

RESPONSE

LOVE ME, LOVE MY OMBRE, ELLE

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The Fall 1981 issue of *Diacritics* contains Gregory Ulmer's review of *La carte postale: de Socrate à Freud et au-delà* (Paris: Flammarion, 1980), called "Post-Age." So much of Derrida's work is on the double take that there might be a virtue in double-taking his latest "book" in the pages of the same journal. ("Double" stands for "indefinite," Derrida frequently implies. Exigencies of the schedule of journal publication and the time table of an itinerant scholar have turned the calendar to the Spring of 1984. An indefinite take, then.) Mr. Ulmer gives an authoritative account of *La carte*. Some duplication is inevitable but I shall, by and large, attempt to stay out of his arguments. As I see it, there are three points where we differ:

1. I do not think Derrida's declared plans are necessarily fulfilled by his texts.

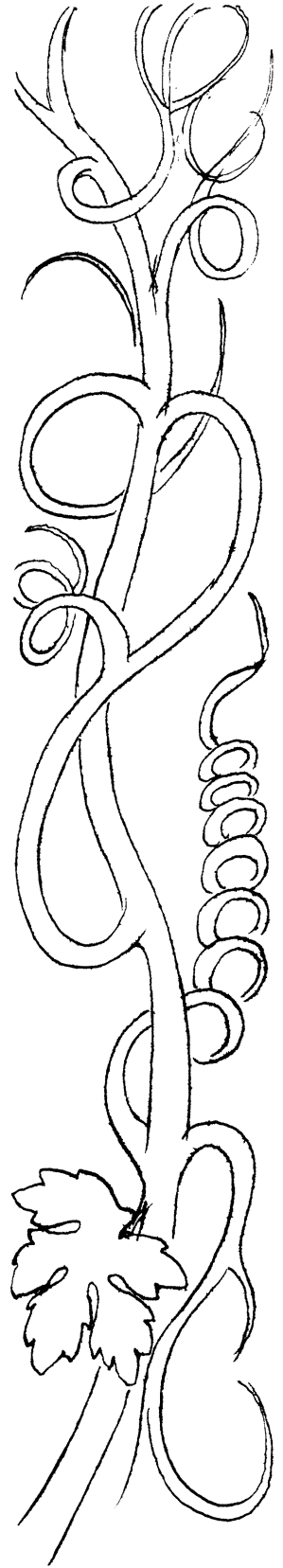
2. I tend to think that grammatology cannot be a "positive science" [Jacques Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, tr. Spivak (Johns Hopkins Univ. Press, 1976), 74–93] and therefore cannot plot it as an "applied science" with three "stages" [Ulmer 56]. I am guided by the excellent good sense of Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe and Jean-Luc Nancy in the matter of the Derrida of postmodernism or popular culture: "We are convinced that the adoption of rubrics of a more modern aura [to designate sections of a symposium on Derrida's work] . . . would probably have ended in the consolidation of a sort of neo-classicism (of the type of the Vulgate of the avant-garde) all the more dangerous because it is not generally perceived as such" [*Les Fins de l'homme: à partir du travail de Jacques Derrida*, eds. Lacoue-Labarthe and Nancy (Paris: Galilée, 1981), 10].

3. I have not left out the place of woman, as most male commentators on Derrida do. Mr. Ulmer has one cryptic sentence: "But we know from Derrida's elaboration of the hymen as a 'quasi-concept' that writing in the next epoch should be more vaginal than phallic" [Ulmer 55]. What does this mean? My essay might be considered an attempt to answer that question.

1

When a man writes, he is in a structure that needs his absence as its necessary condition (writing is defined as that which can necessarily be read in the writer's absence), and entails his pluralization (when the poet is absent, "he bec[om]e[s] his admirers").¹ Writers resist this troubling necessity and desire to

¹W. H. Auden, "In Memory of W. B. Yeats," 1.17. I say "man" because, apart from incidental considerations of Madeleine V.-David, Melanie Klein, and Marie Bonaparte, Derrida reads texts by men for his account of "the scene of writing."



record the living act of a sole self – an auto-bio-graphy. Whatever the argument of a document, the marks and staging of this resistance are its “scene of writing.” When a person reads, the scene of writing is usually ignored and the argument is taken as the product of a self with a proper name. Writers and readers are thus accomplices in the ignoring of the scene of writing. The accounts given of texts are informed by this complicity.

La carte postale foregrounds this “scene of reading and writing” in three different ways in its first three essays.

The book has a double ending, one [549] describing the status of Derrida’s own writing in terms of a scene resembling Jacques Lacan’s reading of “The Purloined Letter,” which is the subject of the third essay of the book; another (the back cover) written like the last page of the first piece (*Envois*), which is a collection of letters to an undisclosed person. Strictly speaking, there is yet another ending: one of the endpapers is a foldout of a reproduction of the *carte postale* which gives the book its title and cover illustration, a picture of Plato behind the seated Socrates at his writing desk.

These inter-enclosing endings make the book as a whole a part of its parts; an effect that Derrida has called “invagination” [“The Law of Genre,” tr. Avital Ronnel, *Glyph* 7 (1980)].

It is possible to read the invagination effect a little further. In the first piece, one of the many readings Derrida gives to this postcard of S et [and] p is to read it as S est [is] p – the formula for the proposition: Subject is predicate. The scene of writing of the second essay can also be read in terms of the initials of the principals. The latter is largely about the game of *fort:da* [“gone - here”] played by Freud’s grandson and recounted by Freud in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*. Thus one might say that S is p (the postcard) is rewritten in the second essay as *fort:da* which proffers the play of absence and presence that we cover under the copula “is.” One could thus read *fort:da* (carrying the shadow of the French Socrate: Platon in its assonance) – f:d – as *freud:derrida*, with the erased copula marking the place of the problem of inheritance.

Yet another “part” exceeds *Envois* outside the cover of *La carte postale*, in the form of an article entitled “Télépathie,” published in *Furor* 2. It is described by Derrida as a collection of four letters written between 9 and 14 July, 1979. It would fit in between pages 219 and 223 of our book, where we are given nine letters marked as “between the 9th and 19th of July, 1979.” Ignoring all numerological fantasies, let us note what Derrida says in the first footnote to the article:

These cards and letters became inaccessible to me, at least materially, by an apparent accident, at a precise moment. They should have figured, as fragments and according to a system already adopted, in Envois (Part One of La Carte Postale) In an equally fortuitous way, I found them near at hand but too late, for the proofsheets had already gone back for a second time. Perhaps one will speak of omission by “resistance.” . . . To be sure, but resistance to what? to whom? Dictated by whom, to whom, how, in what way? From this tangle of daily messages which date from the same week, I do not have the space to extract more than a part for the moment. No time either, for the treatment – sorting out, fragmentation, destruction, etc., to which I have had to subject this exchange. [5]

Given that the accounts and accountings of historical “verity” are being put into question here, the details of this “un-verifiable” footnote seem of interest. In this supplement to the (w)hole in/of the book, which is a consideration of Freud’s curious suspended disbelief in telepathy, Derrida uses a stylistic device that also questions the limits of “inside” and “outside.” There is a long section where Derrida speaks of telepathy “in Freud’s voice,” as Socrates speaks “in the Sophist’s voice” in *Phaedrus*. All the arguments made in “Plato’s Pharmacy” [in *Disseminations*, tr. Barbara Johnson (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1981)] about the status of the good simulacrum – as that which disproves its own validity and thus defies the boundaries of model and image – come to mind. This too would fit within the open-ended taxonomy of “invagination” in Derrida’s language.

Let us suppose the initial resistance overcome: why should we read an elaboration of such a problematic given the urgency of “the rest of the world?” (I touch upon such ques-

tions in my conclusion.)² Let us rather notice that the book can be called, in the *American* sense, “feminist.”³ In the first essay, Derrida does not think love letters are too frivolous to be put in with serious studies of Freud, Lacan, and the French psychoanalytic movement, and is not embarrassed by the writer as lover. In the second essay Freud’s itinerary in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* is discussed as a search for autobiography (as autothanatography) using his daughter/mother Sophie. In the third essay, Lacan’s reading of “The Purloined Letter” is critiqued as phallogocentric. Although I will comment on these gestures in what follows, my chief interest is in the place of “woman” in the development of Derrida’s own vocabulary; the possibility, for instance, that the structural project of this book can itself be called *invagination*.

