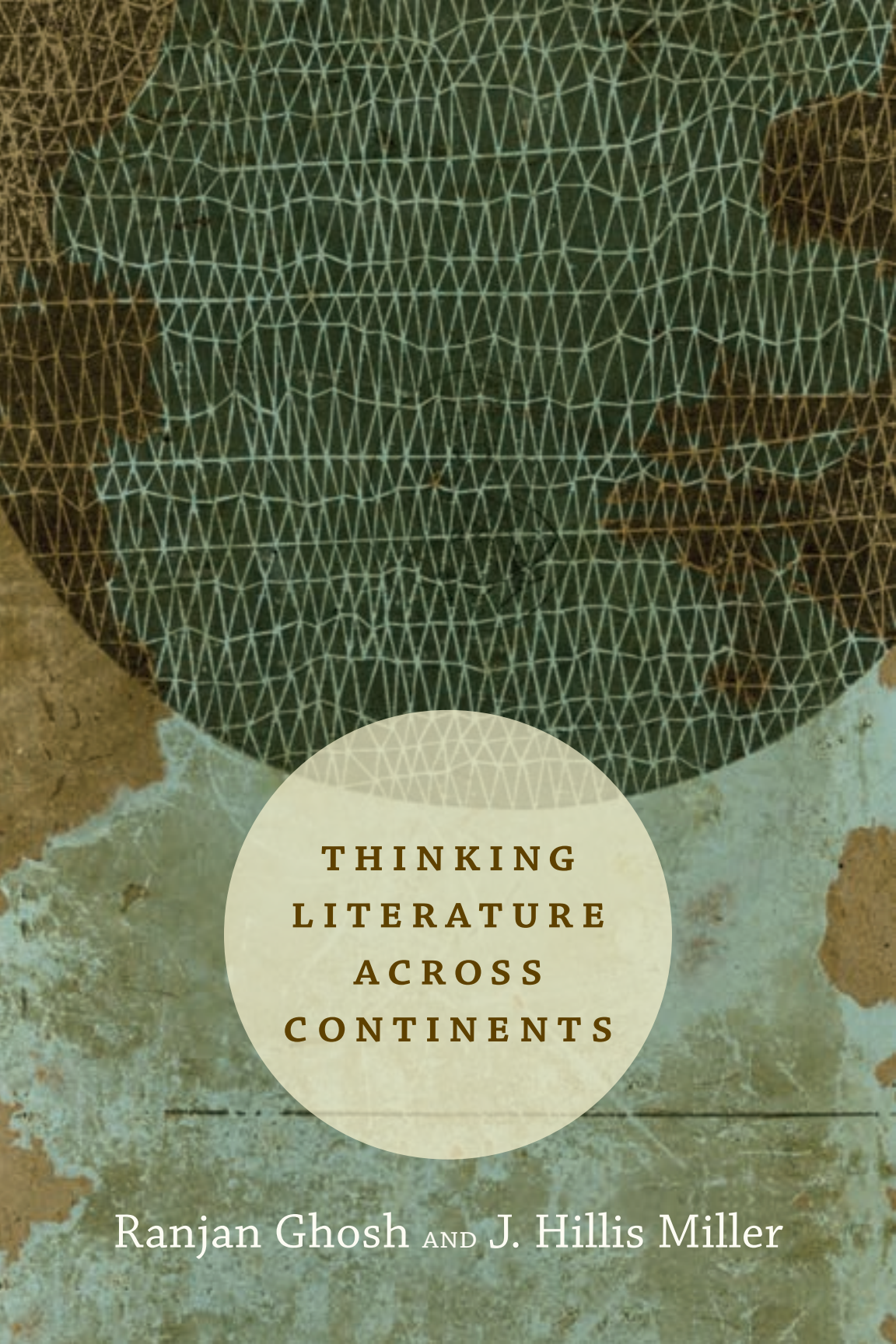
THINKING
LITERATURE
ACROSS
CONTINENTS
Ranjan Ghosh AND J. Hillis Miller

RANJAN GHOSH • J. HILLIS MILLER

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Courtesy of the artist.

CONTENTS

J. HILLIS MILLER

PREFACE

As its title says, this book juxtaposes views of literature by two scholars who live and work on different continents. Ranjan Ghosh teaches English at the University of North Bengal, while J. Hillis Miller is an emeritus professor of Comparative Literature and English at the University of California, Irvine.

Our book, after an introduction by each author, is made up of ten interwoven chapters, paired in sequence, one by each of us on five topics: (1) What Literature Is and Why It Still Matters Today; (2) Poetry as a Literary Form; (3) The Problems of World Literature; (4) Teaching Literature; (5) Ethics and Literature. Though each of us was free to write an essay of any sort on each of these five topics, each chapter also includes dialogical comments by its author on the matching essay by the other author. The explicit dialogical aspect of this book is crucial. It is a book that results from several years of vigorous interaction on our topics, across continents.

The two authors by no means, however, straightforwardly represent India or the United States. For one thing, literary study, literary theory, and the teaching of literature are immensely diverse in each country. Each of us speaks conscientiously for himself, represents himself, not the country or university where he teaches. One of the strengths of this book will be to introduce Western readers who may know little about it to the Sanskrit, Hindi, and Bengali concept of literature as Sahitya. Nevertheless, many of Ghosh's citations and references come from Western theories of literature. His theory is the result of what he calls an (in)fusion from many sources. Many of Ghosh's examples of literature are also Western. Miller's commitments in literary study and teaching to rhetorical reading and to the use of speech-act theory are by no means universally accepted in the West. In the United States, any position on these issues is likely to be strongly contested. Assumptions about literary study and the ways it matters are

centers of much debate these days in the United States, as in the West generally.

Our book, we hope, contributes to that debate not only by juxtaposing essays on our five topics, but by making explicit through the dialogical insertions the ways we differ from one another about what literature is, why it matters, and how it should be written about or taught. I have certainly learned immensely from Ranjan Ghosh's parts of this book.

RANJAN GHOSH

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This book has been a long journey for me, my thoughts and reflections on literature for the last five years. I thank Miller for reading every single chapter in detail and commenting on each one of them. Indeed, we read each other's chapters very closely, building an intense, collaborative, thinking project. I stay beholden to the anonymous readers of the manuscript for their insightful suggestions, leading to an immense improvement on what is now the final draft. Also, our editors at Duke, Courtney Berger and Sandra Korn, commented on the manuscript with their characteristic insight and critical intelligence. Berger, our commissioning editor, deserves a special mention for her warm enthusiasm for this rather unconventional project, and the outstanding cooperation and confidence that she showed during the long course (indeed worked across different continents!) that the book took to reach where it is now.

Chapter 1 is a reworked version of "Literature: The 'Mattering' and the Matter" in *SubStance* 131, no. 42.2 (2013): 33–47. A shorter version of chapter 5 was published as "Intra-active Transculturality," in *Modern Language Notes* 130 (December 2015): 1198–1220. A portion of chapter 7 was published as "Reading and Experiencing a Play Transculturally" in *Comparative Drama* 46, no. 3 (fall 2012): 259–81. Chapter 9 is a reworked version of my earlier work, "Aesthetics of Hunger," in *Symploke* 19, nos. 1–2 (2012): 143–57.

J. HILLIS MILLER

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I gratefully acknowledge all those who have helped me in the preparation of my part of this book, especially, of course, my coauthor in the project, Ranjan Ghosh, as well as those students and faculty in various places around the world who have listened to earlier versions of material in this book and have asked helpful questions and made helpful comments that have aided me in revision and reorientation. I thank also all those at Duke University Press who have been so efficient and generous.

Several sections of my part of this book have already appeared in early forms in journals or books, or were given as lectures, and have recently been collected in *An Innocent Abroad: Lectures in China*. All these segments have been elaborately revised and reoriented for this book to become part of my international dialogue with Ranjan Ghosh about various aspects of reading, writing about, and teaching literature today. I have also revised them to fit my current convictions about literature.

An earlier version of some parts of chapter 2 has appeared in chapter 15 in *An Innocent Abroad: Lectures in China*. The first version of the essay was a lecture titled "National Literatures in the Context of World Literature Today," presented first at Tsinghua University and again at Peking University during a visit to Beijing, September 10–12, 2012. In a different and longer form, the lecture was published as "Literature Matters Today," in *Does Literature Matter?* , a special issue of *SubStance*, edited by Ranjan Ghosh, *SubStance* 42, no. 2 (2013), 12–32. I am grateful to Professor Ghosh for agreeing to a translation of my essay into Chinese, and to the essay's adaptation and revision for this book. A translation into Chinese, by Xialin Ding, of the first half of "Literature Matters Today" appeared in Beijing University's *Guo wai wen xue* (Foreign literature) 2 (2013): 3–8.

