

Só temos, então, a felicitar-nos com a publicação das duas obras em quadrinhos aqui comentadas, na medida em que de novo disponibilizam ao público jovem uma porta de acesso ao milenar imaginário grego. Também pesa nesta apreciação positiva, como vimos, o cuidado dos autores de buscarem um diálogo inovador, mas respeitoso e não-ingênuo, com os clássicos.

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Derrida and deconstruction

In 1967 (nearly half a century ago!) Derrida published three books (*La voix et le phénomène. Introduction au problème du signe dans la phénoménologie de Husserl*, *De la grammatologie* and *L'écriture et la différence* (translated as *Speech and Phenomena and Other Writings on Husserl's Theory of Signs*, 1973, *Of Grammatology*, 1976 and *Writing and Difference*, 1978 and 1980) that focused on the nature of the sign and language, on the privileged place of the voice and the spoken word, and on interpretation and meaning in the human sciences in general. This triple exploration of new horizons, published on the eve of the Parisian May revolution, explored the principles of a philosophy of radical 'presence' and 'phonocentrism', two major items that, for the next decades, were bound to reappear under numerous faces and aspects and were about to change the nature of Western philosophy tout court. A number of what soon would become favourite topics of his were announced here, like the structuralist tenets of De Saussure and Lévi-Strauss (esp. the opposition parole / langue), the status of the theory of literature, the consequences of the rationalism of Descartes, and the importance of Levinas (esp. his opposition between Greek and Jewish). These introductory books were to be followed in 1972 by three new ones, *Positions*, *La dissémination* and *Marges de la Philosophie* (*Positions*, 1981; *Dissemination*, 1981 and 2004; *Margins of Philosophy*, 1982 and 1984), in which he continued his discussion about the written word (esp. the notion of *pharmakon* in Plato's *Phaedrus*) and introduced an analysis of time in Heidegger (with references

to Aristotle). Included were also an anthropological essay on the 'end of the mankind' (read 'traditional humanism') and a discussion of the place of the metaphor in philosophical texts (in an paper called 'White Mythology').

This small introduction informs us that from the very start, Derrida focused on problems that were situated halfway philosophy and literature and dealt with the philosophy of literature, or, vice versa, with literary (and textual) aspects of philosophy. Or, to put it even in a wider perspective, his main point of interest was on the often unconscious and typical Western ways of reading texts and interpreting their contents. In this broad sense, his activities were very close to the daily practices of all (classical) philologists and literary critics: making sense of texts, their traditions and filiations, the cultural and institutional contexts of their functioning, and the construction (rather the constructedness) of the strategies they work with. From the very start, it was obvious that Derrida did not want to propose a methodology of his own. What he called 'deconstruction' was not a discipline nor a procedure that could be taught or copied, and Derrida himself always defined it *a contrario*, or negatively. In his opinion, 'deconstruction' had nothing to do with destruction, nor with immoralism or nihilism. It was not a specific technique nor an analysis, not a hermeneutics nor a criticism, not an archaeology nor a quest for lost origins, not a formalism nor a phenomenology,....

What was it like then? The late sixties were an era that thrived upon the success of structuralism (De Saussure in linguistics, Lévi-Strauss in anthropology) and one of the first points of Derrida's attack was directed against the notion of structure itself, especially the operations that lead to its constitution and the ideological consequences it had on the philosophical 'market'. Deconstruction mainly was a process that engaged him to (re) read texts and to ask epistemological questions in the margin of other texts, not resulting into new interpretations but in analytical remarks about their composition. Deconstruction often exposed mechanisms of defence and conquest, at work both in the composition of the text and in the minds of their readers. In line with his discussion of the Apocalypse of John (in *D'un ton apocalyptique adopté naguère en philosophie*, 1983) where the operations of mystifying and demystifying were a central issue, part of his deconstructive activities was the uncovering of mostly hidden rhetorical and strategic operations that turn a text into a real text(um). Therefore he focused

upon what was not told nor thought, upon what was repressed, excluded, forgotten, and as such constituted, each time again, for every new text, the condition of its being. Hence his assumption that the constitution of every text (pre)supposed a lot of absences, silences and empty spaces. Labelling this a process of 'writing in the margin', he asked attention for the whole process of making (mental and literal) notes about the functioning of texts during the actual process of reading, an age-old technique that already the first commentators of ancient texts practiced. Margins, in between words, lines, and pages always served as a favourite place to write down question marks, exclamation marks, notes and remarks, and, in his opinion, the deconstructive practice mainly served to develop all possible lines of thought that arose during the reading process.