The pragmatic style of North American and English criticism (feminist or masculist) might find in such appellations “a kind of word play . . . detached from what we have to struggle with” [Colette Gaudin et al., “Introduction,” in *Yale French Studies* 62 (1981), 10]. This presupposes a three-part description of reality: practical complexity (what we have to struggle with) – responsible theory (in touch with that complexity) – irresponsibly word-playing theory. In this view, good theory is seen to abstract the principles of the concrete struggle, leading to efficient understanding. By contrast, I understand Derrida’s project as an undoing of such oppositions, a suggestion that even the most abstract-seeming judgments are arrived at by way of, even constituted by, unwittingly value-laden story lines. These narratives are so practiced that they seem self-evident logical propositions. When Derrida offers a counter-narrative through counter-naming, it is, first, to undo the abstract-concrete ranking in judgments and, secondly, to change the shifting grounds of judgments and decisions. The general argument of this essay is that the naming of woman is such a counter-narrative, and that that naming has slowly moved into the scene of Derrida’s own writing.

I shall attempt to show in the body of this essay how it is the implications of this counter-narrative that provoke the moral outrage against Derrida, which ranges from the conservative to the radical in literary criticism. For it is indeed a moral outrage rather than disinterested refutation (whatever that may be) that we encounter from the opponents of deconstruction. What do M. H. Abrams, Dennis Donaghue, and Terry Eagleton have in common, apart from their distaste for Derrida?⁴ They are all academic critics and as such they share a belief, in the last instance, in the adequate subject of the critic and his company, in the adequacy of theory (that will allow the critic to have the privilege over “mere practice” and guarantee him the sense of a controlling role in culture or politics, in cultural politics), a faith in the availability of an analyzable reality purged of its relationship with the sexed sub-

² I borrow the phrase from Derrida’s incisive consideration of the politics of institutional psychoanalysis, in “Géopsychanalyse: ‘and the rest of the world’” [Confrontations, February (1981)]. In the project of the Constitution of 1977, as it was accepted at the 30th Congress of the API in Jerusalem, a parenthetical sentence defines in a way the divisions of the psychoanalytic world:

(The association’s main geographical areas are defined at this time as America north of the United-States-Mexican border; all America south of that border, and the rest of the world [sentence in English in original]). . . . [The last phrase] names at bottom Europe, place of origin and old metropolis of psychoanalysis . . . and, in the same “rest of the world,” all the still virgin territory, all the places in the world where psychoanalysis has not yet, so to speak, set foot. [12]

Something of the politics of a discourse is disclosed when one computes “the rest of the world” that the discourse defines monolithically.

³ This word describes a particular political commitment in France and would be resisted by Derrida. I have discussed related matters in “French Feminism in An International Frame,” *Yale French Studies* 62 (1981).

⁴ M. H. Abrams, “The Deconstructive Angel,” *Critical Inquiry* 3, No. 3 (1977); Edward A. Said, “The Problem of Textuality: Two Exemplary Positions,” *Critical Inquiry* 4, No. 4 (1978) and “Opponents, Audiences, Constituencies, and Community,” forthcoming in *Critical Inquiry*; Dennis Donaghue, “Deconstructing Deconstruction,” *New York Review of Books* 27.10 (1980); Terry Eagleton, “The Idealism of American Criticism,” *New Left Review* 127 (May–June, 1981). Eagleton has since then produced a guarded apology for Derrida as a “post-structuralist” in *Literary Theory: an Introduction* (Minneapolis: Univ. of Minnesota Press, 1983). The powerful continuist misreading of Derrida produced by Perry Anderson, in *The Track of Historical Materialism* (Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 1983), is a different case and worth more careful scrutiny.

ject. As is abundantly evident to any careful reader of Derrida, he does not claim that there is *no* intention, *no* reference, *no* practice, *no* world. He attempts to “situate” them and claims that they are never self-adequate, never (except strategically) altogether distinct from their political opposites, and any practice will have to account (necessarily inadequately) for this. It is this uncertainty that troubles the critical establishment across the political spectrum. This essay will suggest that, in however rarefied a way, Derrida has seen the name of woman inscribed as the curious subject of the practice that would take these lessons of deconstruction into account, never once and for all, since it is (we shall see what a practical responsibility the positing of a copula entails) a practice. In other words, although Derrida’s detractors and followers have paid little attention to it, I will suggest that it is possible to say that “woman” on the scene of Derrida’s writing, from being a figure of “special interest,” occupies the place of a general critique of the history of Western thought.

To chart the movement of woman in Derrida’s vocabulary, I will take *Spurs* [: *The Styles of Nietzsche*, tr. Barbara Harlow (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 19)] as my starting point. Here woman is taken, via Nietzsche, as a name for citationality.⁵

Briefly: the so-called appropriate enunciation of a truth can only be defined over against that *in*-appropriate enunciation which wrenches the truth into a context other than its own and uses it as a mere citation. “Truths” used within “fiction” or “theatrical frames” are, by this argument, examples of citing. Citation can thus be seen as a condition of possibility of self-adequate truth, indeed even to contain the case of truth as one of its effects. Nietzsche writes in *The Gay Science*, “[women] ‘give themselves,’ even when they – give themselves” [tr. Walter J. Kaufmann (New York: Vintage Books, 1974), 317]. Women, “acting out” their pleasure in the orgasmic moment, can cite themselves in their very self-presence. It is as if the woman is quotation marks and vice versa. If men think they have or possess women in sexual mastery, they should be reminded that, by this logic, women can destroy the proper roles of master and slave. Men cannot know when they are properly in possession of them as masters (knowing them carnally in their pleasure) and when in their possession as slaves (duped by their self-citation in a fake orgasm). Woman makes appropriation – the establishment of a thing in its appropriate property – undecidable.

Another version of this, by way of Mallarmé, is given in “The Double Session” [in *Dissemination*]. The theme that the dancing woman seems to mime, to act out, or dance, is the rendering, to the male spectator, “the nudity of [his] own concepts,” but only “through the last veil that remains forever, . . . writ[ing his] vision in the manner of a Sign, which she is” – indicating the absence of that vision even as it is present-ed. The proper outlines of the vision are thus distanced or “cited” into the divided structure of a sign. The veil that stands in for citing the vision is related, by a certain metaphoric logic, to the “gold” of the hymen, where “presence-in-sexual pleasure” is dislocated as neither in soul nor in body, for the hymen is that lining of the “insides” of the body which is also its “outside” skin. “Now, if we can begin to see that the ‘blank’ and the ‘fold’ cannot be mastered as themes or as meanings, if it is within the fold and the blank of a certain hymen that the textuality of the text [as citation rather than transparent simulacrum of speech as presence] is re-marked, then we will have outlined the very limits of thematic criticism” [243, 246–47].⁶

Of course these deductions are based on a curious view of woman and an implicit identification of (male) pleasure (“sem(e)-ination”) as the signified, however besieged. To see indeterminacy in the figure of women might be the effect of an ethicolegal narrative whose oppressive hegemony still remains largely unquestioned. Yet it must be recognized that the deduction allows Derrida’s reading of Nietzsche and Mallarmé to make woman the mark of the critique of the proper. If in the best-known Derrida texts it is Being that is taken as pre-

⁵The figure of woman agitates Derrida’s work at least as early as *Of Grammatology*. For a desexualized (although presented in the context of an intellectual tradition seen as homoerotic) account of citationality see Derrida, “Limited Inc: abc,” tr. Samuel Weber, in *Glyph* 2, 1977. My commentary upon it can be found in “Revolutions That As Yet Have No Model: Derrida’s ‘Limited Inc,’” *Diacritics* 10, No. 14 (1980). I have discussed the place of woman in Derrida briefly in “French Feminism” and from the point of view of the practice of feminist literary criticism in the US in “Displacement and the Discourse of Woman,” *Displacement: Derrida and After* ed. Mark Krupnick (Bloomington: Indiana Univ. Press, 1983).

⁶I have modified translations wherever necessary.

comprehended and therefore inaccessible to the ontotheological question, in *Spurs* and “The Double Session” appropriation is taken to be pre-comprehended even before the question of Being is posed. That something can “be” takes for granted that something can “be proper to itself”: “The question of the sense or the truth of being is not *capable* of the question of the proper. . . . The abyss of truth as non-truth, of appropriation as appropriation/a-propiation, of declaration as parodistic dissimulation, one wonders if this is not what Nietzsche calls the form of style and the non-place of woman” [*Spurs* 111–13, 119–21].