An earlier version of some parts of chapter 6 has appeared in chapter 12 of *An Innocent Abroad: Lectures in China*. The earliest version of those

parts of this chapter was a lecture presented at the Fifth Sino-American Symposium on Comparative Literature, held August 11–15, 2010, at Shanghai Jiao Tong University, where Wang Ning, Chen Jing, and Sheng Anfeng extended many courtesies to me during my visit. At the time of this symposium, I had already expressed my concerns about so-called world literature, not only in a lecture presented in 2003 at Tsinghua University, Beijing, and again at Suzhou University (see chapter 7 of *An Innocent Abroad*) but also in a second lecture, presented first at Tsinghua University in 2003 and again in 2004 at Zhengzhou University (see chapter 8 of *An Innocent Abroad*). For chapter 12 of *An Innocent Abroad*, I used an augmented version of my Shanghai Jiao Tong symposium lecture. The additions are my responses to an admirable paper given at the symposium by Thomas Beebee. The augmented version appeared as "Challenges to World Literature" in the bilingual Chinese-English journal published by Shanghai International Studies University, *Comparative Literature in China* 4 (2010): 1–9. The following year, a revision of the augmented text was published as "Globalization and World Literature" in *Comparative Literature: Toward a (Re)construction of World Literature*, a special issue of *Neohelicon* edited by Ning Wang, *Neohelicon* 38, no. 2 (2011): 251–65. This special issue of *Neohelicon* gathered papers from the 2010 symposium held in Shanghai. I am grateful to Shanghai International Studies University, *Comparative Literature in China*, to Wang Ning, to Peter Hajdu, editor of *Neohelicon*, and to Akadémiai Kiadó Zrt. for permission to use in revised and altered form material from this essay in *Thinking across Continents*.

An earlier version of some parts of chapter 8 has appeared in chapter 13 of *An Innocent Abroad*. The lecture that became chapter 13 of that book was presented in September 2010 at the International Conference on Literature, Reading, and Research, held in Guangzhou (once called Canton) at the Guangdong University of Foreign Studies. Guangdong is the name of the province. I chose in my lecture to take Yeats's poem "The Cold Heaven" as a paradigmatic example of the difficulties involved in deciding whether we should read or teach literature now. The poem also exemplifies the difficulties of explaining such a text to students, at home and globally. It comes from Yeats's volume of 1916, *Responsibilities*. The text of the lecture was published in revised form in a wonderful book of essays edited by Paul Socken, *The Edge of the Precipice: Why Read Literature in the Digital Age?*, and in another first-rate book edited by Jakob Lothe and Jeremy Hawthorn, *Narrative Ethics*.

I am grateful to Northwestern University Press for allowing me to reuse this material in revised and changed form. I am also grateful to Ranjan

Ghosh, Wang Ning, Paul Socken, Jakob Lothe, and Jeremy Hawthorn for instigating me to write the first versions of this material and for overseeing the publication of these preliminary versions.

The section of chapter 10 on Anthony Trollope's *Framley Parsonage* was originally instigated by an invitation several years ago from Ortwin de Graef and Frederik Van Dam, of the University of Leuven, Belgium, to present a plenary paper at a conference there in September 2015, to honor the two hundredth anniversary of Trollope's birth. Since I was unable to come in person, I offered to present a paper by video. The video was made at my home in Deer Isle, Maine, in the summer of 2015, with part of it my oral presentation of sections of my paper on *Framley Parsonage*. That presentation is a segment of a documentary of my current life on Deer Isle. The video was presented September 19, 2015, at the University of Leuven's Trollope Bicentennial Conference. The section on Trollope's *Framley Parsonage* in chapter 10 of this book is a fuller version of my remarks on that novel in the video. What I said has been much revised and reoriented to fit the topic of the ethics of literature and my dialogue with Ghosh. I am grateful to Ortwin de Graef and Frederik Van Dam for turning my attention back to Trollope.

RANJAN GHOSH

INTRODUCTION

Thinking across Continents

I love India, but my India is an idea and not a geographical expression. Therefore I am not a patriot—I shall forever seek my *compatriots* all over the world.
—Rabindranath Tagore

So long as the seeing is something to see, it is not the real one; only when the seeing is no-seeing—that is, when the seeing is not a specific act of seeing into a definitely circumscribed state of consciousness—is it the "seeing into one's self-nature." Paradoxically stated, when seeing is no-seeing there is real seeing; when hearing is no-hearing there is real hearing.
—Daisetz Teitaro Suzuki

Turning outside to inside over and over, turning the inside out: what he is waiting for is not there—visibly; that which is not, neither the outside nor the inside.
—Michel Deguy, "Catachreses"

In the context of Jean-Luc Nancy's "Euryopa: Le regard au loin," a short and baffling text written in 1994, Rudolphe Gasché explains how Nancy raises the philosophical question of Europe by investigating the question of the world, sense, finitude, and horizon—a pregnant and operative clutch of terms that our book prefers to settle with by *thinking across continents*. Gasché explains:

> Nancy's starting point is the admittedly questionable etymological meaning of Europe, *Euryopa*—originally an epithet of Zeus, meaning, either *wide-eyed*, or *far-sounding* (i.e. *thundering*). *Der Kleine Pauly* renders it as "far-sounding and looking far into the distance" and goes on to mention another possible but equally questionable etymology, to which Nancy also has recourse, namely the semitic pre-Greek *ereb*, obscurity. According to this origin, the name "Europe," to cite Nancy, "would mean: the one who looks in the distance (or, as well, the one whose voice is farsounding)." But Nancy brings to bear the other possible etymology

of the word, thus determining *Euryopa*'s glance as a "look far into the obscurity, into its own obscurity."[1]

If Europe, as an idea, is looking into the distance, where the world is realized by being world-wide, it is also a way of looking that problematizes finitude and infinity in our understanding of the world. Looking into obscurity and into one's obscurity is holding a position as the world, where infinite means "the infinity of finitude, of the infinitely finite." Martta Heikkilä points out that under such notions of finitude "there is no idea that goes beyond the world by giving it any end, reason, or ground. A world is a space for the infinite of truth and existence: a world free of a horizon. The world is made up beings that are infinitely exposed to existence as a nonessence. Thus they are singular or finite beings that make up the finite and horizonless world, a world which is infinitely finite, hence infinite."[2] This makes me think about Asia, the continent, the world, which I am writing from in a slightly different way. We don't have a consensus on the origin of the word *Asia*. It could have been derived from *Ἀσία* first attributed to Herodotus (about 440 BC), where we locate a reference to Anatolia, or the Persian empire. Perhaps more authentically, it emerges from Akkadian ("to go out, to rise") with a borrowed allegiance to the Semitic root *Asu*, which is a reference to the rising sun. Asia then becomes the land of sunrise. But presently it is not what it used to be: it has drifted away as a geographical mass, got a new name, footprints of new cultures, marks and remarks of new thoughts and ideological formations. Also, with light, Asia becomes a land or a space that gets light first and loses light first. It first gets noticed and then allows others to get noticed by withdrawing from prominence. Losing light is not losing sight but about sighting others and sighting oneself. Losing light, then, is not darkness but no light, not possession but a sharing with others, a light that comes to it only to be distributed to others. Again the light that it loses to its others comes to it as its light and also the light of others. That light dissolves and sublates itself. So the figure of Asia is always behind the figure, the idea that hides to project, retraces to reaffirm. Asia demarcates itself from its self (light and no light, blind spots?) and also self-demarcation (it is the host to a light and then dispossessed to become, in the process, both the guest and the host). Like the light that goes away and returns upon itself, Asia always has an Asia before itself. Sounding Nancyean, I would like to argue that when there is light Asia sees itself. When light disappears, Asia thinks, seeing changes to thought and discovering the power of invisibility. A reality first (light

there is) and then a possibility, which is both self-demarcation and demarcation from others. Asia, for me, thus, continuously doubles itself.

So our book, *Thinking across Continents*, speaks of no finite Asia or Europe or America—self-contained, harmonically hermetic. This finitude, falling back on Nancy, "does not mean that we are noninfinite—like small insignificant beings within a grand, universal, and continuous being—but it means that we are infinitely finite, finitely exposed to our existence as a nonessence, infinitely exposed to the 'otherness' of our own being."[3] We are caught in the across, not simply going from one end to another (from Asia to America) but *an cros*, in a crossed position (Anglo-French origin of across, literally "on cross"), subjected infinitely to finite spots of meditative singularities. We restore and rejuvenate our across and cross positions through dialogue (*regard*, lending to others, two minds in conversation and a host of thoughts across times and traditions). Our dialogues have evinced our presentness in a culture and tradition of thought and have also given "birth to presence" where we have begun without beginning and ended without having a beginning and an end that we can claim are just ours. This is because we have thought about literature within a world and yet did not forget about its potential to go world-wide. Our positions and transpositions belong to us and to the other.

I approached the book as a deep victim of trans-habit. *Trans*, as a prefix, means "across, beyond, to go beyond," from the Latin *trans-*, from the prepositional *trans* "across, over, beyond," probably originally the present participle of the verb *trare-*, meaning "to cross."[4] This crossing, going *a*cross, and staying perpetually crossed is what motivates and characterizes my doing of literature. Brought up in a family of academics in which my father taught physics and my mother taught history, I submitted to the stirring liminality of getting curious about disciplines such as quantum mechanics, Indian and Western philosophy, evolution, and the ramifications of Indian history. Our library shelves housed Richard Feynman and Albert Einstein, flanked by Satyajit Ray, Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan, Victor Turner, Mircea Eliade, J. S. Mill, and Vincent Smith. My early life amid a wide variety of knowledge regimes, macerated by training in Hindustani classical music and the Bengal school of painting, augmented the fecund frequencies that refused to stay confined to a border but became interference (*-ference* in the sense of "carry over, ferry across").[5] Deeper investments in literature in later years, then, could not have come without the crossaffiliation—my affair of *ference*—revealed in joyriding philosophy, history, political and social theory, comparative aesthetics and

religion, cultural theory and criticism. I stood jauntily entranced. This book, then, comes with its own logic of manifestation ignited through an already embedded deposition and disposition, my across factor.