However, what Derrida interested most, was writing in the margin of philosophical texts and coming to terms with their phrasing and structuring. In general one could say that Western philosophy always has been a very specific house of thoughts, not to be confounded with Buddhism nor Taoism, and till very recently, totally alienated from a philosophy of the body and a female vision of the world. From the ancient Greeks up till now, western philosophy relied upon a manmade, neatly defined corpus of texts and a specific set of tools and techniques, created to understand and incorporate 'reality' through specific discourses, but also leaving a lot of silences and creating systems of exclusion, as Foucault successfully showed. Therefore, in his analyses of concrete texts, Derrida focused on stylistic and rhetorical devices, very often detectable in hesitations, contradictions, citations, or intra-textual references (promises, announcements, recapitulations made in the text, breaks in its internal logic), all aspects that concerned the textual dimension of philosophy. Since it was not, in his opinion, the primary task of a literary critic to detect the (exact, full or intended) meaning of a given text, meaning always being an uncertain category, deconstruction fully exposed the violations of the basic linguistic, rhetorical and thematic rules and devices it had set up internally.

Among these, binary opposition certainly took a place of honour, since here Derrida fully could demonstrate the presence of silenced and hierarchical underprivileged terms (Greek vs. Jewish, real vs. copy, unity vs. plurality, spoken vs. written word,...), suggesting that an opposition as such always had to carry within itself the material for its own subversion. Eventually, this

criticism of the undervalued term did not lead him to propose new readings and interpretations, only to uncover the verbal inconsistencies and textual strategies they were made of. In his eyes, it was due to these tensions that the text was able to function as text (as a series of necessary choices in order to make the story possible), but, as soon as the consequences of all hidden dimensions were fully recognized, it became obvious that a different type of philosophy was bound to be born, one that was able to cope with endless shifts and references, and hence with a perennial necessity of a 'supplement'. A word, sentence, or idea, present or absent, always referred to others, to other contexts, finally to the whole network of written texts that constitute a given society and type of philosophy. How absent signs may be, they always leave a print and trace in what we think, feel or even need and so they constitute a common European heritage in providing characters and stock situations, even in organising the metaphors in our mythological stories (see his *White Mythology*, 1971). Ultimately, the structuring of these signs presupposed common philosophical premises, like the need for a philosophy of 'continuous presence' in order to feel good, a desire that Derrida exposed as the typical Western 'metaphysics of presence'.

A Derridean deconstruction, therefore, relies upon a continuous process of referring, deferring, and differing and deliberately uses the confusing games that language plays with us (homonymy, homophony, synonymy, ...), a provocative attitude that seems to imply that the endless play with differences (called by him '*différance*', English 'differance') makes an interpretation completely impossible. Since a constant deferring makes the presence of sense nearly impossible and even prevents to ever reach its 'fullness', every reading seems to be a 'misreading' from the very start. Hence a profound distrust in the cartesian subject who thought to be in control of the unshakable foundations of the human person, hence also a disbelief in some humanist principles that wanted to rely upon solid grounds for self-affirmation. For Derrida, on the contrary, the constitution of identity, and its final ungroundedness, always had to do with the interplay between a frame and its background, an *ergon* and a *parergon*, and in the most general way, this meant that a prior metaphysical position was involved.

These discussions, held in his *Margins of Philosophy*, are very old and even can be traced back to Plato and his *Phaedrus*. In this dialogue, Socrates condemned writing for being merely a game invented by the Egyptian

god Thoth and this distrust of writing even caused a distrust of language as a whole. Since written words were destined to give up the contact with their first readers and the context that generated them, they were bound to circulate in the absence of their author (their 'father'), misunderstood, forever severed from the living voice that could always return to the unequivocal ideas present in the mind of their author (see his 'philosophy of presence'). Here again, we see the philosophical implications at work in the opposition writing / speaking and the consequences it had for the western subject: both written language and language in general never arrived at the heart of things, being only a tool that kept reality at a distance. In the history of the West, numerous attempts have been made to limit this endless play of '*différance*' in order to secure as long as possible the (alleged and unmodified) presence of the ideas (Derrida called this tradition 'logocentrism').

From Plato and Aristotle to the twentieth century history of literary theory, this discussion has proved not to be an easy one. Apparently, what we do when we interpret texts, is a complicated operation guided by some philosophical principles that are not made explicit. The twentieth century started with a renewed interest in the immanent organisation of the text, its formalist and structuralist principles and the whole 'linguistic turn' it implied (Russian Formalism, French Structuralism, Structural Anthropology, Narratology). However, in the midst of the century this perspective was relieved by a new one that focused on the position of the reader (Reader-Response Criticism, Reception Studies, Feminism, Psychoanalysis). Central issues in all of these discussions were the process of reading, the role of the author, the function of (de)contextualization. Let us not forget that in the same year that Derrida published his *Grammatology*, Eric Donald Hirsch published his *Validity in Interpretation* (1967) that defended the intention of the author present during every reading of the text (for a critical discussion of all these critical positions and some applications with classical texts, see: Thomas A. Schmitz, *Modern Literary Theory and Ancient Texts. An Introduction*, 2007).