If the word “woman” can thus be associated with the narrative of this set of problems, it can take its place upon the Derridian chain which contains “differance,” “parergon,” “writing.” It is by no means one among many Derridian themes. It is perhaps the most tenacious name for the limit that situates and undermines the vanguard of every theory seeking to be adequate to its theme. The limit is where the proper becomes undecidable, is put within the double (or indefinite) mirror-structure of the *abyme*: any invocation of the “abyssal limit” in Derrida (whenever, for example, a proper name undermines its propriety and breaks into common words in the “mother tongue” – “connect, I cut”) entails the “name” of woman – a “name” itself undecidable.⁷ When in “To Speculate – On ‘Freud,’” Derrida uses the concept of semi-mourning (*demi-deuil*) to describe the conduct of the text, once again the abyss-structure that can be named “woman” is invoked.⁸ For Freud suggests in *Mourning and Melancholia* that successful mourning accepts the lost object as lost. According to the abyssal structure named woman, who is also the lost object par excellence, there can be no proper and self-identical acceptance of loss. We achieve only an asymmetrical economy of mourning and melancholia – a semi-mourning – which feeds our desire for establishing ourselves as an autobiographical self. Derrida charts this “feminine operation” in his reading of *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*.⁹

⁷Derrida’s critique of legitimation through the patriarchal proper name can be appreciated in the most common-sensical way. The Western metaphysics of everyday life does indeed make a woman’s name undecidable. It is either her father’s or her husband’s. What is her “own” name? She might take her mother’s father’s or create a fictive name which does not effectively threaten the circuit of legitimacy.

⁸Published in English translation as “Speculations – On Freud,” in *Oxford Literary Review* 3 (1978). The translated title seems to miss the point of the infinitive and of giving Freud as a citation.

⁹Derrida’s attitude toward the advanced technology of electronic telecommunication also reveals the encroachment of the “feminine operation” of undecidability. Officials of the State believe in the distinction between the two technologies as decisive. The French Chief Inspector of Post and Telecommunication (cited in *La carte*) thinks one must face the future by “envisaging an extension of the attributions of the post [there you will think that I am inventing words for the needs of my demonstration] which, omnipresent through its offices or its ‘factors’ [I like the fact that he comes to it via quotation marks], can deal with all [emphasis mine] the operations putting the population and the administration in contact with each other” [117; interpolations Derrida’s; it is of course unnecessary to verify the source of this quotation]. The U.S. Postmaster General offers a slightly different program, one where the word “tandem” and “marriage” would no doubt have set off speculations about Plato in tandem in a homosexual marriage with Socrates. But the distinction remains decisive:

The Postal Service’s recently inaugurated Electronic Computer-Originated Mail service does just that [makes the two modes of message systems work in tandem]: It is a marriage of our universal delivery system with the electronic technology developed and operated by the private sector. . . . It employs private telecommunications services to transport mail electronically just as the Postal Service currently uses planes, trains and other means to move it physically. [*The New York Times, Sunday, Jan. 31, 1982, F19*]

Derrida, however, sees the latest mode as undecidably complicit with the most ancient:

In common language, the post in the strict sense, if you like, is distinguished from all other telecommunication . . . by this characteristic: transporting a “document,” in its material support [Lacan’s definition of “letter” in “The Agency of the Letter in the Unconscious or Reason Since Freud,” in *Écrits: A Selection*, tr. Alan Sheridan (New York: Norton, 1947), 147]. A pretty confused idea but quite useful in building a consensus around the banal notion of the post – and one certainly needs it. But it is enough to analyse this notion of “document” or material support a little to see the difficulties accumulate. [115]

In other words, Derrida would not disagree that there is a rupture between “the book” (letter with a material support) and “film and video” [Ulmer 56]. But he would insist that the distinction between rupture and repetition is structurally undecidable [“Structure, Sign, and Play in the Discourse of the Human

Spurs begins with the declaration: “But – woman will be my subject” [37]. One must always remember that the word “subject” can mean both subject matter (object) and the self. Halfway into the piece, however, Derrida writes: “therefore woman will not have been my subject” [120]. This is because no determined essence of woman can be located objectively.

Of all the names that Derrida has given to originary undecidability, woman possesses this special quality: she can occupy both positions in the subject-object oscillation, be cathected as both, something that différance, writing, parergon, the supplement, and the like – other names of undecidability – cannot do without special pleading. Derrida’s arrival at the name of woman seems to be a slow assumption of the consequences of a critique of humanism as phallogocentrism.¹⁰ But at least since *Glas*, the graphic of sexual difference is never far from Derrida’s work.

In his earliest published book, Derrida suggests that Edmund Husserl, unable to give a phenomenological account of the moment or space before the institution of geometry, assumes it as already accomplished, and concentrates instead on the historical reactivation of that institutionality. This allows Husserl to analyze the privileged concept of Language as the condition of possibility of such a history. I am suggesting here that woman in Derrida is such a privileged figure. Her place is different from that of names such as différance, trace, parergon and the like – attempts at giving a name to the pre-institutional origin of institution. Woman is the name of the absolute limit of undecidability that such attempts must encounter. My suggestion takes on plausibility when we consider that Derrida describes Husserl’s project of historical reactivation in terms that, nearly twenty years before its publication, might well describe *Envois*:

*Husserl . . . speaks of Rückfrage. We have translated it by return inquiry. . . . Return inquiry . . . is marked by the postal and epistolary reference or resonance of a communication from a distance. . . . [It] is asked on the basis of a first posting [envoi]. From a received and already readable document, the possibility is offered me of asking again, and in return, about the originary and final intention of what had been given me by tradition. The latter, which is only mediacy itself and openness to a telecommunication in general, is then, as Husserl says, “open . . . to continual inquiry.” [Edmund Husserl’s *The Origin of Geometry: An Introduction*, tr. John P. Leavy, Jr. (Stony Brook, N.Y.: Nicolas Nays, 1978), 50]*

Are Plato and Socrates, then, standing in for the institution of the metaphysical tradition, and *Envois* a legend of the thought that any return inquiry to grasp the pre-institutional origin can do no more than stall at the absolute limit – undecidability as woman?

Although it is not a clear demarcation, deconstruction can be seen as two different projects. First, as the “deconstitution of the founding concepts of philosophy” and second, as “affirmative deconstruction.” The former project is carried out in the many meticulous analyses of the texts of phallogocentrism – the only texts we have. The latter project is more

Sciences,” in *Writing and Difference*, tr. Alan Bass (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1978), 278–82], as Freud finds it empirically undecidable in the name of telepathy, in “*Dreams and Occultism*”:

What lies between [the] two [mental acts] in telepathy may easily be a physical process into which the psychic act is transformed at one end and which is transformed back once more into the same psychic one at the other end. The analogy with other transformations, such as occur in speaking and hearing by telephone, would be unmistakable. . . . It would seem to me that psycho-analysis, by inserting the unconscious between what is physical and what was previously called “psychical,” has prepared us for the assumption of such processes as telepathy. [Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works, tr. James Strachey et al. (London: Hogarth Press, 1964), vol. 22, p. 55; cited in “*Télépathie*”]

I cannot know if Derrida wants to “believe in” telepathy. I can however recognize that the phallogocentric view of rupture is, here as elsewhere in Derrida, seen to be normed by the “feminine operation” of repetition, of the latter capturing the former in a citational fold; even as I ask: does such a “generalization” of woman negate “woman in the narrow sense”?

¹⁰See “*French Feminism*,” 170.

mysterious, leads to orphic utterances, is concerned with forging a practice that recognizes its condition of possibility in the impossibility of theoretical rigor, and that must remain apocalyptic in scope and tone, “render delirious the interior voice which is the voice of the other in us,” [“Of An Apocalyptic Tone Recently Adopted in Philosophy,” tr. John P. Leavey, Jr. *Semeia* 23 (1982), 71; translation modified]. This project is almost invariably associated with woman. Here explicating Nietzsche: “she plays dissimulation, ornamentation, the lie, art, artistic philosophy, she is a power of affirmation. If one still condemned her, it would be to the extent that she would deny that affirmative power from the man’s point of view, would come to lie in a belief in truth, to reflect in a specular way the foolish dogmatism that it provokes” [*Spurs* 67]. In a text as early as “Structure, Sign, and Play” the well-known final figure accompanies a call for affirmative deconstruction:

I employ these words, I admit, with a glance toward the operations of childbearing – but also with a glance toward those who, in a society from which I do not exclude myself, turn their eyes away when faced with the as yet unnamable which is proclaiming itself and which can do so, as is necessary whenever a birth is in the offing, only under the species of the nonspecies, in the formless, mute, infant and terrifying form of monstrosity. [293]

Here we see one of the first subliminal articulations of the longing for the name of the mother. The critic belongs to a group of men who watch, yet would not watch. The emphasis is still on the apocalyptic practice, the monstrous infant. But the father is noticeably absent, and the operation of birthing fills the stage.