My transposition is built around what I have called the (in)fusion approach, a philosophy of seeing, a hermeneutic desire, that diffracts to interact. Reflecting on the (in)fusion approach, John W. P. Phillips succinctly argues that the sense of "*fusion* (melting, liquefying by heat, and joining by, or as if by, melting), the *infusion* (the pouring of liquid over any substance in order to extract its active qualities) and the Latin (*fundere, fusum*) which can be either to pour (the warm water over the herbal mixture) or to melt (the wax before sealing a letter)" create the operative and dynamic spaces that perhaps "allow us to sidestep the normal institutional barriers"; the (in)fusion approach, both as method and nonmethod, inspires us "to consider what it might mean for a scholar to be steeped in the minute intricacies of an idiom, patiently picking through its margins, and at the same time allowing this work to melt the boundaries of the idiom itself so that other idioms all of a sudden are effectively in play."[6] Staying "crossed," rather acrossed, is what I would like to correspond with the "exteriority within phenomena" that diffractively brings continents together, builds knowledge houses whose relational windows, as Karen Barad argues, are perpetually open and inviting.[7] It is the space outside that works within, as not in its exteriority but as "folded in," enfolded, unfolded, refolded. But going across is not staying crossed in the perpetual whir and whirl: it develops an archive of thinking, a stratum of knowledge, creases and strategies of understanding without losing touch with the force of the across—Deleuze's "new cartographer."[8] Being across breeds the pleasure of being "out of place," a toss amid our "heretical geographies."[9]

(In)fusion, then, can be considered an orientation, a kind of investigative spirit that respects knowledge regimes, the boundaries of tradition, the sacrality of paradigms, but also dares to infringe on them. The infringement is diffractive like an earthworm, as Karen Barad has illustrated resonantly: "Earthworms revel in . . . helping to make compost or otherwise being busy at work and at play: turning the soil over and over—ingesting and excreting it, tunneling through it, burrowing, all means of aerating the soil, allowing oxygen in, opening it up and breathing new life into it."[10] Tunneling through a concept and then transposing it through the gamut of culture and time is what (in)fusion does, much to its productive joy. It assumes a cross-epistemic and transcultural entanglement in a concept or an idea making it "behave" with a difference and some travelling mo-

mentum. (In)fusion has a deep tendency to go across, crisscross, find the crossed point of delicate intersections to enable an epistemological experience gain a vein of life. All my chapters in the book, thus, walk across thoughts, between ideas from a variety of cultures and traditions, making for an experience of literature that is diffractive, mostly, out of time, in the whirl of the "now"—the now that Barad argues "is not an infinitesimal slice but an infinitely rich condensed node in a changing field diffracted across space-time in its ongoing iterative repatterning."[11] My (in)fusion-now is folded into "événement" and the now, in Deleuzian terms, becomes the "prehensions of prehensions," where "echoes, reflections, traces, perspectives, thresholds and folds" prehend and operate as conditions of possibility.[12] However, (in)fusion, through its powers and strategies of melting and smelting, need not be misjudged as a debilitating carnivalesque. The zone of trans maps the effects of difference between communities of thought and paradigms of ideas without being oblivious of the difference, the specificities, the peculiarities that each thought through its own cultural parentage carries with it.

The trans-moment or trans-now is about enacting a communication—difficult and debatable—between apparently incompatible paradigms of thought and concepts. This conflict as communication is not easy to experience and execute because one has to be sure that difference comes through as "differencing," made manifest through intra-activity, an entanglement which preexists our investigation into the forms and modes of difference. My emphatic point is that cultures of thought are intra-active, deeply meshed across different backgrounds, cultures of inheritance, and positionalities. (In)fusion-now is a way, a provocation, to look into the potency of such entanglement (a manifest demonstration of this critical spirit runs through chapter 3).

But (in)fusion-now generously concedes a kind of immanence whose workings might develop both deconstructive and diffractive potential. I revise my earlier entrenched position to link (in)fusion with interdisciplinarity, for I can see the immanence of this approach, its inventive and yet viscous and involved workings within and outside the discipline and in deference to the cardinal principles that disciplinary paradigms love to protect and have remained possessive about.[13] It is not always mediatory, brokering disciplinary dialogues: rather, it is committed to a subtle decrusting of sedimented thinking through conviction of the deep, intra-active, and involved transmediatory existence of literature and concepts and theories by which we try to make sense of literature. This is the power of the across,

clearing spaces and promoting and acknowledging forms of appearing and appearances or emergences. It announces events as ruptures, which Elizabeth Grosz calls "nicks": ruptures into our systems of thinking to figure out an issue and explore what possibilities a concept or an idea can be put to, inciting within limits a force of asystematicity.[14] The untimely and the unaverage is what (in)fusion-now aspires for, an "open-ended cohesion, temporary modes of ordering, slowing, filtering."[15] (In)fusion-now creates frames that are its conditions of understanding and motors of the across.

Infusion-trans-now is the refusal to see our intellectual doing as simply "keeping up with literature," as one of our "constantly shrinking fields," and believing that "steady progress is being achieved simply because, as the field gets smaller, the objects left in it look larger."[16] Our readings of literature usually come with footnotes: sites carefully cited to provide the institutionalized performatics of knowledge and its address. If literature has gone across borders, we are obligated to account for such movements through a method or a rule and enshrine such moves within a tradition and pattern that should sacerdotalize an inheritance. Not that I am belligerently opposed to such institutional keys that unlock our readings of literature. I am not disrespectful either of the specificities that culture and tradition are highlighted with. But like Michel Serres, relishing a kind of nonanxiety of adversarial modes of knowledge formation (the hard as against the soft, as Serres argues in *Five Senses*) where frames, and hence borders, determine our sense of the world and world-meaning, I plunge into literature, most often without footnotes (endnotes, however, materialize to evince how my spirit of the across, staying footloose, has stayed afoot through the book!). Thinking literature saves itself from the "end of thought" by not merely avoiding footnotes but by not feeling their necessity. J. Hillis Miller and I thought across in ways that are varied and made allowance for literature to speak back to us; we dialogized on the literary, and eventually found ourselves on either side of the fence without forgetting that "something there is that does not love a wall."[17] We experienced the footnoted locality of our continent and again forgot what we were "walling in" and "walling out." Experience, excursus, energy were our software of literature. Literature, I admit, exists without us.

We remember, with Serres, that a "cartload of bricks isn't a house."[18] Working out a reading of literature is also about mapping one's worldview, abilities toward world-making. Serres shows us how we are "as little sure of the one as of the multiple."[19] Somewhere, going across is also about believing in monadologies and letting them fall away through our ever

mounting investigations. The (in)fusion-trans-now thesis throws us into the space where a unitary knowledge of cultures and traditions of thought, the collectivity and indivisibility of knowing and the understanding of life and literature, are under question. There is the confidence and commitment to drop anchors across systems and orientations but not always with a rounded certitude in operations that would make the *across* a well-tested medium, a calculus to understand literature and literary thought. The now, as I have demonstrated in chapter 5, has both defined and undefined boundaries, something I have argued as the phenomenon of the "taking-place," where the globality and locality of doing literature become a process that is viscous, "a lake under the mist," in the words of Serres: "The sea, a white plain, background noise, the murmur of a crowd, time. I have no idea, or am only dimly aware, where its individual sites may be, I've no notion of its points, very little idea of its bearings. I have only the feeblest conception of its internal interactions, the lengthiness and entanglement of its connections and relations, only the vaguest idea of its environment. It invades the space or it fades out, takes a place, either gives it up or creates it, by its essentially unpredictable movement."[20]

I am happy to see the now as having Serres's parasite: the noise, the perturbations, the disorder in a system of exchange.[21] The now builds a turbulence that intercepts literature with an energy, new contracts, contacts, and topologies. Literature stays healthy through such violence. My reading of "Daffodils," in chapter 5, of "Birches," in chapter 1, of *Endgame* in chapter 7, and of "The Scholar Gipsy," in chapter 9, are all in some ways a parasitic imbalance in exchanges, the imperfect balance sheet in the operation of the now but not as emergences of simple disorder but rigorous disorder. The parasitic now also has the character of Deleuze's "series," which is not simply the mechanism of resemblance and analogy but "multi-serial in nature," an *agencement* (as the process of "laying out") and a structure for connections and dislocations.[22] (In)fusion-now is in the character of a judgment that is not overpowering but a force, a "non-organic vitality" that works across thought-traditions, becoming combative among a variety of forces and leading to a "new ensemble."[23] It sponsors a growth of thinking and movement that produces a milieu (meaning an experience, middle, and medium, in the French sense of the word). It is across, without beginning or end, "but always a middle *(milieu)* from which it grows and which it overspills."[24] The infusion-now is the *rumeur* (murmur) of assemblages, of affection across subjects and sources.[25] Literature builds its affective accumulation in making potent investments in the now.