All of these ideas are a familiar play ground for classicists. Right from the very start, Classical Studies have been challenged to come to terms with (necessary and inevitable) silences and empty spaces, due to the incompleteness of their materials, the absence of a contemporary reading public and the loss of contexts. Lately, Classical Reception Studies made us

familiar with all possible attempts to fill in (historical and thematic) silences and gaps and taught us how to create new images, tools to understand and to survive the present, strong and convincing enough to cope with the cracks and fissures of the past. On top of that, one has to cope with the (extreme) diversity of interpretations of one and the same text. Between the first editions of classical texts and their most recent interpretations, a great number of paradigmatic changes occurred and influenced the reading of all classical texts, creating humanist, historical, romantic, positivistic, formalist, structuralist, feminist..., interpretations of the same texts. As late as 1962, Thomas Kuhn, in his *Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, proposed to analyse these kinds of differences through the notion of paradigm shift, a notion that embraced the whole network of presuppositions, selections of problems, and instruments used by specific sociological groups and identities. Throughout history, interpretations of (classical) literature unmistakably have been determined by strategies and prejudices of all kinds, making the hypothesis of a stable core of all meaning extremely doubtful, a situation that is well rendered by Terry Eagleton's sarcastic remark: 'Hostility to theory usually means an opposition to other people's theories and an oblivion of one's own' (Literary Theory, 1996: X).

Before entering into a more detailed discussion of the role and function of a Derridean analysis in the field of Classics, a double *caveat* has to be pronounced. First, there has been a (sometimes radically) change in tone, style and self-assurance in some of Derrida's later books. Often enough his style became more sophisticated and narcissistic, sometimes ending in complete arrogance, or resulting into endless personal statements and arguments (think of the discussion with Austin and Searle concerning the speech act theory), all elements that created a heated atmosphere of provocation and hostility. As this discussion mainly was a phenomenon of the eighties and does not infect the intellectual value of positions taken in his earlier books, I just mention the 'intellectual pretensions' of deconstruction *en passant*, not ignoring them, but trying to put them in the right perspective. Second, there has been the so-called de Man affair and its afterlife, a period that more specifically had to do with the career of deconstruction in America. Paul de Man (1919-1983), close friend of Derrida and main representative of his ideas in America, who, just like him in 1967 wrote an important work (*Criticism and Crisis*) on the break between a sign and its meaning (what lead to the conclusion that literature 'meant' nothing), expanded his views mainly

through an exploration of all kinds of tensions in figural language. In 1987, however, a series of some two hundred articles written by de Man during World War II (and published in a presumed ‘collaborationist newspaper’) was discovered. In one of them (published in 1941), he discussed the pernicious influence of Jewish culture on the modern European literature, what led to an international scandal. At that very moment, and all through the nineties, academic adversaries of deconstruction exposed its moral implications and emphasized the need for an ‘ethics of discussion’. Could Derrida defend a friend and colleague, recurring to a kind of justifying interpretation (a position that he eschewed to take all along his life) or were de Man’s articles subject to the same rules of differance, unreadability, and misreading that Derrida used to explore? A difficult pitfall to escape from, but international media coverage, followed by some colloquia and responses by adherents and supporters, had the advantage to narrow down some of the most crucial notions defended by deconstruction and to focus on their socio-political relevance. This battle was lost by Derrida *cum suis*, emotions and personal involvement being stronger than the distancing techniques they developed for all other texts.

However, in the wake of Derrida, interpretation will never be the same and the main (workable) attitude towards texts will always have to take a middle position between an interpretation of texts on a concrete level and general critical statements. Surely, an application of deconstruction to Classics in general will always be an important and valuable intellectual challenge and in the second part of this article, we will focus on a recent book that explored the cross-fertilization of a number of disciplines involved.

Derrida and Antiquity

Derrida and Antiquity, edited by Miriam Leonard, well known in the series ‘Classical Presences’ for her *Athens in Paris. Ancient Greece and the Political in Post-War French Thought*, (2005) and for the project she shared with Vanda Zajko (*Laughing with Medusa. Classical Myth and Feminist Thought*, 2006), is the first attempt to study systematically Derrida’s influence on Classics. In what follows, I would like to analyse its contents and situate them against the background I just traced. The last decades, there was a definite interest in Derrida’s use of Platonic texts, but up till now no book before the one under review succeeded in bringing together the (other) main players in the field. A number of them who are present

here wrote books or articles on more specific Derridean themes (Bowlby, Gersh, Leonard, Miller, Naas, O'Connell, Vessey) and together with some colleagues they now give a rough idea of how Derrida and poststructuralist French intellectual life in general have been understanding classical antiquity. Hence the key question to be treated in this book: how do classics survive this contemporary challenge, one of the most profound interrogations the Western classical tradition ever had 'to endure', one that really targeted traditional 'Western pride'.

At first glance, this book contains the materials that can be expected: an *Introduction*, twelve *Chapters*, (bibliographical) *References* and an (alphabetical) *Index*. However, from the moment one starts to read, one is entitled to become suspicious, since this is a book on deconstruction, one that invites, on top of our traditional and academic reading habits, to consider and evaluate what we usually do when we read, what we have been trained to do, who taught us to think along these lines, what is present and absent? Thoughts like these pay attention to the framing of all contributions and the conditions of their (de)contextualization, an important issue since for Derrida, all divisions between an inside and an outside are constructed and even rely upon a transcendental (philosophic) nature, a frame (an *ergon*) being not natural at all, and always leaving room for its *parergon* (its supplement).