In “Plato’s Pharmacy,” the mother’s son is directly related to another name for undecidability: writing. Logos or speech is the father’s legitimate son, whose parent is authoritatively present. Writing is the mother’s illegitimate son, who can be claimed by anyone. The phallogocentric philosopher systematically resists the possibility that all discourse is dependent upon the producer’s absence, and thus irreducibly illegitimate – a mother’s son. (The daughter is not in sight.)

By way of conclusion, I will offer some criticism of such a use of the figure of woman. Here, however, I will ask the reader to keep in mind the nature of woman’s place in the Derridian vocabulary (the protocol is instantly to point out that it is an undecidable (non)place), as I summarize the matter of each of the four sections of *La carte postale*.

2

It is of course risky to generalize about the work of someone who calls the possibility of adequate generalization into question. Let us risk one on those shifting grounds: When Derrida analyzes philosophical or theoretical texts, however canny they might be, “the scene of writing” is seen to be betrayed rather than declared. When he reads literary or visual texts, on the other hand, the scene of writing seems more directly “thematized” in what is being read.¹¹ I have elsewhere suggested that such a difference in treatment is due perhaps to the combination of a stringent subdivision of disciplinary labor by the French Ministry of Education and the corresponding pedagogic system, on the one hand (thus a separation from the ideology of literary production), and the Parisian tradition of non-academic high-journalistic writing on the occasion of literature, on the other. Whatever the case may be, we are not surprised to find Derridian statements such as: “It was normal that the [dislocation of the founding categories of the language and the grammar of the *epistémè*] was more secure and

¹¹As I noted in my text, Derrida cautions us against entertaining the theme-form opposition too strictly in “The Double Session” [Dissemination 245]. The word can only be read within the feminine boundaries of the quotation mark. Thus, when speaking on the issue of philosophy and literature, Derrida appropriately reminds us that there is no philosophy or literature as such, and those words would have to be redefined if they are used to describe Derrida’s project as a literarization of philosophy or a philosophizing of literature. My observation here obviously does not “venture up to the perilous necessity” of confronting such an abyssal limit or undertaking such a task. For the (non)scientific method of not venturing up to “the perilous necessity” of fundamental questions, but “taking shelter” in discourse, see *Grammatology* 74–75.

more penetrating on the side of literature and poetic writing" [*Grammatology* 92]; and, "when a writing marks and re-marks this undecidability, its formalizing power is greater, even if it is 'literary' in appearance, or apparently the tributary of a natural language, than that of a proposition, logico-mathematical in form, which would not go as far as the former type of mark" [*Dissemination* 222].

Thus when Derrida wishes to *mime*, as he does in *Glas*, the scene of reading and writing, he produces a type of discourse that seems, to the "common experience" which allowed Socrates and Freud to assume the phenomenon of pleasure, like literary discourse. This I think is the case with *Envois*, the first piece in *La carte postale*.

In the light of Derrida's work, and of Derridian criticism, it is not difficult to understand that traditional phallogocentric discourse is marked by, even as it produced, "the name of man." The disclosure of the denegated scene of writing-reading, the acknowledgement that appropriation is indeterminate, as undertaken by Derrida, can be seen to articulate a certain "(non)name of woman." I have made the argument in some detail in the previous pages, and I think it is a point worth making. At certain moments in this essay, where I comment on the operative importance, in Derrida, of the critique of appropriation through the disclosure of the scene of writing-reading, I will simply refer to this (non)naming of woman, in the expectation that the argument will be recalled.

It is already with this expectation, then, that I give below an outline of the scene of writing-reading as deployed by *Envois*:

I. The sender is (always) undecidable. This is paradoxically thematized (I think Derrida would prefer the word "stenographed" or "legended") through the proliferation of plausible biographical detail – Derrida's visits to Yale, Oxford, and many other university towns.¹² The book's "origin" is given in an incident involving Cynthia Chase and Jonathan Culler. Yet, since the book may well be written in a code known only to Derrida himself, a singular crypt, those data might be "cited" as part of a game. Derrida invokes this possibility in *Spurs* [135–39] and elsewhere; and many times in this book. I quote an example from the letter-in-excess on the back cover which supplements *Envois*: "This satire of epistolary literature had to be stuffed: with addresses, postal codes, crypted missives, anonymous letters, all seeped in many modes, genres, and tones. I also give false dates, signatures, titles or references, the language itself." Thus the "postcard, an open letter," is "where the secret appears but undecipherably." It cannot be overemphasized that this stenography mimes the structure of *all* messages through exaggerated foregrounding, as indeed the word "satire" implies.

II. The receiver is also undecidable. The point is made many a time that the sender does not really know who the receiver really is, if (s)he exists. It is indicated that it might be wrong to think of *Envois* only as a heterosexual exchange (57, 60, and *passim*). After all, the picture on the many copies of the "same" postcard that the sender sends the receiver (the plurality of the "same" is probably stenographed here) may be of a famous homosexual couple a *tergo*. Yet the "normal" aura of the male-female couple (which can also inhabit a certain sort of homosexual coupling) is very strong in *Envois*. The second person allows a partial cover for "sexual identity." But there are enough adjectives with feminine endings to support the "normative" expectations. (Just as you need satiric exaggeration to stenograph the scene of reading-writing, so do you need a greater effort at dislocation to counteract the sexual "norm" of epistle literature. Plato and Socrates' homosexual aura is supported after all by an abundantly expressed classical Greek cultural "norm." Derrida says of Rousseau – "Rousseau does not doubt that imitation and formal outline are the property of art, and he inherits, as a matter of course, the traditional concept of mimesis" [*Grammatology* 208]; so would I hesitantly advance: the concept of love that Derrida seems to be working with is "the traditional concept of love, which takes for granted that an irrational fixation upon the unique is a property of love." It underscores another feature of the epistolary tradition: he speaks *for* her, she remains mute, reported; written to; Diotima to his Socrates more

¹²I discuss the implications of "legend" in "Glas-Piece: A Compte-Rendu," in *Diacritics* 7, No. 3 (1977). "Stenography" would, presumably, yield "a writing in little," a "miniaturization," even a "metonymic contraction," rather than metaphorization or symbolization. Mr. Ulmer interestingly suggests that Derrida's trips and returns are a fort-da-ing of the subject [43].

than Socrates to his Plato.¹³ Some of the letters in this collection, have, apparently, been burned. In the matter of burning letters, women cannot be “as subtle” as the philosopher:

*I made a fire; being tired
Of the white fists of old
Letters and their death rattle
When I came too close to the wastebasket.
What did they know that I didn't?
Grain by grain, they unrolled
Sands where a dream of clear water
Grinned like a getaway car.
I am not subtle
Love, love, and well, I was tired
Of cardboard cartons the color of cement or a dog pack
Holding in its hate
Dully, under a pack of men in red jackets,
And the eyes and times of the postmarks.
— Sylvia Plath, “Burning the Letters.”*

A traditional concept of love seems also to be implicit in the handling of the child as justification or sublation of a relationship. It is the “impossible message” that cannot be a sign [29–30]. It is the most vivid phantasm [45]. Derrida speaks of the child growing in him [49] but also of “my sorrow I love it as a child of yours” [236] as he walks in and out of Oxford colleges. Although he writes of suckling the child and feeling it breathe in his belly, the banal metaphor of “the philosophic heritage” is too strong to be ignored, especially when Derrida himself gives it support [144; the basic argument in “To Speculate – On ‘Freud’”]. When he writes: “without delay we would make ourselves a child, and then come back to sit in that compartment as if nothing had happened” [208], although I know that Derrida *might* be parodying that Platonism which, identifying orgasm with semination – as in the male – declares in the *Laws* that the law of nature is coupling destined for reproduction [*Dissemination* 152–53]; I cannot not think that, like Norman Mailer and his thousand ancestors, he might also be repeating it; and, repeating his own critique of Freud, I would withhold the benefit of the doubt: “description takes sides when it induces a practice, an ethics, and an institution, therefore a politics assuring the tradition of its truth” [509].