What does this now map? It is multiplicitous and both strategic and imaginary, complex and curious. I am greatly tempted to see this mapping as akin to the "psycho-geographic" formations that the situationist theorist Guy Debord theorized from his walks across Paris. The thrust with Debord, as it is with my now, is about aspiring to hit detours, dare the destandardization of connections, and aim configurations through seeming aimlessness—the *dérive*, a drift of a meaningful flâneur, an experimental momentum. The now-as-derive seeks to find communication in interruption, making dialogues possible across formally settled incompatibles. The now is naked but not without its own threads of chance, "redolent passageways, shocking landscapes, superimposing routes and spaces onto each other." Now as "new cities" is our provocation to "*détournement* to monkey-wrench accepted behaviour, to create light, to *disalienate*."[26] So I have tried to meet literature half way: a sort of gathering-up of thoughts, concepts, parameters from various ends of culture and tradition into a poetics of relationality.

Remapped Asia, both as the epistemic site I am writing from and as an atopos, becomes the "being with" and is the continent that believes in the "taking-place" where light, no light, relight come together not in continuity (as it might appear) but works through contiguity. So my Asia (my *sahitya-darshana*, philosophy of literature) exists predominantly as an ensemble, as in-betweenness, a fractal, an otherwise than being. The doing of literature has its center as a relation, most often, an inoperative relation working through reticulated and articulated singularities. My Asia exceeds itself to form another Asia, an other Asia; awareness of Asia is also about an awareness of being "out of Asia," being with non-Asia, being without my Asia-logos. I invest my relation with Asia and non-Asia in the *across*, which is not about taking Asia beyond the local into the arms of the global (the non-Asia, America, or Europe). Asia is out in the world, at large, has always been the world, has stayed world-wide (immanentism).[27] It is my sahitya in the book. Thinking literature begins in destroying literature, an experience of the impossible through excess, singularity, and eccentricity. My thinking across continents, then, is decartographized: geography becoming a vision, a topology, a thought in process. In across as desire, I have lost my home (*aAsia*) but have surely found a world, my *sahit* with continents, forms of a worldling, found my finitude without horizons. *Sahit* is my *across*, "a crossover in attributes of another origin," that thought the book to life, conceived literature as *compatriot*.[28]

J. HILLIS MILLER

INTRODUCTION CONTINUED

The Idiosyncrasy of the Literary Text

Before I begin my introduction proper, let me say how much I have learned from Ranjan Ghosh's part of this book, for example, his introductory essay above. His goal is much different from my own. He wants, if I understand him correctly, to develop, more or less, a unified, universal, and transnational theory of literature. He will then potentially use that theory to account for literary works of all sorts. This happens, in different chapters by him in this book, for Wordsworth's "Daffodils" and Frost's "Birches." He calls his theory and methodology of studying literature "(in)fusion." That word names the amalgamation of the elements that go into it, as tea is an infusion of tea leaves in boiling water. Though many of Ghosh's impressively learned and diverse citations in support of his (in)fusion theory come from Hindi or Sanskrit sources, many are from Western sources, as in his citations from Jean-Luc Nancy or Gilles Deleuze in his part of our introduction or in the abundant etymological notations there, as for the word *Asia*. Ghosh's work in this book, both in his introduction and in his chapters, is an impressive example of "thinking (across) continents," to borrow his name for what he does.

My own procedures in literary study are quite different from Ranjan Ghosh's, as my introductory remarks here demonstrate. I most often start from a literary work or some text, including, but not exclusively, theoretical and philosophical ones. My goal is to account inductively, as best I can, for what some text says and how it says it. Those differences between us generate the dialogical aspects of this book, in our comments along the way about one another's chapters.

I Am Not a Deconstructionist

I am not a deconstructionist. Let me repeat that once more: I am not a deconstructionist. Why do I begin this part of my introduction to this book with this sentence? To clear the ground to start with, so there will be no

misunderstanding. I say I am not a deconstructionist for two related reasons: because my work does not fit the widely accepted misunderstandings by academics and by the media of the work of Jacques Derrida (who coined the term *deconstruction* as a critique of Heidegger's term *Destruktion*), or the work of Paul de Man, or my own work, such as it is, and because I have discovered, to my sorrow, that the erroneous understanding of deconstruction, promulgated by the mass media and by many academics, as I have said, is almost impossible to correct, however carefully, patiently, and circumstantially, with many citations, you explain its wrongness. The word in its mistaken understanding is now used in all sorts of areas to name not destroying something totally but taking it apart, as in "first we deconstructed the building." The problem begins when this meaning of the word is applied to a procedure of interpretation.

The almost universally believed, mistaken conception of so-called deconstruction as a reading method is a spectacular example of a deeply rooted ideological distortion. As Marx (in *The German Ideology*), Louis Althusser (in "Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses"), and Paul de Man (in "The Resistance to Theory") have in slightly different ways asserted, just being circumstantially and persuasively shown that you are mystified by an ideological mistake by no means cures you of your mystification.[1] Climate-change deniers go right on denying humanly caused climate change in the face of rising waters, fires, floods, droughts, and unprecedented storms.

I have a lot to say in my essays in this book about the uses of rhetorical reading to unmask ideological distortions. Therefore, I need not anticipate those demonstrations in this introduction. Let me stress again here, however, that I do not claim in this book or elsewhere that this unmasking will cure those under the spell of an ideological mistake. The mistake about deconstruction as a reading procedure is a splendid example of this. I give two examples out of innumerable possible ones in both the media and in academic writing.

A recent short essay in *Scientific American* by Michael Shermer is entitled "Scientia Humanitatis," with a subtitle as follows: "Reason, empiricism and skepticism are not virtues of science alone."[2] Here is a scan of the essay as it appeared in the print version of *Scientific American*:

This essay is one in an ongoing series by Shermer identified, as you can see, at the top left-hand corner of the page as "Skeptic by Michael Shermer; Viewing the world with a rational eye." Shermer's one-page, two-column essay praises a recent book by Rens Bod.[3] Bod advocates a return

Skeptic by Michael Shermer

Viewing the world with a rational eye

Scientia Humanitatis

Reason, empiricism and skepticism are not virtues of science alone

In the late 20th century the humanities took a turn toward post-modern deconstruction and the belief that there is no objective reality to be discovered. To believe in such quaint notions as scientific progress was to be guilty of "scientism," properly said with a snarl. In 1996 New York University physicist Alan Sokal punctured these pretensions with his now famous article "Transgressing the Boundaries: Toward a Transformative Hermeneutics of Quantum Gravity," which left *postmodern* phrases and deconstructionese tropes interspersed with scientific jargon, which he subsequently admitted were nonsensical gibberish.

I subsequently gave up on the humanities (we are now reconsidering my position after an encounter this past March with University of Amsterdam humanities professor Rens Bod during a European book tour for *The Moral Arc*. In our dialogue, Bod pointed out that my definitions of science—a set of methods that describes and interprets observed or inferred phenomena, past or present, aimed at testing hypotheses and building theories—applies to such humanities fields as philology, art history, musicology, linguistics, archaeology, historiography and literary studies.

Indeed, I had forgotten the story he recounted of Italian philologist Lorenzo Valla, who in 1440 exposed the Latin document *Donatio Constantini*—the *Donation of Constantine*, which was used by the Catholic Church to legitimize its land grab of the Western Roman Empire—as a fake. "Valla used historical, linguistic and philological evidence, including counterfactual reasoning, to refute the document," Bod explained. "One of the strongest pieces of evidence he came up with was lexical and grammatical: Valla found words and constructions in the document that could not possibly have been used by anyone from the time of Emperor Constantine I, at the beginning of the fourth century A.D. The late Latin word *feodum*, for example, referred to the feudal system. But this was a medieval invention, which did not exist before the seventh century A.D." Valla's methods were those of science, Bod emphasized. "He was skeptical, he was empirical, he drew a hypothesis, he was rational, he used very abstract reasoning (even counterfactual reasoning), he used textual phenomena as evidence, and he laid the foundations for one of the most successful theories: stemmatic philology, which can derive the original archetype text from extant copies (in fact, the much later DNA analysis was based on stemmatic philology)."

Inspired by Valla's philological analysis of the Bible, Dutch humanist Erasmus employed these same empirical techniques to demonstrate that, for example, the concept of the Trinity did not appear in biblical before the 11th century. In 1800 Leiden University professor Joseph Justus Scaliger published a philological reconstruction of the ancient Egyptian dynasties, finding that the earliest one, dating to 3280 B.C., predated the Bible's chronology for the creation of the world by nearly 1,300 years. This led later scholars such as Baruch Spinoza to reject the Bible as a reliable historical document. "Thus, abstract reasoning, rationality, empiricism and skepticism are not just virtues of science," Bod concluded. "They had all been invented by the humanities."

What does this distinction matter? Because at a time when students and funding are flowing humanities departments, the argument that they are at least good for "self-cultivation" arises as their real value, which Bod has forcefully articulated in his recent book *A New History of the Humanities* (Oxford University Press, 2014). The transdisciplinary connection between the sciences and humanities is well captured in the German word *Geisteswissenschaften*, which means "human sciences." This concept embraces everything human do, including the scientific theories we generate about the natural world. "Too often humanities scholars believe that they are moving toward science when they use empirical methods," Bod reflected. "They are wrong. Humanities scholars using empirical methods are returning to their own historical roots in the studies humanistica of the 15th century, when the empirical approach was first invented."