From a deconstructive point of view, the five parts as the major and the twelve chapters as the basic units can be considered companions, neighbours, signalling mutual '*décalages*', (self)-limits and restraints, creating 'traces' and resulting in unfinished messages that always are and will be underway, always somewhere half between sender and receiver, always articulated in some individual and ethnic contexts. What Derrida relentlessly has been showing and what Leonard must have experienced in composing this collection of papers, is the impossibility of delineating or really shutting off this presentation, a consciousness that ends in the idea that, finally, all that can be done is just creating provisional frameworks. Art in general and texts in particular share this notion of being caught by a series of limits, rules and regulations, delimitations of topics, impossible choices, endless black holes, and unfinished propositions. This creates a new and poststructuralist position for every editor, as the always provisional maker of frames, one who presents shifting perspectives that are bound to complement and supplement each other, each frame just framing the other.

In a Derridean spirit, the twelve articles cannot be seen as finished objects, having a closed nature, bringing some definite insights. On the contrary, Derrida himself might have arranged them in a different order, presented them next to one another on the same page, merely as traces, as divergences, as if they were rests of letters or postcards (*'des envois'*) that were recently left in a fire and recovered in their unfinished state. His familiarity with the Talmudic scriptures or with Joyce's writing style invite the reader to see them as columns, to be read as shifting and moving elements in a never ending signifying process, not as signs of a closed and finished academic writing.

And in fact this book shows more than one trait of a Derridean and destabilizing enterprise, since it is constantly framed between the central image of the 'Bodleian Post Card' and the 'The Open Letter against Derrida'. Unmistakably present on the jacket presentation, and showing Socrates and Plato in what can be called a problematic father/son filiation, this post card taken from 'The Book of Predictions' emerges here and there all along Leonard's book and spreads around some debunking doubts about the nature of this philosophical and/or sexual relationship, hence about the construction of the common opinions we have on them, and even on Classics as such. The same goes for 'The Open Letter against Derrida', mentioned on p. 43, written by Prof. Barry Smith et al. in 1992, protesting the proposed granting of an honorary degree to Derrida at the University of Cambridge (The Times, 9 May 1992). These two *Envois*, a postcard and a letter, return during the book as sign posts and traces, as processes of a never finished reception of antiquity, as messages always pending between acceptance and repudiation, between appropriation and distancing.

Once this unsettling tone is noticed, one easily accepts both Leonard's introduction to this volume carrying the puzzling title 'Today, on the Eve of Platonism' (pp. 1-16) and the translated text 'We Other Greeks' (pp. 17-39), two appetizers that remain outside the scope of the twelve chapters (pp. 41-369). They are relieved by two other texts on texts, the References (pp. 370-385) and the Index (sc. Rerum et Nominum) (pp. 387-406), proofs of a continuous transmission of meaning, endless sources of quotation, and in the eyes of Derrida, endless occasions to transfer and defer what has been conveyed by other texts.

The introductory remarks made by Leonard immediately followed by the new translation made by Pascale-Anne Brault and Michael Naas, specially

commissioned for this volume, mainly concern the nature of the 'Greek thing', that 'thing' that kept, for a number of decades, a whole movement together and gave an identity to a great number of divergent philosophers. Precisely this Greek point of reference proved to be a useful one to (re)define and (re)consider the modernist, and even the postmodern project, or to put it more bluntly, it was by reading four Greeks called Husserl and Heidegger, Nietzsche and Freud, that both the Greekness of philosophy was (re)introduced into the Western minds and that Western philosophy as a linguistic and ethnic construction was brought back to its Greek origin. Attempting a painstaking analysis of the past, Derrida returned to the pre-Socratics, Plato, Aristotle, the Neo-Platonists, and some Greco-Romans, both discussing the philosophical assumptions they all share and stressing the consequences they have for our present and modernist assumptions about Antiquity. At the core of his preoccupations, there always was Plato and a concern for the logocentric vision of the world, what turned Derrida into a indefatigable annalist of the presumed 'metaphysics of presence'. And for Derrida, Leonard argues, this process inevitably begins with the idea of difference, a first class tool to deconstruct the dominating Western longing for a constant and primordial 'presence'. At first glance, it may seem that he was especially interested in the 'non-Greek', the barbarian, the Egyptian, the Jew, and the Christian, who ultimately helped to delineate the geographic and ideological contours and contexts. However, it was not the 'non-Greek' that attracted him as such, Leonard insists, not 'the other' of the Greek, but the 'wholly other' of the Greek, and precisely the position that was inconceivable to him. Leaving Derrida's biography and personal psychohistory outside the scope of this book, Leonard focuses on the idea that it is this 'wholly other' that haunted Derrida in every one of the essays he has devoted to 'Greek' things. 'For Derrida, it is the figure of the excluded who is central to his understanding of antiquity', she argues, and it precisely was 'by isolating a word or concept in Greek thought which turns out to be inconceivable within its own terms' that Derrida could act to unsettle the self-identity of philosophy. Ultimately, Derrida aimed at nothing less than the destabilization of the 'identity of the Greek in general', looking as he was for figures that intruded into the text, made it 'undecidable' and left the system powerless to control its own figuration. Both Leonard's 'Introduction' and Derrida's 'We Other Greeks' focus on this important idea of dispossession that the Greeks experienced when they wanted to define themselves, not only through obvious scales and oppositions, like

excluded vs. included (the Egyptian in Plato's *Phaedrus*), but especially through elements that carried with them their own negation and were able to dismantle whole configurations of thought. The notions of *pharmakon* and *khôra* illustrated these proposals well, since both of them profoundly disturbed oppositional thinking and resisted an easy identification, ending up as notions that philosophy could not name.