This tradition can accommodate the rich specificity of the discourse of erection and countererection which, through the French colloquial verb “bander” (to get a hard on) is made, as usual, to communicate with contraband, the binding of *Bindewort* (copula), the binding of “bound energy” in Freud, and leads to an “économie bindinale” as distinct from an “économie libidinale.” Vagina and hymen remain as “supply-side” as the child. I would recommend a more down-to-earth critique to binary oppositions:

Perhaps masculinist thinking divides life into dualities and dichotomies so that men can get the half that suits them. Children per se have been divided into the concept and the reality. Men are in charge of the concept of the child (they decide when life begins, or which child is “illegitimate,” for example), while women are in charge of the reality (morning sickness, toxemia, breech births, cracked nipples, three meals a day, fevers, snowsuits, bathtimes, nightmares, and diapers). [Letty Cottin Pogrebin, “Big Changes in Parenting,” Ms 10, No. 8 (1982), 46]

¹³The fact that “Derrida” is aware of this problem does not change the reading: “and if because I love them too much I don’t publish your letters (which by rights belong to me). They will accuse me of effacing you, silencing you, of making no mention of you. If I publish them, they will accuse me of appropriating myself, of stealing, of raping, of keeping the initiative, of exploiting woman’s body, always the prick [toujours le mec, quoi]. Ah, Bettina, mon amour . . .” [247]. Is this Bettina von Arnim, whose childhood letters to Goethe, collected and published by herself in maturity as *Briefwechsel mit einem Kinde*, are of course always carefully cross-indexed to Goethe, the overshadowing receiver? I am grateful to Sandra Shattuck for this suggestion.

There is, so to speak, a rich ore of narrative ingredients to be mined here.

One feels similarly uneasy about the pervasive use of certain words in an overdetermined way: “generation” as in computers of succeeding generations, or “reproduction” as in the mechanical reproduction of postcards. One might have expected a deconstitution of the sedimentation of these metaphors, as Derrida recommends in the case of the word “literature”: “Literature is annulled [*s’annule*] in its limitlessness. . . . This should not prevent us – on the contrary – to labor [*travailler*] to find out what has been represented and determined under that name – literature – and why” [*Dissemination*, 223]. In the same spirit one might suggest that one must labor to find out why technological or mechanical systems that understand themselves at least partially as co-opting human functions have chosen to name themselves from the field of human sexuality, most specifically from human continuity through coupling.¹⁴

I am not necessarily faulting Derrida here. I am restraining the enthusiasm of readers like the two (woman) intellectuals in France who maintained in pedagogic discussion that Derrida “wrote like a woman.”

I have also thought that they might consider, reading the scattered mail, that I send myself these letters, all by myself: no sooner dispatched than they arrive (I remain the first and the last to read them) by the trajectory of a receiver-sender “hook-up” [“combiné”]. By that banal device, I would be the listener of what I tell myself. And, if you follow, that arrives a priori to its destination. . . . Or perhaps, what amounts to the same thing, in the process of waiting for myself or attaining myself, it arrives everywhere, always here and there at the same time, fort and da. . . . Then it always arrives at its destination. Eh! that’s a good definition of the “ego” [“moi”] and the fantasm, at bottom. But I speak of other things, of you and of Necessity. [214]

Although the implication in these lines is that “they” would be wrong if they thought these were self-addressed letters, we cannot ignore that possibility either, for it is a good definition of the “ego,” an ensemble of a *carte postale* [postal map] where all sorts of things arriving here and there combine to produce an ego-effect. The associations are of Nietzsche hinting at the subject’s irreducible plurality when he calls women “his truths” [cited in *Spurs* 105]. The beloved of *La carte* is then the truth(s) of the subject. One might also think of Mallarmé’s “Prose (pour Des Esseintes)” – a poem celebrating Huysman’s hero, who put reality “under glass” [*Dissemination* 263], where the divided self entertains itself as itself and its sister: “We led our faces (I maintain that we were two) over many charms of the landscape, O sister, comparing yours to them. . . . But this sensible, tender sister carried her glance no further than to smile, how to understand her is an old care of mine” [tr. Anthony Hartley, in *Mallarmé* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1965), 62, 64]. The links between “Mallarmé’s” project and “Derrida’s” are multiple and abyssal, including, of course, the other’s existence only as mutism and citation. Here I will comment merely on the last sentence from the passage from *La carte* that I quote above: “But I speak of other things, of you and of Necessity.”

If a good definition of the “I” (ego) is a staggered contingent set of postal relays arriving at multiple points at the same time, to say “you,” to speak of Necessity, is to contravene that definition by transforming it into a “metaphysical” situation of distinct subjects and objects bound by law. This deliberate contravention is the peculiar position of the philosopher who knowingly mimes a scene that puts the value of knowing in question. He is obliged actively to forget the lesson he has learned, wittingly to attempt to perpetrate autobiography; he is obliged to make “an offer on the scene where attempts multiply to occupy the place of the Sa (understand absolute knowledge [*Savior absolu*]; but of course also the possessed female

¹⁴I have commented on the uncritical use of “capital” as “a sum of money that can generate interest” and “surplus-value” as “capital-appreciation” in “Il faut s’y prendre en se prenant à elles,” in *Les Fins*. Mr. Ulmer seems to endorse such uses when he writes: “‘Surplus value’ and catachresis are similar phenomena” [55; see Marx, *Capital*, tr. Ben Fowkes (New York: Vintage Books, 1976), 320–438 for a definition of surplus-value]. It should be mentioned that autoeroticism as writing, which has so far remained exclusively male in Derrida, is given a certain ambivalence on p. 55.

thing, and the Signified – the purloined letter in Lacan’s analysis] stenographed in *Glas*), all the places at once, of the seller, the buyer, and the auctioneer” [549]; just as “the old man dreams of the complete electro-cardio-encephalo-LOGO-icomo-cinematobiogram” [76]. Thus there is a repeated insistence on many metaphysical themes questioned by deconstructive method: the uniqueness and proper-ness of the beloved as addressee, the reference point behind everything that the addresser presents in public (Derrida specifically mentions “The Law of Genre,” given first in Strasbourg in 1979). Such insistence goes against the fractured alterity of the scene of reading and writing and against the notion that the signature earns its effect because it is irreducibly citable. *La carte postale* is “personalized” for each recipient of a complimentary copy with the handwritten first name of that recipient under “Envois” and Derrida’s handwritten signature at the end of the prefatory note. (To anticipate, this also contradicts the propriety of the deconstruction of firsthand and secondhand readings set up on “The factor of truth,” and thus once again renders undecidable – “feminizes” – the very credibility of Derrida’s own argument. And to generalize, it is this irreducible asymmetry and complicity between discourse and example that, moment by moment, seems to tip the narrative toward a mere reversal of the opposition man/woman, rather than present an accomplished displacement, whatever that might be.)

III. Let us resume our description of the deployment of the scene of writing in *Envois*. Not only the sender and the receiver, but the message too is undecidable. The burnt-out blanks of this collection have been arranged according to a code of 52 (twice the number of letters in the Latin alphabet, the number of playing cards [*cartes*] in a pack, does that mean anything?).¹⁵ The blanks do indeed come at important moments, when a crucial secret seems just about to be revealed. Further, the addressee is repeatedly asked to “guess” important details. The letters are peppered with gestures of deferment (the most common being “*Bon, laissons*”) that remain dead ends. The writer remarks upon the many marks (words and strokes) that he makes upon the actual postcards. Yet we have nothing but the generalized copy on the cover (not identical with the one he projects in a letter, where all the customary information would be inscribed upon Socrates’ phallus [268–69]); the endpaper; and the colored reproduction in the corner of page 268. (Again one must insist: this is *not* to say that specifically *writing* cannot capture reality; but to stenograph that *all* discourse is constituted by thus missing the mark.) All discourse must structurally recall “the generality of writing . . . : hymen, reference set apart [*écartée*] by difference. . . . And this generality of writing is nothing other than the production, by writing, of generality: the weaving, according to the setting aside of the referent, of that ‘veil of generality’ ‘which is of no woman in particular’” [*Dissemination* 242]. Each particular postcard is different from itself. As such all postcards share the general predication of writing. Derrida’s representative postcards *mime* this condition. The undecidability of the message is emphasized by means of a topos: the “author” would like us to think of *Envois* as “preface to a book that I did not write” [7].