Regardless of which university building scholars inhabit, we are all working toward the same goal of improving our understanding of the true nature of things, and that is the way of both the sciences and the humanities, a scientia humanitatis. ■

Figure I.1 A scan of the essay *Scientia Humanitatis* as it appeared in *Scientific American,* June 2015.

to empirical methods in the humanities, for example, the use of lexical and grammatical methods to date documents, as Lorenzo Valla did in 1440 to show that the famous *Donation of Constantine* was a fake and could not have been written in the fourth century A.D. because it uses Latin words and constructions not around in the fourth century A.D. I'm all for the use of such methods. They are indispensable. They have their limits, however, as in the quite correct omission of rhetoric, in the sense both of the knowledge of persuasion and the knowledge of figurative language, from Shermer's phrase "lexical and grammatical." These words name two members, if you take *lexical* as involving logical argumentation, of the

basic medieval *trivium*, grammar, logic, and rhetoric, but conspicuously leave out rhetoric.

Before beginning his praise of Bod and *scientia humanitatis*, however, Shermer opens his essay by saying: "In the late 20th century the humanities took a turn toward post-modern deconstruction and the belief that there is no objective reality to be discovered. To believe in such quaint notions as scientific progress was to be guilty of 'scientism,' properly said with a snarl." This is a blatantly ignorant, robotic repetition of an ideological mistake, with no evidence of skepticism about received opinion. I'll bet, however, that no one could convince Shermer he is ignorant and wrong.

Let me look a little at the rhetoric of Shermer's byline, title, and opening sentences. Shermer calls himself a skeptic, but "viewing the world with a rational eye" is not at all the same thing as "viewing it with a skeptical eye." A rational eye presumably knows what reason is and says, "What I see is a hummingbird. Any rational person can see that." A skeptical eye would say, "That looks like a hummingbird, but I could be mistaken. Perhaps my eyes are deceiving me." In any case, the phrase "view the world with a rational eye" is a figure of speech. It is a figure so commonplace that its figurative quality likely passes most readers by unnoticed. But of course it is not the eye that is reasonable or skeptical, but rather the mind behind that eye, or perhaps one should rather say "the brain behind the eye," with its training, its neurological structures, its memories, its language set, and its presuppositions about how to interpret the perceptual world. The little bird is behaving like a hummingbird and is feeding at the hummingbird feeder, and therefore it is most likely actually a hummingbird. Seeing that it is or is not a hummingbird is not at all the same as reading in a rhetorical way, that is, with attention to the implication of the figurative language used to assert the results of perception, such as the words "viewing the world with a rational eye." My use of the cliché "my eyes could be deceiving me," by the way, is another figure, this time a personification of the eyes as like a deceitful person.

Between those series-title words in small type in the upper left-hand corner of the page and the title proper ("Scientia Humanitatis") comes an illustration of a nuclear family (father, mother, and small son) looking in a museum at a large and at first inscrutable, medieval-looking painting. As the title under the painting in the museum (*Donatio Constantini*) and as Shermer's essay later indicates, it is a (changed) painting of the forged *Donation of Constantine*, "by which," says Wikipedia, "the emperor Con-

Figure I.2 "Sylvester I and Constantine," by unknown medieval artist in Rome.

stantine the Great supposedly transferred authority over Rome and the western part of the Roman Empire to the Pope."[4] Sure enough, Shermer or the artist who devised the illustration in *Scientific American*, Izhar Cohen, most likely also used Wikipedia, since the *Scientific American* page reproduces, with significant amusing changes, the same painting as the one in the Wikipedia entry. Here is the original painting:

This is a thirteenth-century fresco in Santi Quattro Coronati, Rome, of Sylvester and Constantine, showing the purported donation. In the version cleverly presented as part of Shermer's essay the theme of anachronism detected by Valla's rational analysis of lexical and grammatical features of the *Donation of Constantine* is brilliantly represented by the airplane flying overhead that is being looked at (unless my eyes deceive me) through a telescope by one of the men on the horse. The art editors of *Scientific American* or Izhar Cohen himself probably designed the picture. As Paul de Man says, we must learn "to *read* pictures" rather than "to *imagine* meaning," in this case by comparing the original fresco and the satirical parody of it.[5]

I have not yet done with my reading of the opening of Shermer's essay, however. To call it with a Latin name, *Scientia Humanitatis*, is a slightly pretentious way to claim to be a learned person, as is Shermer's use later in his essay of the grand German word for the human sciences,

Geisteswissenschaften. The words tell the reader Shermer is in the know, so to speak. A good deal of rhetoric, both in the sense of persuasive language and in the sense of figurative language, characterizes Shermer's first two sentences: "In the late 20th century the humanities took a turn toward post-modern deconstruction and the belief that there is no objective reality to be discovered. To believe in such quaint notions as scientific progress was to be guilty of 'scientism,' properly said with a snarl." The first sentence turns on the metaphor "took a turn," with its embedded notions of history as some kind of straight-line journey which in this case took a wrong turn. The ominous "his condition took a turn for the worse" is also echoed. No one is blamed for this bad turn. It just happened. The humanities took a turn. Suddenly people just believed "that there is no objective reality to be discovered." Nor is any evidence given from any scholar who represents this bad turn. Nor is anything said about the historical conditions that might have been a context for this bad turn. The sentence just hangs there in the air, uttered without evidence but with bland, apodictic certainty. The implication is that everyone knows this happened and that something so universally accepted as true no longer needs any proof or explanation. The bad turn happened, and everybody knows it. The second sentence is a bit more openly polemical. It mimes the absurdity of postmodern deconstructionists by saying they hold that belief in scientific progress is a "quaint notion," perhaps as quaint as believing walking under a ladder brings bad luck. Shermer's formulation imagines someone's dismissing scientism as, in a powerful personification, a nasty person's speaking "with a snarl." The next sentence brings in the famous Alan Sokal nonsense parody, published in a major humanities journal, "chockablock full of postmodern phrases and deconstructionist tropes interspersed with scientific jargon." The implication is that postmodernists and so-called deconstructionists all write that way. I discuss below the way the publication recently of immense numbers of fake and nonsensical scientific papers could be used, falsely, to discredit science generally. Sokal's paper is the only one I know of that parodies deconstruction, whereas the number of fake scientific papers is enormous.

So-called deconstruction never says there is no objective reality to be discovered, nor that science does not progress. The scholars Shermer attacks would hold, however, that science progresses to a considerable degree precisely through correcting earlier mistakes about "objective reality." Shermer could hardly disagree with that. Shermer gives no evidence whatsoever that he has ever read a word by Derrida, or de Man, or even

me. He is relying, it appears, only on second-hand mistaken accounts in the media or on distorted academic accounts.

Shermer goes on to say, "I subsequently gave up on the humanities." This is as stupid and ignorant as if I were to say, "I gave up on science when I heard about the uncertainty principle, Gödel's incompleteness or 'undecidability' theorems, physicists' inability to identify what dark matter and dark energy are, and all those fake scientific papers published in reputable scientific journals."[6] Everyone would think, correctly, I was an idiot if I were to give up on science for those reasons.

Shermer's error about deconstruction is a good example of a blithely believed ideological mistake repeated as a universally acknowledged fact needing no empirical evidence. Such mistakes are more or less impossible to root out, as Marx, Althusser, and de Man, among many others, assert. It is therefore, I conclude, best for me not to use the word *deconstruction* at all to name something I do, but to name it "rhetorical reading."

I have just, dear reader, given an example of such a reading in my brief investigation of the rhetoric of Michael Shermer's *Scientia Humanitatis*.

Another example of the resistance to the unmasking of ideological mistakes comes from China. *Ideology*, by the way, has, I long ago discovered on my first visit to China, in 1988, a quite different valence in China from what it has in the West. For us, the word names a prejudiced mistake, as in my usage in this introduction. For the Chinese, *ideology* tends to mean something good the authorities must persuade you to believe. That is, in my judgment, by the way, a profoundly un-Marxist use of the word. The Chinese appear, to echo Paul de Man's phrasing, to be "very poor readers of Marx's *German* Ideology." I have visited China many times and have given over thirty lectures at conferences there, though I still consider myself an innocent when I am in China. I remain someone who is never quite sure what is going on, to a considerable degree because I do not know Chinese. Many of my essays and books, however, have been translated into Chinese and published in China. I have often been interviewed in China, have had a number of dissertations written there on my work, and keep close contact with many Chinese colleagues. For the most part, my work seems to have been correctly read and well understood in China. I greatly value that.

Nevertheless, a recent interchange of e-mail letters indicates that a quite highly placed Chinese academic holds stubbornly to something like Shermer's ideological mistake. "In the mentality of Chinese scholars," asserts my Chinese correspondent, "deconstruction is a powerful trend of

thoughts which rejects reason, doubting about truth and trying to subvert order. Its manifestation in literary criticism is denying all the previous criticism, advocating decentralization and anti-essentialism, and deconstructing the fixed meaning, structure and language of a given text, or to use your own words, it's 'something that could be separated into fragments or parts, suggesting the image of a child's dismantling his father's watch into parts that cannot be reassembled.' " My Chinese correspondent does not mention which or how many Chinese scholars share this mentality. This is Shermer's mentality too, spelled out in much more detail in my email from China. As anyone knows who has read with care any work by Derrida or de Man, this is at every point a caricature of so-called deconstruction. In particular, that passage about a child's dismantling his father's watch is used to make me say the exact opposite of what I actually said, so powerful in this case is the force of ideological (in the Marxist sense) misconceptions.

