubverted. Resulting from this series of subversions is an endless interrogation of epistemological calmness. In strict conformity with figurality, this interminable subversion is tropologized as allegory, or more appropriately, *allegoresis*. In allegoresis,

> the relationship between the sign and its meaning (signified) is not decreed by dogma; we have, instead, a relationship between signs in which reference to their respective meanings has become of secondary importance. But this relationship between signs necessarily contains a constitutive temporal element; it remains necessary, if there is to be allegory, that the allegory refer[s] to another sign that precedes it. The meaning constituted by the allegorical sign can then consist only in the *repetition* . . . of a previous sign to be pure anteriority.
>
> (De Man 1983: 207)

For several reasons, allegoresis supersedes metaphoricity in literary apprehension, and prominent among these is its ability to reconstitute the destiny and destination of the sign each time it is used. Allegoresis respects the boundaries that separate and join meaning, structure, and usage. It does not seek to obliterate the identity of other sign(s) – generally called its meaning – because allegoresis is, by definition, formed as a reiteration of an equally palpable anterior sign. To use Gasché's words again, allegoresis reiterates the permanent cleavage that separates "successive and repetitive moments" (1983: 49) in the constitution of its signification process. Furthermore, allegoresis, through its necessary gesture of reaching outside of itself, demonstrates that no full self exists, and self-reflexivity is thus manifestly wrong (De Man 1983: 207).

For many critics however, rhetorical reading, apart from being a watered down and, thus, a distortion of Derridean philosophy, deemphasizes the importance of historical circumstances to an uncomfortable level. One such critic is Suzanne Gearhart who, relying on the authority of Derrida's *différance,* claims that historicity must be a prime factor in all reading strategies that begin from the text. She says that

> if considerations related to "context" always limit and relativize the privilege of certain times, they also preclude other terms from being efficacious or strategically appropriate . . .
>
> (1983: 71)

In that wise, because allegoresis widens the gap between successive and

co-present moments in a text, it cannot serve as an adequate reading tool. To be effective, it must join successive and contemporaneous elements. Since it is incapable of doing that, allegoresis, willing or not, absolutizes literature and gives it a monopoly of the self-knowledge of self-undoing.

Gearhart specifically accuses De Man of repeatedly defining "literature and literary language in opposition to a natural or phenomenal world" (1983: 72). Whenever De Man discusses history, Gearhart continues, it is put to literary questions under the assumption that literature is able to ask history many questions that history cannot ask itself. Nonetheless, if, as Gearhart herself admits, the circumstances of an utterance cannot fully explain its strategic importance, De Man cannot be all that wrong when he says that,

> the hermeneutics of experience and the hermeneutics of reading [which is a necessary companion to writing] are not necessarily compatible.
>
> (De Man 1986: 62)

Allegoresis, by insisting that historicity is the imposition of unhistorical metaphysically determined schema on the unfolding of events and time, lays to rest the misconception that historicity is synonymous with temporality. Since history cannot stand on its own because it too is an effect of a substitutive play it is implicated in a chain of other terms like philosphy, translation, and criticism which are all derivations of antecedent discourses. Thus, philosophy derives from perception, criticism from literature, and history from events. But quite unlike the way Gearhart will desire it to be, these "derivations", remarkably enough, do not resemble or imitate what could be roughly called their predecessors. The discourses occur mutually exclusively of one another while they are also mutually interdependent. Philosophy, for example, arises from perception but is outside it because philosophy exists to interrogate "the truth of perception" (De Man 1986: 83). In like manner, history might arise from subject-dependent events but it is not actually subjected to them because history is a structure of narration or of apprehension of these events. Were this not so, history would simply be the name of events, which, I believe, it is not. At any rate, names live much longer than their bearers in the same manner that history survives events.[7] Since history, like allegoresis, is not itself stable, it cannot stabilize the apprehension (or reading) of other differential items.

History is linguistic and events are not, and for that reason history has to submit itself to the instability of signifying forms. Historiography and historicity function like letters in a word: independently. Because letters come together in a word while the word is not present in each of the letters, we can also claim that the letters and the word are independent of each other. Events, culture, and epochal variables are like the letters in a word in historical discourse: they take on culturally acceptable meaning only in history. But since we can not have history without events, and or have events without history, history has no ground for claiming to be the sole determinant of all meanings.

A grammar of *history* is possible, but that of events, I am not sure about.

Marxism, to date, constitutes the boldest attempt to draw up such a grammar, and it appears events are betraying such constructs. Fully conscious of the risks of absurd reductionism, I want to equate historicity with culture and eventuality with nature. The latter terms in the oppositions are apprehended only on the signification processes of the former. The former set of terms signifies the materiality of the letter (or of the signifier) and thematizes the lack of fullness of the latter set. Crass historicism is a variant of the worship of names as fully representing being, and modern critical theory has shown that the existence of a name signifies the existence of a lack.