IV. In *Envois*, Derrida/sender is not only a writer of letters, but also a reader of the picture postcard. As such, he constructs interpretations of what’s going on in the picture that would seem wildly fantastic by the rules of reason. If one consults Freud’s account of the dream-work, however, one can surmise that Derrida is foregrounding the notion that the work of the dream resembles and operates in *all* reading, however we might want to disavow it in our quest for the proper. We notice in his reading of the postcard the multiple and displaced determinations that Freud calls the “overdetermination” of the dream-text. Words are treated as things and vice versa, as in the case of the dream-rebus. If a “connection” can be made, it is made, and “logical” ones are not privileged. It is impossible to do justice to the exhilarating variations in a review essay. Suffice it here to say that this “im-proper” use of language and utterance acts out a critique of the appropriation of meaning. I remind the reader of my opening argument that such a critique might be the woman’s mark in the Derridian text.

History is seen here as a series of chain letters written on postcards. This is a version of saying that “truth” is a chain of substitutions, or history a series of displacements within a

¹⁵ I am grateful to John Willett-Shoptaw for reminding me of the deck of cards. I look forward to the appearance of his work on Joyce in *La carte postale*, a rich topic that does not fit the specific concerns of this review.

restrained economy (a lopsided binary system not producing sublated third terms), or the concept (of the) metaphor (and vice versa) is an autobus or a boat that cannot be stopped ["The *Retrait of Metaphor*," tr. eds., *Enclitic* 2 No. 2 (1978), 7]. The chain is constituted by the possibility of non-arrival, first because the idea of arrival cannot otherwise emerge, and secondly (and more "radically") because all arrivals are irreducibly askew. Such a chain of substitutions and displacements (of senders-receivers-messages and so on) takes place because the origin and the end of anything, be they only of an "act" of signification, or of the theory and practice of revolution, cannot be identical. If origin and end were or could be identical, as idealists or sociopolitical engineers of all types believe (allowing for calculable compensations falls within this belief), there would be no chink out of which history could emerge. History is the difference between origin (*archè*) and end (*telos*), each the postponement and holding-in-reserve of the idealized other. Even that idealization stops short when it suspects that at each end is an abyssal limit, where the proper identity or "appropriation" of each and other becomes undecidable. The chain is used to declare that those two "women" at the limit do not exist, that the project remains the (adequate recovery of the) indivisible self-identity of the phallus.

3

What happens when we read theoretical texts as itineraries of desire? Not a "rejection" of theory, but a recognition that it is subject to production and that therefore its use-value is not *simply* theoretical, explicatory, curative, a rule from above. The author is caught in and enabled by the same net as other men.¹⁶ The net is always that of resistances to abyssal limits.

Freud is in this predicament in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, a text that has caused most Freudians some embarrassment, since the master seems to be playing there on the borders of mysticism and biologism. Derrida fixes his glance on the scene of writing betrayed by the text. On the one hand, in each of its seven sections, the essay seems to propose one breakthrough after another: from pleasure principle as the last instance to repetition compulsion, thence to the death instinct, next to sex as the drive to life, and finally to the biologism of the last brief chapter, via Aristophanes' myth of the orginary unisexual egg. This progression is achieved by postponing difficulties at every step and deciding to move on to a bolder doctrine, a method that can be described as the very *fort:da* game that, Freud concludes, allowed his grandson Ernst to cope with the absence of his mother, Freud's daughter Sophie. It is Freud's contention that Ernst received more pleasure from the *fort* than from the *da*. The *un-pleasure* of the *fort*, in other words, is, for the sake of the assurance of the pleasure of the *da*, more pleasing than the pleasure "itself." This renders the phenomenal identity of pleasure undecidable; and keeps the game forever *in-complete*, although Freud insists to the contrary. As Freud recounts the normality of Ernst's game (chosen by Freud in his text after the quick dismissal of the enigma of traumatic behavior in Section II of *Beyond*), he "identifies" with him as grandfather of the subject. Every move in the game, however, is interpreted with the reported agreement of the mute daughter Sophie. Thus Freud also plays out his role of father of the object (Sophie). He would rather that Ernst had played at railway trains with his bobbin, for then it would have remained securely in his hand and he would not have had to look back. By throwing his reel over the bed and under its skirt, Ernst copes with his desire for his mother, brings the bed into his game; by playing at trains with controlling string and back turned, Freud transforms himself from mother's son to psychoanalyst, turns the bed into a couch. (This is akin to the power play over the woman that Derrida notices in Lacan's "Seminar on 'The Purloined Letter.')" Even this inadequate summary shows that the founding of psychoanalysis in Freud's proper name is related by Derrida to the desire for the woman as daughter/mother.

Derrida's reading weaves in and out of *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* with consummate skill. I shall outline three of his conclusions, because they relate to the "name of woman."

¹⁶See note 1.

First, each inconvenient difficulty that Freud bypasses as he pushes his argument by yet another step beyond, is the possibility of an incursion of undecidability in his argument. Each of these steps is an attempt to take a “pas au-delà.” By calling his own book “De Socrate à Freud et au-delà,” Derrida might be indicating his own inability to step across undecidability and give a proper name to the woman, name his book. (He might, in other words, remain stuck “aux deux-là,” beyond.) Each “pas,” literally a “step” in French, is also the negative supplement in the compound French negative “ne pas.” Thus each step beyond the abyssal limit is itself marked by undecidability.¹⁷ The game remains incomplete.

Indeed, the general method that Freud must employ is also similarly marked by undecidability. Derrida calls it a-thetical, quoting Freud again and again to show Freud’s “speculation” is avowedly neither philosophy nor empirical observation. The father of psychoanalysis speculates because he has an “interest”: to bring death within the grasp of the proper. Death is postponed (sent *forth*) by the repetition compulsion so that each individual can articulate his own proper death rather than yield to the impersonality of nature, can write autobiography as autothanatography. But even thus appropriated, death cannot be allowed to win. Freud turns to the *Symposium* and quotes Aristophanes’ fable; the unifying sex drive is treated as the final determinant.¹⁸

Freud seems constrained to overlook the fact that the fable has a conditioning frame in the *Symposium*. It is spoken by Aristophanes, elsewhere described as Socrates’ worst detractor. Within the scene of writing of the *Symposium*, the value of the fable is not at all clear. Aristophanes cannot speak when his turn comes because he has the hiccoughs. He is obliged to yield his place and can only speak when he has cured his hiccoughs by sneezing. This is hardly the proper production of a self-adequate truth. Within the dialogue, it seems likely that Aristophanes tells this curious fable because he wishes to be different from the other speakers around the table – the discourse of difference, then, and not of identity. Most importantly, in Socrates’ own speech, Diotima seems to contradict Aristophanes’ fable. When Aristophanes attempts to answer Socrates, Alcibiades enters and the *Symposium* takes a new turn. At the very end of the dialogue, we see the still sober Socrates convincing the drunken Aristophanes.

In other words, by extracting Aristophanes’ account without the multiple frame, Freud is ignoring Socrates.¹⁹ As Derrida writes:

¹⁷For an elaboration of this, see Derrida, “Pas I,” *Gramma* 3/4 (1976).

¹⁸The desire to appropriate death by articulating one’s own proper death is a widespread topos. I am reminded of Yeats. He rehearsed many times “the hour before dawn,” the incursion of absolute objectivity. He sought to write his own epitaph in “Under Ben Bulbin.” He repeated that gesture as an accession to the speech of the vanquished ego at the flooding of death – the ego symbolized as a fool in collective identity – in “The Black Tower,” his last poem. The relationship between these rehearsals and the play between Subject (Will as Man and the poet’s nickname) and Object (Mask as Woman) can be readily plotted out. In one of his obscurest poems his speaker seems to attempt, through implicit self-division, a willed suspension of orgasm, to speak for both man and woman at the moment of engendering, even as he seeks to identify the magical phallus. (This attempt is articulated merely as a question in the greater “Leda and the Swan.”)

What Magic Drum?

He holds him from desire, all but stops his breathing lest
Primordial Motherhood forsake his limbs, the child no longer rest,
Drinking joy as it were milk upon his breast.

Through light-obliterating garden foliage what magic drum?
Down limb and breast or down that glimmering belly move his
mouth and sinewy tongue
What from the forest came? What beast has licked its young?

His more celebrated longing for androgyny is recorded in “Among School Children,” by way of the same passage from the *Symposium*. The place of Socrates and Plato in one of our greatest poets is of interest to the feminist.