Here are the two sentences in their entirety in my original text: "The word 'deconstruction' suggests that such criticism is an activity turning something unified back to detached fragments or parts. It suggests the image of a child taking apart his father's watch, reducing it back to useless parts, beyond any reconstitution."[7] The passage, when returned to its context in my essay, by no means says deconstruction really is like a child's taking his father's watch apart, in an act of rebellion against the father, or against a paternalistic tradition. It says, on the contrary, that the word *deconstruction* misleadingly and falsely suggests such an image. The sentence is ironically contrary to fact. When I tried to explain this to my Chinese correspondent, he replied, in the translation another scholar supplied, since he does not know English, just as I, to my shame, don't know Chinese: "On receiving your letter, I re-examined your original sentence in its context and found that if the sentence was read by itself separately, there could be misunderstanding. After this sentence, you immediately explain that deconstruction is for construction. [Not really quite what I said. I said the two prefixes *de* and *con* must both be taken into account when parsing the word.] This once again proves that our dialogue will promote a more accurate understanding of your academic positions." He doesn't say that there is misunderstanding, but that there could be misunderstanding. Nor does he by any means say that the "mentality of Chinese scholars" is an ideological mistake, similar to the one American scholars such as Michael Shermer make.

I therefore conclude that it is best not to use the word at all any more, since it has such a distorted meaning in the mentality of even highly educated people in both China and the West. As a result I say, "I am not a deconstructionist." Whether or not Chinese textbooks, as my correspondent says, actually have so-called deconstruction so categorically wrong could only be ascertained by looking at them, which my ignorance prevents me from doing. Nor do I know why it is that so many of my Chinese academic acquaintances seem to have escaped being bewildered by such mistakes about deconstruction. Nor do I know what the relation is between what the "Chinese mentality" is said to believe about deconstruction and the Chinese campaign by Minister of Education Yuan Guiren, enunciated on January 29, 2015, and reported on January 30, 2015, in Western media, to ban in China all university textbooks that promote "Western values." Is their parody of so-called deconstruction taken by them as a Western value? These possible connections would be well worth investigation by someone who is more learned than I in matters Chinese, not to speak of having the indispensable knowledge of the Chinese language.

He who would make a pun would pick a pocket, as the proverbial saying goes. It is now attributed to John Dennis. Now that I have, I hope, cleared the air a little about so-called deconstruction, though I am not dumb enough to assume that I have cleared the fog completely, I turn to a brief introductory account of my presuppositions in the chapters by me in this book.

As opposed to Ghosh's apparent desire, if I read him right, to affirm a universal system of literary theory and then turn to read actual literary works, my deeply rooted procedure is to go the other way, that is, from specific literary works through their detailed reading to whatever tentative generalizations I can make on that basis about literature in general. The generalizations are only as good as is the empirical evidence acquired from trying to read individual works. Citations from others' theories are only useful to me as ways of helping me formulate what I have found in whatever particular work I am trying to read.

My fascination with literature began when I was five years old and taught myself to read so I could read Lewis Carroll's *Alice in Wonderland* for myself, rather than having to depend on my mother to read it to me. Two things absorbed me about the Alice books: first, their ability to transport me into an imaginary world, as if I had gone down a rabbit hole or through a looking-glass. Even the most "realistic" novel, such as any one of Anthony Trollope's novels, does that. It is a basic feature of any literary work, for

example of Johann David Wyss's *The Swiss Family Robinson*, which absorbed me in the same way as *Alice in Wonderland*, though a few years later on in my childhood. Second, the wonderful puns and wordplay in the Alice books, which I found, and still find, hilarious. The puns in *Alice* were my introduction to the figurative dimension of language in one of its most powerful forms.[8] Many other kinds of wordplay besides the pun are represented in the Alice books, but all in one way or another depend on figurative displacements. The rhetorical reading I have practiced as an adult stems directly from what I learned about language from Lewis Carroll. Growing up, for Alice, means learning to understand that a single word or word sound may have wildly different meanings. Both of these features of Alice's experience with language are named by her with the word *curious*. What she experiences is said to be "curiouser and curiouser!"[9] That word is Alice's version of what I have called the "strangeness" of literature.

I give just one example. Alice has been listening to the mouse's tale, but she imagines it as having the shape of the mouse's tail. The book shows graphically what the mouse says as curving back and forth down the page like a tail.

> "Mine is a long and sad tale!" said the Mouse, turning to Alice and sighing.
>
> "It *is* a long tail, certainly," said Alice, looking down with wonder at the Mouse's tail; "but why do you call it sad?" And she kept on puzzling about it while the Mouse was speaking, so that her idea of the tale was something like this:
>
> "You are not attending!" said the Mouse to Alice, severely. "What are you thinking of?"
>
> "I beg your pardon," said Alice very humbly: "You had got to the fifth bend, I think?"
>
> "I had *not!*" cried the Mouse, sharply and very angrily.
>
> "A knot!" said Alice, always ready to make herself useful, and looking anxiously about her. "Oh, do let me help to undo it!"
>
> "I shall do nothing of the sort," said the Mouse, getting up and walking away. ""You insult me by talking such nonsense!"
>
> "I didn't mean it!" pleaded poor Alice. "But you're so easily offended, you know!"
>
> The Mouse only growled in reply.[10]

In my considered judgment, anyone who does not find this extremely funny as well as disquieting does not have much talent for literature. I learned also from such passages, without at all being able to articulate

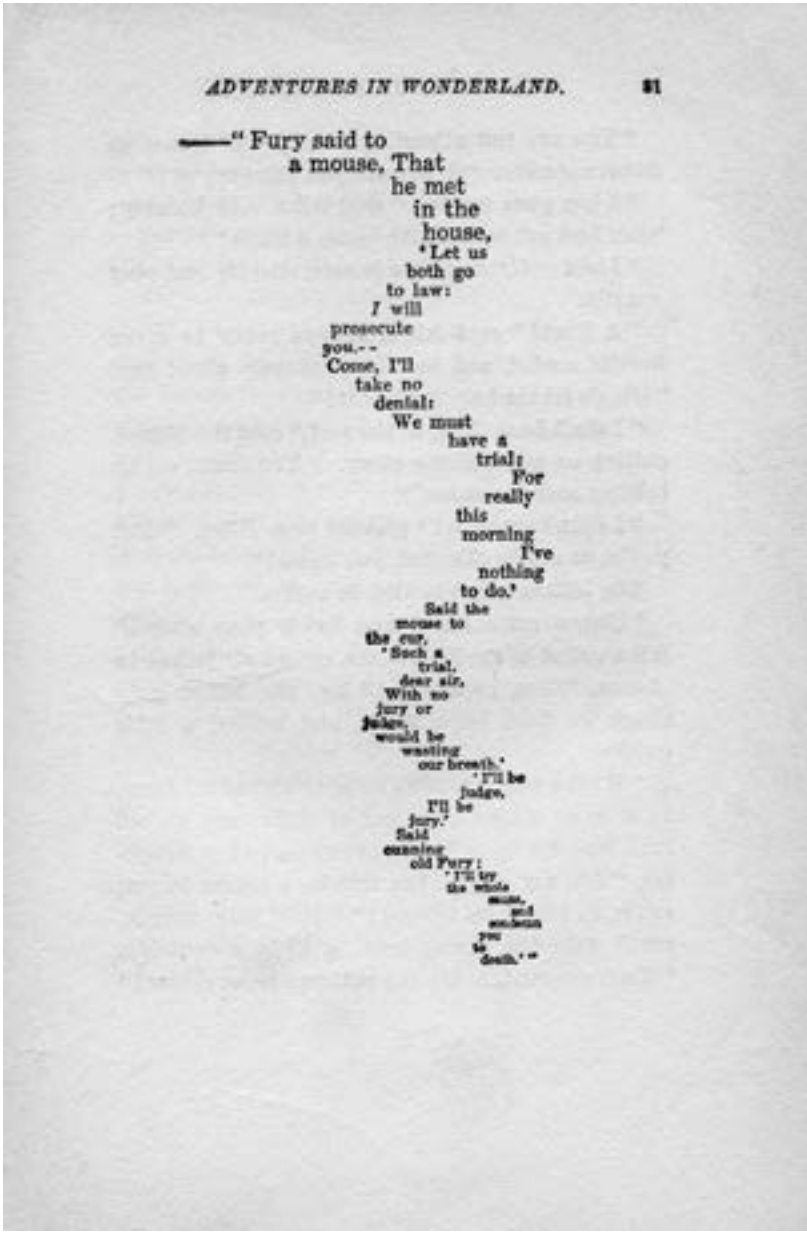

Figure I.3 A scan from *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*.

what I had learned, how important irony, that trope that is not a trope, is in literature. The irony arises in this case, as is usual in literature, from the discrepancies among what the characters know and understand, and what the narrator, the author, and the reader may understand. Readers in this case can see that Alice is not yet grown up enough to understand wordplay, but the mouse is no better. He is only made more and more angry by what Alice says, while Alice does not understand the linguistic mistakes she has made, just as I surely missed some when I first read the Alice books. Alice can only plead, "I didn't mean it," when she offends the mouse, in anticipation of Stanley Cavell's *Must We Mean What We Say?* That issue comes up explicitly later in *Alice in Wonderland* and may be Cavell's source for his formulation.[11] Only the narrator, author, and reader, in different ways and degrees, can be presumed to "understand irony" (if we can indeed speak of understanding it, a dangerous assumption), and to get the joke.