As such, instead of subsuming literature and philosophy under history, they all need to be bracketed into the same category and assigned identical values because they are all implicated in signification. All three thrive on the ability to make pronouncements about everything in the world and, as we have said repeatedly, only signs can do that. In this light, it could be said that nothing is beyond the text of the sign. And literature being the only sign-form that formally announces that fact, we can also say that De Man is right, to a large extent, for asserting that literature is the signifier *par excellence*. In his words:

> the divergence between grammar [historicity] and referential meaning [events] is what we call the figural [literary] dimension of language [signification] . . . . We call text any entity that can be considered from such a double perspective; as a generative open-ended, non-referential grammatical system and as a figural system closed off by a transcendental signification that subverts the grammatical code to which the text owes its existence . . . .
>
> (1979: 270)

In the light of the foregoing, how do we read literature? Actually there is no one way except that of *literary* semiology. To effect such a reading, we concentrate first on the thematic aspects or "the specular understanding" of the text. This is the cognitive phenomenal phase. Second, we proceed to describe its non-representational (or material) dimensions. To put it in another phrase, the critic studies the figural make-up of the text in the second phase. At the third level, the critic consciously demonstrates the incongruity between his discoveries in the first two stages, making conscious efforts to demonstrate the asymmetrical nature of cognition and representation. This last stage is crucial because a truly "semiological" reading must show that every text is, so to say, a re-enactment of the arbitrariness of "literary" signification.[8]

Notes

1. Sometimes Ohmann's arguments tend to support this position. He says, for example, that literature belongs to the category of the substantially inconsequential even though the author may indirectly give us access into his "wishes and fears" through his surrogate. But so as not to be seen as somebody who regards literature as escapist and therefore worthless, he says that "reading literature is a form of play . . . and the fictional worlds we construct in this game constitute a judgment on our own real world" (1972: 56). This citation, so full of un-suspended illocution,

surreptitiously undermines its author's arguments. Here, Ohmann fully deploys what in his own description will be called literary activity – metaphorization – to say things that are not literary. Since it is not possible for judgment to work (just like a reader does not catch a falling star) do we then suspend our regular "illocutionary" sense before we can understand this supra-normal illocutionary act?

2. Derrida says, "an interval must separate the present from what it is not in order for the present to be itself, but this interval that constitutes it as present, must by the same token, divide the present in and of itself, thereby also dividing, along with the present, everything that is thought on the basis of the present, that is, in our metaphysical language, every being, and singularly substance or the subject" (1982: 13).
3. For concise, though short, discussions of these possibilities see the first chapters of De Man's *Allegories of Reading* and *The Resistance to Theory*.
4. De Man, for example, often substitutes literature for language. For him, language means linguisticity and not necessarily an aggregate of phonemes, syllables, words, and sentences, but what grounds them.
5. Poetic ambiguity, for instance, is said to be no more than a repetition of the basic split in being itself. According to De Man, "the ambiguity poetry speaks of is the fundamental one that prevails between the world of the spirit and the world of sentient substance: to ground itself, the spirit must turn itself into sentient substance but the latter is knowable only in its dissolution into non-being [or linguisticity]". Taking what I said above about language into consideration, being, De Man seems to be saying, is groundable only when subjected to the spirit of literature (1983: 237).
6. The definition of metaphor, from Aristotle to Jakobson, has lingered around "the transfer to a thing of a name that designates another thing" (De Man 1979: 146). This definition is so broad that all other figures relate to it in one way or the other. As the true meaning of fiction is said to lie in what it is not about, so is that of metaphor said to reside in its "literal" meaning, that is, the common factor that exists in the items of substitution or transference. This simple notion of substitution has been the subject of sometimes acrimonious debates over the importance of metaphoricity in signification. Thus, we have on the one side critics who argue that metaphoricity is the basis of all signification and so of all understanding, and on the other side, those who insist metaphors have no content.
7. As De Man says in a notoriously famous statement, "the bases for historical knowledge are not empirical facts but written texts, even if these texts masquerade in the guise of wars or revolutions" (1983: 165). I do not believe that this statement denies the physical evidence of wars and revolutions but that wars and revolutions, as real as they are, cannot by-pass the travails that representation impose on other "less real" events. Ironically, De Man's trails during World War II is later to be betrayed by texts and not events.
8. For a more detailed explication , see the first three chapters of De Man's *Allegories* (1979) and Gasché's "In-Difference to Philosophy" (1989).

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