¹⁹This emphasis on the frame might seem in one way to contradict citationality. Since every utterance is citable, the appropriate context seems not to need emphasis. In fact, however, the insistence upon context or frame might mark the displacement of the binary opposition between citationality and contextuality, suggesting that the “appropriate context” itself is no more than one condition of citation. The

to omit Socrates when one writes, is not to omit anything or anyone, especially when one writes on the subject of Plato. Especially when one writes on the subject of a dialogue of Plato where Socrates, a Socrates, and the Socrates, is not simply a figure. Of course this omission is not a murder, let us not dramatize. It effaces a singular personage whom Plato writes and describes as a character in *Symposium* but also as someone who will have made him or allowed him to write without writing himself, the scene of an infinitely complex signature where inscription arrives only to efface itself. [398]

Effacing Socrates, Freud inscribes him all the more. For the ostensible purpose might be to step beyond the Socratic heritage of Plato. Freud speculates upon the view that Plato is the heir of something as mysterious as the biological domain, namely, the Brihadaranyaka Upanishad: "For Plato would not have adopted a story of this kind which had somehow reached him through some oriental tradition—to say nothing of giving it so important a place—unless it had struck him as containing an element of truth" [*Standard Edition*, vol. 18, 58].

As surely as Ernst, however, Freud cannot risk an absolute *fort*, the open horizons of biology and "the East." He resists a complete solution [*Lösung*] as surely as, according to his own speculation, the patient might resist analysis by falling back within the repetition compulsion. He conserves the *da* by repeating yet another gesture of the "feminine operation" of undecidability. In the limping short section that serves almost as a postscript to the rest of his book, he makes a declaration of the suspension of belief in all that he has said in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*. He ends with the supplementary prosthesis of a repeated citation—citing Goethe citing the Scriptures recommending a limping gait when a firm tread (beyond?) is made impossible by the nature of the terrain.

Derrida is thus careful to point out that *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* ends in the undecidable folds of "citationality," which, as I have pointed out earlier, is one of the chief arguments in Derrida's "situating" of the appropriation of truth. The fold of citationality is marked by the concept-metaphor. I remind the reader of my opening suggestion: such a description here, of the end of *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, might be the description of a text that is operated by the (non)name of woman.

(It is a reminder of the "reality principle" that only in the middle of the next century—after Derrida's death and if the "free market place of ideas" still considers him sufficiently important in the postal relay of the Great homoerotic Tradition, from Socrates to Freud and beyond—can a similar reading of the Derridian scene of writing—with the text of "life" crosshatched into the text of "arguments"—of the *fort* of Freud with the *da* of Derrida, be undertaken.)

4

"The Factor of Truth," the third essay in the book, is well known to most students of Derrida. It was first published in *Poétique* in 1975, and published in English translation in *Yale French Studies* in the same year.²⁰ Although Derrida has added passages and footnotes for this reissue, the method here is "early Derrida," a systematic analysis which is more accessible to an academic reading precisely because the status of the investigating subject is not put in question there. Accordingly, the defense of woman is also more clear-cut there, a part of

frame is also what stages a seemingly transparent argument within the scene of writing, thus undoing the opposition between argument and scene. Just as "theory" is always normed by its "practice," the frame can always be shown to be framed by part of its content [p. 513, n. 27]. The relationship between this graphic and the positivistic project of Erving Goffman's *Frame Analysis* (New York: Harper Colophon, 1974) is comparable to the relationship between grammatology and I. J. Gelb's *A Study of Writing: The Foundation of Grammatology* (Chicago, 1952), cited in *Grammatology*, p. 323, n. 4. I am grateful to Professor Michael Ryan for bringing Goffman's book to my attention.

²⁰The authorized translation of the title is "The Purveyor of Truth." "Purveyor" seems to me to lack the notion that truth can be "situated" as merely a "factor," rather than the end, of "signification." On the other hand, the sense of "facteur" as mailman is one of the archaic senses of the English "factor."

the subject matter, not an undecidable “subject” encroaching upon Derrida’s scene of writing.

As I have already mentioned, the essay is a critique of Jacques Lacan’s “Seminar of [Poe’s] ‘The Purloined Letter.’” Derrida’s critique of Lacan can be summarized as follows:

By ignoring the open-ended frame of Poe’s story (within the narrative as well as within the trilogy of Poe’s tales of detection), Lacan is able to preserve the transcendental status of the phallus. The letter travels from hand to hand in the story. Thus in an intersubjective situation must the signifier be displaced until its true status is revealed: it is the phallus as signifier of the truth that every (male) subject must accede to in order to be inserted into the symbolic order, where the signifier always “means” the absence of the signified; the mother (as truth) unveiled shows that she is castrated. Although the phallus as signifier does not symbolize either the penis or the clitoris, in effect, as Derrida argues, it symbolizes (the lack of) the penis (in the mother).²¹ Thus the phallus, which must arrive at this destination, has a trajectory *proper* to it. And, as Lacan argues, it must also be “indivisible” – the letter even if cut up must remain the *same* letter. This bestowal of propriety and indivisibility idealizes the phallus; curiously enough, Lacan names it the “materiality” – the letter as thing – of the signifier.²² If Lacan had attended to the multiplicity of Poe’s frames, he would have seen that rather than the proper trajectory of truth, it is rather the undecidability of the signifier that gives the story its plot; for the letter is constituted in its putative identity by the fact that it can be *different* from, *improper* to, itself, that it might always not arrive at its destination. In the curious vocabulary of women in the scene of writing, it is indeed the victory of the hymen (which makes defeat or victory undecidable) over the phallus.

Derrida also defends Marie Bonaparte’s reading of “The Purloined Letter” [in the *Life and Works of Edgar Allan Poe*, tr. John Rodker (London: Image Pub. Co., 1949)]. Bonaparte did indeed see the significance of the letter as the mother’s castration, but she averred that the explanation of truth as castration seemed appropriate only for men (cited on p. 487). With Ernest Jones and Melanie Klein, whom Lacan also disparages, Bonaparte sees the phallus as “part object” rather than indivisible whole.²³ She sees the button *above* the chimneypiece where the letter is hung as a clitoris where the phallic signifier is imposed. Lacan follows Baudelaire in misplacing the letter – no mention of the displaced clitoris – *between* the two legs of the chimneypiece and declaring it to be the phallic signifier disclosing the mother’s lack.

In the end Lacan must read Poe’s detective Dupin in two ways: as a dupe *and* as a super analyst. He implicitly identifies with Dupin when he writes, of the Queen’s monetary reward to Dupin: “Do we not in fact feel concerned with good reason when for Dupin it is perhaps a matter of withdrawing himself from the symbolic circuit of the letter – we who make ourselves the emissaries of all the purloined letters which at least for a time will be in sufferance with us in the transference. And is it not the responsibility their transference entails, which we neutralize by equating it with the signifier that is the most annihilating of all signification, namely money” [“Purveyor,” 68]. Derrida endorses Bonaparte’s reading: that Dupin is on the circuit because he desires the (Queen) mother, and the mother rewards him with money in exchange for the penis. According to Derrida, as Freud on the scene of writing of *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, so Lacan demotes the Queen from mother to patient.

The most interesting addition in this new version of “The Factor of Truth” deals with the relationship between Lacan and Heidegger. Derrida distinguishes between two Heideggers, generally in terms of Heidegger’s reading of Nietzsche. In *Of Grammatology* [19–21] the distinction is made without reference to sexual difference. On the other hand, sexual difference becomes the determining factor in establishing this distinction in *Spurs*. It is not surprising that, in these additions to the “Factor,” Derrida shows that Lacan relates to the *other*

²¹ This would be a case of what I have described as a “symbolic clitoridectomy” in “French Feminism.”

²² A sustained analysis in this direction would certainly question Rosalind Coward’s and John Ellis’s insistence that “the dialectic of desire as it appears in Lacan is in no way comparable to Hegelian idealism” [Language and Materialism: Developments in Semiology and the Theory of the Subject (London: Routledge, 1977), 108].

²³ “Type of object towards which the component instincts are directed without this implying that a person as a whole is taken as love-object” [J. Laplanche and J.-B. Pontalis, The Language of Psycho-Analysis, tr. Donald Nicholson-Smith (New York: Norton, 1973), 301].

Heidegger, who “missed the woman in truth’s affabulation, [who] did not ask the sexual question or at least submitted it to the general question of the truth of being” [*Spurs* 109].