I resist the temptation to turn aside and continue my reading of the Alice books. I give, however, two more examples of wordplay that are not exactly puns but examples of the tropes buried in ordinary language that lead to absurdities if taken literally, like Shermer's "took a turn." In one, from *Through the Looking-Glass*, Alice finds herself in a shop run by a knitting sheep, who asks her, "What is it you want to buy?" Alice answers politely, in perfectly idiomatic English, "I should like to look all round me first, if I might," to which the Sheep replies, "You may look in front of you, and on both sides, if you like, . . . but you can't look *all* round you—unless you've got eyes at the back of your head." On the next page, Alice finds herself rowing a little boat with the Sheep as passenger. The sheep cries repeatedly, "Feather! Feather!" and "You'll be catching a crab directly." Neither Alice nor I, when I first read the Alice books, knew that "feathering" is the name (a catachresis, in fact, since it does not substitute for some more literal word) for turning your oars sideways when you take them out of the water so they don't catch the wind. She also does not know, nor did I, that "catching a crab" is the name for getting your oar stuck in the water through digging it too deeply (another catachresis). But I could go on and on, and must resist temptation.

My experience with literature has taught me that literary works (and philosophical or theoretical works, too) are each sui generis, unlike all the others. Each therefore demands its own procedure of being read and accounted for. Moreover, each reading of a given work by a given reader will differ from all the others, as will different readings at different times by the same reader. As Heraclitus said, "You can't step twice into the same

river, for other waters are continually flowing in." The pleasure, intellectual excitement, and benefit of reading literary works, really reading them, comes from these perpetual differences. These differences mean, among other things, that a given reader can always return to read once more a given work with the expectation of new pleasure, new intellectual excitement, and new benefit. My decades of literary study are, in short, empirical and inductive, not deductive from general presuppositions. I do take for granted that literary works are made of language, including figurative language, so that investigating a literary work is always an investigation of linguistic constructions. Language is the matter to be empirically investigated, not consciousness, or history, or society, or nature, or intersubjectivity, although these may be referred to in the language of this or that literary text.

The consequence of these assumptions, or, rather, of my ingrained experiences of trying to account for literary works, is that each of my five chapters is centered on the attempt to read some specific work, including in one case a philosophical or theoretical work: Tennyson's "Tears, Idle Tears," for chapter 2; Wallace Stevens's "The Motive for Metaphor," for chapter 4; Nietzsche's *Die Geburt der Tragödie aus dem Geiste der Musik* (The birth of tragedy), for chapter 6; Yeats's "The Cold Heaven," in chapter 8; and Anthony Trollope's *Framley Parsonage*, for chapter 10. These readings are not meant to support theoretical propositions I have initially put forward in a given chapter. They are what the chapters are centrally about, that is, the attempt to read this or that work, with a given topic in mind in each chapter. Chapter 2 focuses on why literature matters. Chapter 4 is about the lyric. Chapter 6 centers on the problems of world literature. Chapter 8 investigates the justification of literary study in today's world. Chapter 10 is about the ethical dimensions of literature. The works I read, one in each chapter, are chosen as exemplary from among the many works that I admire. Several chapters are fairly elaborate revisions of previous essays I have published or will publish. Others are newly written for this book. These are part of my current investigation of what actually happens when I read a poem or a novel. I claim that what happens is stranger than one might think. It is different for every reader or even different for different readings by the same reader. I have put my chapters explicitly in dialogue with Ranjan Ghosh's matching chapters and have made them fit better my current convictions about the topics of the five sections. My part of this book is a fairly elaborate rethinking of my positions on these topics.

A good bit of each of my chapters, however, is made up of contextual assertions that try to establish the circumstances within which literature is read, taught, and written about in the West today. These contexts somewhat dismayingly suggest that literary study faces some obstacles today, to say the least. I now identify the most conspicuous ones as a conclusion of this brief introduction. Each is in one place or another, or in several places, discussed in more detail in my chapters, especially in chapter 8. My claim is that the rhetorical reading I advocate and try to practice will help us at least to understand what is happening to us and what is making literary study more and more marginal for most people: The overwhelming threat of catastrophic climate change, along with its widespread denial by many people, threatens us, even now. The epochal shift from a print culture to a digital culture looms, as does the marginalization of the humanities in our universities as they are transformed more and more into trade schools teaching primarily STEM subjects (science, technology, engineering, and mathematics) to prepare students for work in a technologized, digitized, and commoditized society. An almost unheard of discrepancy in the wealth and income of the rich and poor accelerates dangerously, as between the 0.01 percent or 0.001 percent and the rest of us. The result is that elections, in the United States at least, are more and more bought by the rich, to a considerable degree through the manipulation of the mass media that are a result of new teletechnologies, as is the ubiquitous advertising that keeps us in thrall to commodity fetishism. And we are beset by globalization (brought about by new teletechnologies, such as the Internet), with a paradoxical increase in isolationisms and commercial as well as military conflicts among nations.

Reading, teaching, and writing about literary works today must be carried on, if at all, in these not entirely cheerful contexts. Most people these days, in the United States at least, let's face it, spend much time using iPhones, Facebook, or Twitter, watching Fox News, or playing video games, not reading Trollope's *Framley Parsonage* or Tennyson's poetry. That is the case even though Trollope's novel and Tennyson's poetry, like so much of the rest of old-fashioned print literature, are easily available in free Guttenberg e-text form to be read on any laptop, iPad, or iPhone with an Internet connection.

As Tom Cohen has demonstrated in a brilliant essay, "material inscription," in the de Manian sense, plays a crucial role in all five of my contextual situations, as well as in all the literary texts I try to read.[12] Just what is material inscription in the de Manian sense? Here is the crucial formulation

at the end of de Man's "Hypogram and Inscription: Michael Riffaterre's Poetics of Reading." De Man's target is Riffaterre's reading of a short poem by Victor Hugo:

> Every detail as well as every general proposition in the text [Hugo's poem] is fantastic except for the assertion that it is *écrit*, written. That it was supposed to be written, like Swift's love poem to Stella, as words upon a window pane, is one more cliché to add to those Riffaterre has already collected. But that, like Hegel's text from the *Phenomenology*, it was written cannot be denied. The materiality (as distinct from the phenomenology) that is thus revealed, the unseen "cristal" whose existence becomes a certain *there* and a certain *then* which can become a *here* and a *now* in the reading "now" taking place, is not the materiality of the mind or of time or of the carillon [a topic in Hugo's poem]—none of which exists, except in the figure of prosopopeia—but the materiality of an inscription. Description [de Man means the naming of the things, events, and actions, such as the carillon, in Hugo's poem], it appears, was a device to conceal inscription. Inscription is neither a figure, nor a sign, nor a cognition, nor a desire, nor a hypogram, nor a matrix, yet no theory of poetry can achieve consistency if, like Riffaterre's, it responds to its [inscription's] powers only by a figural evasion which, in this case, takes the subtly effective form of evading the figural.[13]

Investigation of what happens to the materiality of inscription in the new digital media is approached indirectly here and there in my chapters of this book, but I claim, with Cohen, that the materiality of inscription, in various forms, operates as much in climate change, in the financial world, in the new media, in politics, and in globalization, as in printed poetry or fiction. Though in the citation I have just made de Man mostly tells the reader all the things the materiality of inscription is not, the figure of the invisible glass on which a poem might be scratched gives the reader a glimpse of why it is that the materiality of inscription is "unseen," nonphenomenal. In de Man's figure, borrowed from Hugo, we cannot see the materiality of the glass because the mind attends not to the invisible "cristal" but to what is scratched on it, something phenomenally visible and instantly read as interpretable language. It is a case of description's concealing the materiality of inscription. The reader must remember, however, that de Man's figure of the words upon the windowpane is another "figural evasion." By no means is it a direct confrontation of the materiality

of inscription. That materiality is not phenomenally visible. It cannot be confronted (another prosopopeia).

I must end here by encouraging you to read carefully de Man's "Hypogram and Inscription" and his "Anthropomorphism and the Lyric," the first in *The Resistance to Theory*, the second in *The Rhetoric of Romanticism*.[14] I also encourage you to read Cohen's wonderful essay, mentioned above. That essay is, among many other things, a long gloss or riff on de Manian materiality of inscription, as it might help us to understand where we are now, "in the twilight of the anthropocene idols."

NOTES

Introduction

Epigraphs: Rabindranath Tagore, *Letters to a Friend. Rabindranath Tagore's Letters to C.F. Andrews* [1928] (New Delhi: Rupa, 2002), 119. Emphasis mine. Quoted from John G. Rudy, *Wordsworth and the Zen Mind* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1996), 49. See Michel Deguy, *Recumbents: Poems* (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 2005), 84.