The opening part of the book focuses on 'Derrida and the Classical Tradition' (pp. 41-132), in fact two chapters on his engagement with ancient philosophy and a third one on Neoplatonism and (negative) theology. Starting from the pre-Socratics and ending with the Neoplatonists, these three essays share the idea of a common belonging, of a European philosophical heritage that both continues and challenges our well known traditions of thought. The first chapter, written by Michael Naas, and called 'Earmarks. Derrida's Reinvention of Philosophical Writing in "Plato's Pharmacy"' (pp. 43-72), analyses one of Derrida's most famous essays on antiquity: 'Plato's Pharmacy'. Written in 1968, in one of the epochal periods of the last century, Derrida's text asks a number of important philosophical questions on writing, reading, and the process of interpretation, showing most clearly the origins of a series of hierarchies that are built in a number of famous well-known Western structural oppositions. Naas, in a very pedagogic style, takes us back to the construction of the whole 'basileo-patro-helio-theological' network (p. 49) that supports the creation of differences and oppositions, and exposes Platonism as the foundational system that generated hierarchies between them. In order to do so, Derrida used a special kind of critical language, a 'reinvention of philosophical writing', based upon jokes, puns, gimmicks, polysemy and homonymy, in short, a number of linguistic 'ruses' that sometimes have violently worried and disturbed the traditional academic public. As a supreme illustration of the clash between old and new, Naas extensively quotes and uses the 'The Open Letter', already mentioned above, in which the signatories, without citing nor mentioning a single Derrida fragment, severely judge his playful techniques, or in their own words: 'Many of them seem to consist in no small part of elaborate jokes and the puns "logical phallusies" and the like, and M. Derrida seems to us to have come close to making a career of what we regard as translating into academic sphere tricks and gimmicks similar to those of the Dadaists or of the concrete poets' (p. 43). Naas patiently disentangles this superficial and grotesque kind of criticism, going back to Plato's *Phaedrus* itself,

and situating the intriguing notion of *pharmakon* (meaning ‘remedy’ and ‘poison’ at the same time) within the ambivalences of writing itself. His contribution ends with a discussion of another ‘gimmick’ from the end of Plato’s *Pharmacy*, ‘*Le logos s’aime lui-même*’ that can be read, and especially heard, in three different ways (‘logos loves itself’, ‘logos sows or seeds or scatters itself’ and ‘logos loses or shakes itself’), with neither taking priority over the other, a phenomenon that evokes a decoupling of expression and meaning, and of course also of writing and a *vouloir-dire*, which leads to the end of a *logos* patronized by univocity as its *telos*, and to a generalized critique of metaphysics. Anyway, with this first discussion by Naas, the basic categories of ‘dissemination’, ‘*différence/différance*’, and the ‘metaphysics of presence’ are brilliantly introduced and explained in their epistemological and ontological settings.

In the next contribution, Erin O’Connell focuses on ‘Derrida and Presocratic Philosophy’ (pp. 73-100) and discusses some definite similarities between Derrida and the old ‘masters’, especially Heraclitus. What they have in common is a couple of important notions, for instance ‘separation’, ‘meaning and signification’ and ‘difference’, but also some basic visions and attitudes. It is startling to see that some ancient and modern philosophers share a completely ‘innovative, unorthodox and subversive’ vision of a venerable past and at the same time introduce radically new ideas and innovative strategies. O’Connell starts with Presocratic topics (the importance of the four, and later on, of the five physical elements, the boundaries and the boundless of the cosmic order, linguistic discourse and its limits, scepticism about the human possibility to account for metaphysical processes,...) and discusses them in the theories of Anaximander, Pythagoras and Xenophanes, stepping stones to arrive at Heraclitus and his vision on *diapherein*, a very early apprehension of Derrida’s own notion of *différance*. Both philosophers most keenly are interested in the way epistemology, language and meaning influence and create each other, since without their strategic presences, no meaningful representation can be made. But above all, the Heraclitean *logos* prefigures the Derridean one in many ways: difference in motion, unity and its opposite at work at the same time, logos functioning in and through language. Hence a common interest in what exceeds traditional metaphysics, and in what destabilizes the firmness of the system. And as a reminder for us, the non-specialized public, the final sentence of O’Connell’s article brings ‘us’ back to the ‘we’ in ‘We Other Greeks’: ‘Surprisingly, it is

a return to antiquity that affords, for the moment, the unexpected increase to a philosophical future', he concludes (p. 100). In Heraclitus, Derrida found a definite *companion de route*, and Classicists surely will be interested in the detailed comparison O'Connell drew between both of their works.