5

I have suggested a possibly insufficient differentiation in Derrida’s handling of child, reproduction, generation. A similar possibility could be charged against Derrida’s treatment of the quotation from Crébillon that ends Poe’s tale:

– *Un dessein si funeste,
S’il n’est digne d’Atrée, est digne de Thyeste.*

Derrida does indeed point out that “The Purloined Letter” begins in the indeterminacy of open textuality – in a library – and ends with a citation. If my sustained reminders are plausible (see pages 21–25, 27, 33), this describes the story as a “feminine operation,” in the (non)name of *woman*, an operation which frames the Lacanian account of it as a disclosure of the mother’s castration, the realization of which operates the accession to the name of *man*.

Yet Crébillon’s text is itself “citational” of the classical narrative of Atreus and Thyestes. They were brothers, as, on the circuit of the signifier, are the Minister and Dupin. Thyestes is the lover of Atreus’ wife and is punished for it. Since one cannot know if Dupin is donning Atreus’ or Thyestes’ mask in the citation, the duo fill up undecidably the places of the King and the unknown letter-writer – another Atreus-Thyestes pair.

It should be remarked that there is one detail of the mythic narrative that does not fit into the symbology of Poe’s story. Atreus punished Thyestes by making him eat his children. The siblings in “The Purloined Letter,” fighting over the mother’s phallus and the father’s place, do not make Oedipus’ mistake but rather learn from it, as on the oedipal scene. They do not breed actual children by the mother. This negative detail would not be perceptible if the Atreus-Thyestes story had not been invoked. I think Derrida is right when he says that Oedipus is complicated in Poe’s scene of writing [461]. This particular complication, the manipulation of the Atreus-Thyestes story, dramatizes the phallogocentric initiation scenario which Freud calls the passage through the Oedipal scene. It acts as a displaced representation of the situation of “the actual” Oedipus, symbolically purged of the violence of crime and punishment. Even if one undertook a deconstruction of the theory of representation by demonstrating that the origin is irreducibly a text, the mechanics of working the phallogocentric oedipal scene *through* (the appropriation of the feminine operation of) citation remains noteworthy.

What does it mean to make such an analysis? Dupin corrects the Minister vis-à-vis the Queen. Lacan updates Freud vis-à-vis the Queen’s story and Marie Bonaparte. Derrida re-inscribes the Queen, Poe, and Marie Bonaparte on the occasion of Lacan’s reading. Descending now from the sublime to the ridiculous, Spivak suggests that the frame of “The Purloined Letter” does indeed engage the oedipal rivalry between men over women. It is a game of post office in which we are caught even as we would like to escape it.

The scope of this review will not permit extended consideration of “Du Tout,” the interview with René Major that closes the book. Here as elsewhere, when Derrida speaks of collaborative or institutional work, it is from a precarious “singular” position. “Affirmative deconstruction” seems not to suggest a micrological inscription as regards collective work.

The “du” in the title carries the ambiguity of the French genitive. The conversation may be a part of, or be about, the entire psychoanalytic scene. On the other hand, since “du tout” in French comes after “pas” to emphasize a negation, it might indicate that, like the mothers’ sons he discusses here, Derrida too has been attempting to take *pas* after *pas* – step after step – beyond the abyssal limits of theoretical production where reading and writing, fact and fiction, become undecidable. And this postscript shows either that he could not do it at all, or how those steps relate to the “all” of psychoanalysis. But the relationship is still expressed in terms of the excluded individual (also “plural,” of course) who can be neither

swallowed nor thrown up, who is inevitable – since you cannot, at the limit, escape avoiding him – and must be “inevited” into psychoanalysts’ meetings. Apart from the splendid last sentence about wanting all the places on the circuit that I have already quoted, it seems a bit of a letdown as an endpiece. But then, Derrida might always say it matches Freud’s limping clubfoot of a last section in *Beyond*. . . .

6

What we have in *La carte postale*, then, is a spectacle of how a male philosopher trained in the school of Plato and Hegel and Nietzsche and Heidegger acknowledges the importance of sexual difference and tries to articulate the name of woman. He does not deny that he is tied to the tradition. He cannot show his readers womankind made heterogeneous by many worlds and many classes. Although such a philosopher can wish to deconstruct the methodological opposition between empiricism and structuralism [*Grammatology* 162], in fact it is a binary opposition he often seems to honor, with the privilege going to structure. One example among many: “The interest of this recurrence [of certain motifs], and of its spacing is not, for us, that of an *empirical* enrichment, of an experimental verification, the illustration of a repetitive insistence. It is *structural*” [487; italics mine].

Thus it would be unwise to look in Derrida for a deconstitution of the history of the concept “it-woman” – as opposed to “we-men” – where the line between empiricism and structuralism would shift and waver. Yet we might want to attend to him because the tradition that he is thus “feminizing” or opening up has been the most prestigious articulation of the privileging of man. He thus shows us the dangers of borrowing the methodological imperatives of that tradition uncritically.

It is surely significant that, even today, the men who take to him take everything from him but his project of re-naming the operation of philosophy with the “name” of woman. Although sexual relations of reproduction are still crucial in every arena of politics and economics²⁴ – and the tradition of love letters has been the most powerful ideological dissimulation of those relations, such letters continue to be considered merely frivolous in a world of bullets and starvation. Although Derrida is using them as texts for interpretation and suggesting their complicity with the objective tradition of intellectual discourse, they can still be dismissed as a mark of bourgeois individualism. It would be absurd to claim that Derrida (like Joyce or Lacan) “writes for the working class.” If, however, we academic women of the First World observe Derrida’s minuet with the epistles of love, we might learn that sexuality, “the woman’s role,” is not in simple opposition to “real politics,” and that a vision that dismisses a man’s conduct in love as immaterial to his “practical” stands would not be able to see the generally warping legacy of masculinism implicit in the following polarizations:

*Who, among my numerous calumniators and venomous enemies, has ever reproached me of having the vocation of playing the leading rôles of the lover in a second class theater? And yet, it is true. If those scoundrels were astute, they would have painted on one side “the conditions of production and circulation (of commodities)” and on the other, me at your feet. . . . Love, not for the being of Feuerbach, not for the transmutation of Molechott, not for the proletariat, but love for the beloved, and particularly for you, makes a man a man. [Marx to Jenny, 21 June, 1856, in Pierre Durand, *La vie amoureuse de Karl Marx* (Paris: Julliard, 1970), 60, 62]*

This, I think, is why Derrida reads great men’s letters and writes about them as he writes about their “serious” work. The project for *Envois* might have begun in a reading of Plato’s

²⁴Three simple items in a list inconceivable in its many-layered complexity: the upswing of the Italian left can surely be dated in terms of the successes in the divorce (1974) and abortion (1980) referenda; Ronald Reagan’s victory at the polls was surely linked irreducibly to the politics of the family [Zillah Eisenstein, “Antifeminism in the Politics and Election of 1980,” *Feminist Studies* 7, No. 2 (1981)]; it is surely impossible to sustain the key role of the housing industry in advanced capitalism without the ideology of love. (The reference is to Reagan’s first term.)

Epistles. I have commented on the feminine operation of the simulacrum with reference to "Télépathie," where Derrida speaks "as Freud." It is possible that in *Envois* Derrida speaks "as Plato," exhorting the correspondent to burn the letters, an exhortation only imperfectly obeyed. Perhaps *La carte postale* shows the "true author" of Plato's scene of writing in more than one sense.²⁵ Let us reread a bit of the end of "Plato's Pharmacy," where Derrida finishes rereading Plato's Second Letter, a dispraise of writing, which was not burnt in spite of the sender's injunction to the receiver, who, after many postal relays, retrieves it from phallogocentrism for the undecidable limit of grammatology:

And to finish that Second Letter ". . . Reflect upon this and take care lest at some time in the future you may have to repent of having divulged your views in an unworthy form. The best safeguard is to avoid writing, and learn by heart. For it is impossible that what is written not fall into the public domain. That is the reason why I have never written anything about these things. There is not, and there never will be a written treatise of Plato's. What are now called his are the work of a Socrates restored to youth and beauty. Farewell; be guided by my advice, and begin now by burning this letter when you have read it through several times. . . ."—I hope this one won't get lost. Quick, a double . . . graphite . . . carbon . . . have reread this letter [technology and the psychic machine] . . . burn it. There are ashes there. And now one must distinguish, between two repetitions. . . . [Dissemination 170–71]

²⁵It is hard to fix origins. There is a distant prefiguration in "Freud and the Scene of Writing," written at least a decade before *Envois*: "And the 'sociology of literature' perceives nothing of the war and ruses where the origin of the work is thus at stake, between the author who reads and the first reader who dictates. The sociality of writing as drama [the scene of writing] requires an entirely different discipline" [Writing and Difference 227].