1 Rodolphe Gasché, "Alongside the Horizon," in *On Jean-Luc Nancy: The Sense of Philosophy*, ed. Darren Sheppard, Simon Sparks, and Colin Thomas (London: Routledge, 1997), 136.
2 Martta Heikkilä, *At the Limits of Presentation* (Frankfurt: Peter Lang, 2008), 103.
3 Jean-Luc Nancy, *Birth to Presence* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1993), 155–56.
4 Dictionary.com, s.v. "Trans," accessed March 13, 2016, http://dictionary.reference.com/browse/trans. For more on trans-habit, see my *Transcultural Poetics and the Concept of the Poet: From Philip Sidney to T. S. Eliot* (London: Routledge, 2016). Chapter 1 from this book elaborates what I theorize and mean by trans-habit.
5 Deguy calls this an "affair of ference," and we are in the midst of the agglomerated force of inter-ference, con-ference, de-ference, di-ference, and in-ference (suffix, *ferre*, "to carry"), in the words of Deguy, "quotable/Deference preference difference/Afference." See "Memorandum," in Michel Deguy, *Gisants* (Paris: Gallimard, 1985), translated as *Recumbents: Poems* (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 2005).
6 See John Phillip Williams, "Hodos Infusion and Method," in *Romancing Theory, Riding Interpretation: (In)fusion Approach, Salman Rushdie*, ed. Ranjan Ghosh (New York: Peter Lang, 2012), 73.
7 See Karen Barad, "Intraactions," *Mousse*, 2012, 34.
8 See Gilles Deleuze, *Foucault*, trans. S. Hand (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1988), 23–44.

9 Tim Cresswell, *In Place/Out of Place: Geography, Ideology, Transgression* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996), 11.
10 Karen Barad, "Diffracting Diffraction: Cutting Together-Apart," *Parallax* 20, no. 3 (2014): 168.
11 Barad, "Diffracting Diffraction," 169.
12 Deleuze, *The Fold*, 76, 78.
13 See my *(In)fusion Approach: Theory, Contestation, Limits* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 2006).
14 Elizabeth Grosz, *The Nick of Time* (Sydney: Allen and Unwin, 2004), 9.
15 Elizabeth Grosz, *Chaos, Territory, Art: Deleuze and the Framing of the Earth* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2008), 8.
16 See Rene Girard's introduction to Michel Serres, *Detachment*, trans. Genevieve James and Raymond Federman (Athens: Ohio University Press, 1989), viii.
17 Robert Frost, "Mending Wall," accessed November 10, 2015, http://www.poetryfoundation.org/poem/173530.
18 Michel Serres, *Genesis*, trans. Genevieve James and James Nielson (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1995), 2.
19 Serres, *Genesis*, 3.
20 Serres, *Genesis*, 6.
21 See Michel Serres, *The Parasite*, trans. Lawrence R. Schehr (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1982).
22 Gilles Deleuze, *The Logic of Sense*, trans. M. Lester and C. Stivale, ed. C. Boundas (New York: Columbia University Press, 1990), 37. Also see Gilles Deleuze, "How Do We Recognize Structuralism?" in *Desert Islands and Other Texts, 1953–1974*, trans. M. Taormina (New York: Semiotext(e), 2004), 170–92.
23 Deleuze, *Essays Critical and Clinical*, 133, 132.
24 Gilles Deleuze, and Félix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, trans. Brian Massumi (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987), 21.
25 Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *Kafka: Toward a Minor Literature* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1986), 83.
26 Andy Merrifield, *Guy Debord* (London: Reaktion Books, 2005), 51.
27 Globalization as "unitotality" suppresses world-forming, which is indeed a conceptual catastrophe. See Jean-Luc Nancy, *The Creation of the World or Globalization,* trans. Françoise Raffoul and David Pettigrew (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2007).
28 Bruno Latour, "The Enlightenment without the Critique: A Word on Michel Serres's Philosophy," in *Contemporary French Philosophy*, ed. A. Phillips Griffiths (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), 90–91.

1 Louis Althusser, "Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses (Notes towards an Investigation)," *Lenin and Philosophy and Other Essays*, trans. Ben Brewster (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1972), 127–86. Paul de Man, "The Resistance to Theory," *The Resistance to Theory* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1986), 3-20.

2 Michael Shermer, "Skeptic: Scientia Humanitatis," *Scientific American*, June 2015, 80. Shermer is publisher of *Skeptic* magazine.

3 Rens Bod, *A New History of the Humanities: The Search for Principles and Patterns from Antiquity to the Present* (Oxford University Press, 2014).

4 Wikipedia, s.v. "Donation of Constantine," accessed June 4, 2015, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Donation_of_Constantine.

5 Paul de Man, "The Resistance to Theory," 10.

6 Google "fake scientific papers" for a long list of websites on this topic, for example, an essay in *Nature* entitled "Publishers withdraw more than 120 gibberish papers" (http://www.nature.com/news/publishers-withdraw-more-than-120-gibberish-papers-1.14763, accessed June 3, 1015). Other fake papers claim to be based on scientifically conducted research that never occurred, for example, a recent, notorious one claiming with fake evidence that just talking to people will cure them in a few minutes of their opposition to gay marriage.

7 My Chinese correspondent cited the two sentences I have quoted here from the preface in Chinese to the Chinese translation of my *Fiction and Repetition*. They come originally from my "The Critic as Host," in *Deconstruction and Criticism*, ed. Harold Bloom (New York: Seabury Press, 1979), 251. The short paragraph from which these two sentences are drawn begins with an unequivocal assertion that "the word 'deconstruction' has misleading overtones or implications" (251). Any careful reader should see that my figure of the dismantled watch is an ironic parody of what many people mistakenly think deconstruction is.

8 See Wikipedia's entry for "pun" for a valuable entry on the different forms of *pun* along with a brief history of examples. *Paronomasia*, as the pun is called in Greek, itself contains a multiple pun on antithetical meanings, since the prefix "para," sometimes, as in this case, shortened to "par," means "beside; next to, near, from; against, contrary to." (Wikipedia, s.v. "Pun," accessed June 6, 2015, http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pun.)

9 An immense number of editions of the Alice books exist. I cite the one I read as a child and still have in my library. It is much battered and worn from having been read by generations of children. It has the Tenniel illustrations, which were, and are, essential to my "rhetorical reading" of the two Alice books: Lewis Carroll, *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland and Through the Looking-Glass* (New York: A. L. Burt, n.d.), 12.

10 Carroll, *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland and Through the Looking-Glass*, 30–32.

11 " 'Then you should say what you mean,' the March Hare went on.

'I do,' Alice hastily replied; 'at least—at least I mean what I say—that's the same thing, you know.'

'Not the same thing a bit!' said the Hatter. 'You might just as well say that "I see what I eat" is the same thing as "I eat what I see"!'

'You might just as well say,' added the March Hare, 'that "I like what I get" is the same thing as "I get what I like"!'

'You might just as well say,' added the Dormouse, who seemed to be talking in his sleep, 'that 'I breathe when I sleep" is the same thing as 'I sleep when I breathe'!' " (Carroll, *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland and Through the Looking-Glass*, 82).

12 "Trolling 'Anthropos'—Or, Requiem for a Failed Prosopopeia," in *Twilight of the Anthropocene Idols*, ed. Tom Cohen, Claire Colebrook, and J. Hillis Miller (London: Open Humanities Press, 2016), 20–80.

13 de Man, *The Resistance to Theory*, 51.

14 de Man, *The Resistance to Theory*, 27–53; Paul de Man, *The Rhetoric of Romanticism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1984), 239–62.

Chapter 1: Making Sahitya Matter

Epigraphs: Anthony Earl of Shaftesbury, *Characteristics*, ed. John M. Robertson (London: Grant Richards, 1900), vol. I, 189; *Ontogeny and Phylogeny* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1977), 289.

1 Tagore, "Sadhana," in *The English Writings of Rabindranath Tagore*, ed. Sisir Kumar Das, vol. 2 (New Delhi: Sahitya Academy, 1999), 322–23.

2 Wai-Lim Yip, *Diffusion of Distances: Dialogues between Chinese and Western Poetics* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993), 140–41.

3 Raghavan, "Sahitya," in *An Introduction to Indian Poetics*, ed. V. Raghavan and Nagendra (Bombay: Macmillan, 1970), 82.

4 Paul Hernadi, "Why Is Literature: A Coevolutionary Perspective on Imaginative Worldmaking," *Poetics Today* 23 (spring 2002): 22.

5 D. C. Lau, *Lao Tzu Tao Te Ching* (Harmondsworth, UK: Penguin Books, 1963), 3.

6 See D. C. Lau, *Lao Tzu Tao Te Ching*, accessed September 26, 2015, http://terebess.hu/english/tao/lau.html.

7 Prabas Jiban Chaudhury, *Tagore on Literature and Aesthetics* (Calcutta: Rabindra Bharati, 1965), 12.

8 Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Judgment*, vol. 1 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1911), 59.

9 Chaudhury, *Tagore on Literature and Aesthetics*, 13. Tagore writes in "Sahityer Swarup": "There is no need in art to settle a problem, its business is to perfect its form. To untie the knot of a problem is an achievement of the intellect but to give perfection to some form is the work of creative imagination. Art dwells in this realm of imagination and not in the realm of logic" (45). I hope I have been able to problematize literary judgment as elucidation and the analysis of literature.