Stephen Gersh, in 'Negative Theology and Conversion. Derrida's Neoplatonic Compulsions' (pp. 101-132), is interested in elucidating the early Christian rewritings of Plato and more specifically in explaining the distinction between negative theology and deconstruction. At the core of his essay, there is this concern to situate the possible relations (concerning for instance 'space' or 'stages', *des étapes*), analogies and anomalies between a system that involves notions like transcendence, monism, Being, 'onto-theology', and one that thrives upon their opposites. Derrida's approach to discourse rather focuses on the structure of 'the trace' (*la trace*), what involves a philosophy of the non-transcendental and of the becoming-temporal.

The second part (pp. 135-184) explores the relationship between 'Antiquity and Modernity'. Two essays analyse the making of Modernity and European identity, caught as they are in an endless series of philosophical questions and challenges from the eighteenth till the twenty first century. Miriam Leonard opens this second part with 'Derrida between "Greek" and "Jew"' (pp. 135-158), a discussion that focuses on two major intellectual traditions of Western culture, the Hebraic and the Hellenic, definitely an interesting approach since Derrida himself was born a Jew and raised as a sophisticated friend of Greek philosophy. Paradoxically, however, he assumed neither of the two cultural models as his ultimate home and preferred the abstract notion of a 'non-site' to express his continuous struggle with them. Being a stranger and a perennial wanderer between identities and nations himself, Derrida never got tired of analyzing the notion of 'otherness' that prevented him from belonging substantially to one and the same culture. However, the Greek / Jew opposition was a constant preoccupation of his and Leonard focuses quite rightly on the consequences this configuration had for his appreciation of Hegel and Kant. 'This turns out to be very fruitful when he examines how Hegel repeatedly positions Kantian philosophy on the side of Judaism in an attempt to discredit his moral doctrines. In this process Hegel Hebraizes Kant in order to better Hellenize himself', Leonard argues (p. 140). Also Hegel's Socrates, a fresh illustration of the Enlightenment ideas and a constant companion on his own travels, serves

Derrida well to formulate his own philosophy, if only in his meditations on the shortcomings of Christianity. The same holds for Hegel's Christ, who was defined in opposition to or all along the lines of a Greek philosophical programme. Proof enough for Derrida to conclude that the most pressing debates of the Enlightenment have been carried out in a constant discussion with the ambiguous definitions of 'Greek' and 'Jew'.

In his paper 'Derrida's Impression of *Gradiva*. Archive Fever and Antiquity' (pp. 159-184), Daniel Orrells focuses on the important role that Freud has played in Derrida's appropriation of the classical past. Set against the background of the excavations of Pompeii, Wilhelm Jensen's novella *Gradiva. Ein pompejanisches Phantasiestück* (*A Pompeian Fancy*, sometimes also *Fantasy*) (1903) provides a good opportunity to question the (Freudian) notions of the unconscious and the excavation, and of the functioning of memory and the archive itself. Derrida's reading of them questions the operations of preserving and disturbing, and therefore of constructing and deconstructing our common ideas of the tradition and the past. Since most of us do not read Wilhelm Jensen, a German writer and poet without Freud's comments, the question arises in what way we are able to conceive the past without the present. Just like Jensen's *Gradiva* profoundly disturbs our common opinions about the original and the copy, in a more general sense, modernity cannot be constructed without the constant interfering of classics. Or, put into a different perspective, problems of filiation and dependency often profoundly influence and determine our traditional visions on Antiquity, as is the case with *The Post Card* that questions so deeply the traditional image we have of the relations between Socrates and Plato.

The third part (pp. 187- 263) studies the way that Derrida interferes with the political landscape of the past (III. 'A Politics of Antiquity'). His interventions on themes of a lasting importance, such as hospitality, friendship, the (female) stranger, the foreigner or foreignness, are mostly informed by Greek and Roman ethics and politics and are often conceived as direct challenges or answers to them. Rachel Bowlby's paper, 'Derrida's Dying Oedipus' (pp. 187-206), focuses on the death of Oedipus as discussed by Derrida in *De l'hospitalité* (1998), (*Of Hospitality*, 2000), and narrows down the problems of exile and asylum by exploring the situation of the woman foreigner, victim of an impossible mourning, like Antigone who in

Sophocles' *Oedipus at Colonus* is just an exile like her father. As dramas about endlessly disturbed origins and endings, or about relations of kinship turned upside down, both *Oedipus the King* and *Oedipus at Colonus*, discuss problems of full citizenship, hospitality, and aimlessness. Oedipus, the mythic and tragic wanderer, exemplifies the philosophical position of Plato's *pharmakon*, since he is seen, as Bowlby mentions, 'between two positions in his movement from the figure of pollution and abhorrence, the negative *pharmakos*, to that of a saviour, who is posthumously to take on the role of a kind of protective deity for Athens' (p. 192). An excellent remark, of course, and a pending invitation to continue Derrida's destabilising reading of the *pharmakon*, this time in a tragic context.

'Possible returns. Deconstruction and the Placing of Greek Philosophy' (pp. 207-234), by Andrew Benjamin, continues the fascination exerted by Oedipus and Greek philosophy, pursued here as an application of what Derrida meant by 'hospitality'. More specifically, this notion has to be situated in terms of a general concern for the act of reception and interpretation, also in terms of what Heidegger in his 'Introduction to Metaphysics' formulated as part of his discussion of *Oedipus at Colonus*. In both cases, one meets a fundamentally different sense of (the arrival and acceptance) of (Greek) philosophy. The history of 'hospitality', largely inspired by Levinas, is a chapter in Western philosophy that still needs to be written and elaborated, and in order to do so, Derrida turns to Walter Benjamin. Once interpretation can be defined as a mode of 'welcoming' and can be accepted in terms of 'hospitality', the nature of Greek philosophy profoundly changes, since it no longer functions in the sentimental framework of the pureness and originality of sources that has to be repeated all over again, but in a rather 'bastard, hybrid, grafted, multilinear, polyglot' network (p. 208), since the Greek source as such never can be authentic nor can authenticate its own history.

Bruce Rosenstock concludes this third part with an essay called 'Derrida *Polutropos*. Philosophy as *Nostos*' (pp. 235-263), mainly a discussion of two Derridean papers that elaborated some points made by Aristotle, 'White Mythology' (1971) and 'Politics of Friendship' (1994), an early and a late engagement with Aristotle's philosophy, both dealing with specific metaphorical transfers. Constructed along these lines, the author stages a threefold journey into the past, calling it a *nostos* or return. He departs from the heliotropic metaphors that the Greek philosopher tried to establish

as the most fundamental and deepest layer in the construction of his/our ontology ('the sun is the father and sower of light'), then passes by the dark pages of what he calls Heidegger's *Nekuia* (Heidegger functions here as a cultural 'psychopomp') where the same sun declines in a dangerous way, and finishes with the ecstatic and even 'messianistic' friendship that anticipates in a faithful expectation the return of the Other. 'White Mythology', an early attempt at deconstructing Greek philosophy itself, published just two years later than the famous 'Plato's Pharmacy', exposed the problems of Reason considered as self-evident source and self-illuminating knowledge and able to proceed without loss of meaning. However, metaphysics in general, and language in particular, cannot escape the innate metaphoricity of things, and give rise to elaborate and important patterns of metaphors, of which the paternity of the sun must be acknowledged as the Western 'Ur-metaphor', and therewith as the main metaphor for Western metaphysics (see Derrida's discussion of Aristotle's *Poetics*, 1457b25-30). Focusing on Aristotelian friendship (esp. *Nicomachean Ethics* and *Eudemian Ethics*), Derrida discovers another kind of sunshine and light, a friendship that thrives upon a symmetric and reciprocal relation, but, here again, he retraces some elements that lead to a fundamental *aporia*. Pushing friendship to the limits of its Aristotle's definition, Derrida attempts to measure Greek *philia* against the background of a biblical 'love of the neighbour' and explores an encounter between East and West, a time and a place where 'Greekjew is Jewgreek' and 'extremes meet'.

Part four (pp. 267-317) focuses on the question of literature, an important issue since Derrida repeatedly provoked the boundaries between literature and philosophy, and as Leonard already suggested in her 'Introduction' : 'From Plato's exclusion of the poets from his ideal Republic to Aristotle's banishment of figurative language from philosophy, ancient thought has repeatedly staged a conflict between literature and philosophy' (p. 14). In the first of the two essays presented here, Duncan F. Kennedy studies 'Aristotle's Metaphor', an item already discussed in the previous paper where it also was part of a discussion on 'White Mythology' (1971). Kennedy focuses on the subtitle of the article, 'Metaphor in the Text of Philosophy' ('La métaphore dans le texte philosophique', published first in *Poétique*, 5, 1971 (not 'Poétiques', as mentioned by Kennedy, p. 267, nor *Poétique*, see Rosenstock, p. 235, n.1), later reprinted in 'Marges de la Philosophie' (1972), and translated as 'Margins of Philosophy' in 1982.

Attention to metaphors is part of a greater discourse, he maintains, one that, from Aristotle to the present day, has tried to preserve the clarity of language and therefore wanted to efface the role of figural language. Through a great variety of historical texts, Derrida followed the reactions to Aristotle's work on metaphor, and Kennedy reorganizes them in a broad and very thoughtful overview that demystifies the search for a 'proper' meaning. The absence of metaphor is a Western illusion, since meaning, in a Derridean sense, is only possible through an endless process of referring, turning every concept into a metaphor and installing never-ceasing traces of 'différance'.

The second and last essay in this fourth part, Mark Vessey's paper 'Writing before Literature: Derrida's Confessions and the Latin Christian World' (pp. 289-317) explores the problems one meets when trying to follow the genealogy of literature back to its Greek origins. Often enough, we have to admit that our views on classical literature have been deeply influenced by the specific Latin tradition it found on its way. Mentioning Derrida's use of *The Post Card*, an image that suggests a number of possible filiations between Socrates and Plato, of a 'Socrates writing before Plato', or of a 'Plato (literally) behind Socrates', Vessey discusses a number of equally problematizing items about literature and its history. In the last decade of his life, Derrida asked some questions about the 'history' of literature as a name, a concept and an institution, especially regarding the imperial aspirations of the relations between literature and its European roots, its monotheist and scriptural traditions and the whole of its '*mondialatinisation*' (a French term that Derrida preferred over the Anglo-American 'globalatinization', since here, the notion of 'world' defined by its Christian history, is lost).

Part five (pp. 321- 369) deals with Derrida's interpretation of the body, caught as it was in an ever lasting conflict between the sensible and the intelligible, between idealism and materialism. The first of the two essays that deal with the topic of 'Platonic bodies' was written by Paul Allen Miller ('The Platonic Remainder. Derrida's *Khôra* and the *Corpus Platonicum*', pp. 321-341) and analyses how Derrida's interpretation of the Platonic notion of the *khôra* challenges any discourse based upon binary and structuralist presuppositions. Warning against taking too seriously certain interpretations of Plato's *Timaeus* and arguing that this text constantly moves between two levels of understanding, a literal and a figurative one, an ambiguity that leads to a lecture on cosmology that constantly seems to undermine its own

seriousness, Miller focuses on the double level in this text and qualifies the two levels now as *mythos*, now as *logos*. The simultaneous presence of these two dimensions leads to a discussion of a certain bottomlessness of discourse, while staging a continuous *mise-en-abîme* and stimulating endless processes of reflection. This is the place where the Platonic notion of *khôra* becomes interesting, as ‘the prephilosophical, prenarrative moment that makes the construction of both *muthos* and *logos* possible, even as it reveals their essential complicity’, Miller argues (p. 327). As such, the *khôra* challenges both the ideal and the material, and provokes the dual notions of being and becoming, of essence and appearance. Defined along these lines, *khôra* opens up a philosophy of difference that supersedes the traditional oppositional thinking, a third *genos* that no longer depreciates the materiality of the body.

Ika Willis’ concluding essay, ‘Eros in the Age of Technical Reproducibility. Socrates, Plato, and the Erotics of Filiation’ (pp. 342-369) starts with a provocative statement by Derrida: ‘“Quite stupidly”, writes Derrida near the beginning of ‘Envois’, the immense, fragmentary, epistolary preface to *The Post Card*, “one has to believe (that) Socrates comes *before* Plato, there is between them - and in general- an order of generations, an irreversible sequence of inheritance” (p. 343). Such a statement focuses on the main point that ‘*Envois*’ keeps referring to: the perennial problem of the ‘in-between’, like the one mentioned here, between Socrates and Plato, a communicational problem that relies, however, on a deeper philosophical attitude, Derrida argues, so typical for Western metaphysics. What ‘quite stupidly’ refers to, is, ultimately, the frozen condition of our beliefs and tenets, the unification and irreversibility of relations, or, as Willis mentions, the idea that ‘texts addressed, destined, dedicated by a determinable signer to a particular receiver’ (p. 343) have to function properly. In suggesting some totally different storylines that the Bodleian *Post Card* invites us to consider, Derrida shows how multiple connections can take us to totally different interpretations (sexual, generational and reproductive ones), shocking, but not impossible ones.

If one of the central aims of the series ‘Classical Presences’ is to bring ‘the latest scholarship to bear on the contexts, theory, and practice of such use, and abuse, of the classical past’, then the present volume most successfully meets this requirement. The essays brought together here by Miriam

Leonard are most provocative, well written and dealing with major points of poststructuralist philosophy, substantially enlarging all common opinions about Derrida and Classics. It is obvious now that Derrida's engagement with the ancient world was no casual affair, but rather a very fundamental and necessary (re)appropriation that dug deeper than most Westerners would like to admit. From 'logocentrism' over 'dissemination' to 'unconditional hospitality', this book challenges basic insights and foundational concepts of the 'classical presence' that have never been questioned. His attack on the 'philosophy of presence' and its 'basileo-patro-helio-theological' principles, done during the headiest days of the sixties, has resulted in a general change within most human sciences and provoked a successful reorientation within the field of Classics itself, although predominantly felt in areas that occupied, up till now, marginal positions, like feminist and gender studies, cultural poetics, or postcolonial studies. The emphasis on the 'undecidability' of important Platonic notions like *pharmakon* or *khôra*, central issues in his *Phaedrus* and *Timaeus* that destabilize whole networks and discourses, stimulated the human sciences to question, once again, the kind of dialogue that this century needs to revitalize itself and to (re)consider why, as has often been the case before, we need the past in order to understand the present.

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Estes dois volumes, coordenados por Rita Marnoto, apresentam estudos sobre os seguintes sonetos:

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