

Hedgehogs:

verse-reflections after Derrida

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by Christopher Norris

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For Rahim and Wendy

This book is dedicated to Rahim and Wendy Hassan in token of their enormous help and encouragement with my poetry-writing over the past four years. It would never have been conceived or sustained without the regular creative stimulus provided by their online magazine *The Wednesday*, a wonderful meeting-place for poets and philosophers.

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Foreword

This is a sequence of formal poems (sonnets, villanelles, pantoums, *terza rima*, *ottava rima* and other types) on themes from the voluminous and far-ranging work of the philosopher Jacques Derrida (1930-2004). My aim throughout has been partly to introduce that work to readers more interested in poetry than philosophy, and partly to convince them that Derrida's thought has a more than incidentally poetic character as well as great intellectual power and acuity. It was also to explore, for my own creative benefit, the relationship between certain striking yet hard-to-define characteristics of his texts and the kinds of formal and inventive resource that poets more commonly draw on. Derrida had much to say about literature in writings early and late, including some notably cryptic and evocative essays on poets and poetry, most of them published in his final two decades. I address them here in a number of extended verse-sequences, two of which – 'Hedgehog' and 'Signed and Dated' – came as close as I could to defining what it is in those texts that I find so utterly compelling and elusive.

The poems were a late product of many decades spent reading Derrida and writing about him in books and essays of a more orthodox and academically accredited sort. This volume belongs, if anywhere, to the category 'creative criticism', and seeks to make good on both terms in a conjunction once deemed near-oxymoronic though nowadays perhaps too loosely bandied about. The ordering is more for the sake of

formal variety and thematic linkage than chronology or logical development. The epigraphs – all but a few of them taken from Derrida’s texts – are identified by brief source-title since they can readily be tracked down by an online search. They are load-bearing in the sense that they provide readers, especially those relatively new to Derrida, with some useful orientation and a basis for engaging with what’s going on in the way of verse-commentary. Their relation to the poems is sometimes explanatory, sometimes associative, sometimes ironic, and sometimes – perhaps most often – a variously-weighted combination of the three.

The epigraphs also embody my conviction – contrary to post-Romantic, Symbolist, Imagist, Modernist, and other schools of thought – that poetry can have propositional content and thus be at liberty to reason or argue a case beyond the confines of its own, purely autonomous formal or rhetorical structure. There are, roughly speaking, two sorts of formalism, one overly dogmatic or doctrinal, the other more a set of working practices and priorities. The first raises devotion to certain kinds of rhyme-scheme, metrical structure, poetic device, and so forth, into a wholesale – even metaphysical or doctrinally sanctioned – set of precepts. Among them is a rule about not having headnotes or epigraphs because these are inadmissible prose intrusions into just that (somehow) ontologically privileged poetic domain. Mine is the other sort of formalism and happily permits itself such intrusions for the sake of, among other things, our shared humanity and the interests of achieving closer contact between poetry, philosophy, and life in general. It takes for granted that even the most hermetic or formally intricate poetry – for instance that of Mallarmé or J.H. Prynne – will contain certain words and combinations of words that have at least some elusive reference to objects, events or matters ‘outside the text’. And if this seems flatly at odds with Derrida’s single most notorious pronouncement – ‘il n’y a pas de hors-texte’ (‘there is no “outside”

to the text') – then it is worth remarking that he and others, myself included, have amply refuted the once-prevalent misconception which took it as espousing some form of wholesale textualist-idealist creed.

All the same I should admit – since the point will not escape notice – that this declaration places my project at somewhat of an angle to Derrida's own later thinking about poems, keen as he is to insist on their separateness from the realm of discursive thought. Moreover, he excludes them from the category of 'the literary' in so far as that designation subsumes them under certain discursively specified generic concepts or norms. In the same way Derrida consistently disowned any ambitions to 'be a poet', to 'write poetry', or to have it thought that the term might apply to some of his more strikingly metaphorical, inventive, allusive, or exegetically challenging passages. His conception of the poem, as witnessed especially in his later writings on Paul Celan, was one that stressed its utterly *sui generis* character, its uniqueness as a life-event for poet and (optimally) for responsive reader, and – above all – its non-availability to anything remotely like gloss, paraphrase, explication, or 'literary' commentary. Rather it stood in splendid though perpetually threatened and infinitely fragile isolation as witness of its having been signed at this or that date by this or that named individual in this or that context-specific set of more or less ecstatic, rapturous, reflective, apprehensive, desolate, or abject conditions. My sequence 'Signed and Dated' tries to get at the extraordinary force and resonance of Derrida's writings in that vein though it does so in a mixed-mode genre – that of verse-essay, exegesis, meta-textual commentary, even critique – which those writings would count as inherently non-poetic.

Of course this problem could quickly be got over by falling back on the well-established verse/poetry distinction and saying that mine are verse (though non-poetic) renditions of Derrida's prose-philosophical (hence strictly non-poetic no matter how 'poetic'-seeming) essays on the name and nature of po-

etry, properly so conceived. This would offer the advantage of a clear if somewhat drastic or draconian demarcation of realms. It would also fall in with a great many otherwise diverse movements of thought, among them German and English Romanticism, French Symbolism, Anglo-American literary Modernism, the US New Criticism of the 1940s and 50s, and – oddly enough – Derridean deconstruction as interpreted by those who have lately come to it with a special interest in poetics. At the same time it leaves us, his readers, with no way of giving articulate substance to the sense that there is more going on philosophically in the ‘poetic’ aspects or passages of his writing than could ever be accounted for on any such binary conception. And conversely, we are harder put to explain how the ‘poetic’ comes to play such an integral – indeed constitutive – role in the process of textual-conceptual engagement that produces a deconstructive reading. If the word is to signify anything more than an appreciative gesture towards certain of Derrida’s texts – perhaps the most intensely metaphorical, self-reflexively performative, or rhetorically complex – then there is, I think, a role for commentaries like this that combine poetic with discursive elements.

Still I should also acknowledge that my approach is bound to downplay the Mallarméan or high-modernist aspects of Derrida’s writing. In his early work this accompanied an overt, albeit qualified subscription to the ‘semioclastic’ or radical-textualist tenets of the group around the journal *Tel Quel*. Those aspects are to the fore in a text like *Dissemination* where he broaches, inter alia, the undoing of Platonic metaphysics and ontology via a sustained intertextual reading of Plato and Mallarmé on and around the theme of mimesis. I should not want to say that Derrida moved ‘beyond’ that phase, any more than he ever wholly renounced the somewhat arcane ultra-left post-structuralist politics that went along with it. But he did move toward more substantive forms of ethico-political engagement, as well as more direct, less high-theoretical ways of approach-

ing them. Those later writings are the main focus of attention here, not least because – in contrast to the complex of ideas in *Dissemination* and related texts – they don't in effect create a zone of exclusion around that once near-mythical object, the radically polysemous or plurisignificant text. Put simply, my poems would themselves have lacked any room for engagement – any points of thematic or conceptual purchase – had I followed the more extreme injunctions of Derrida's early work.

Many years ago I sent some of it, including his landmark essay 'Structure, Sign and Play in the Discourse of the Human Sciences', to the poet-critic William Empson about whom I was writing a Ph.D. thesis and who has remained, with Derrida, one of those thinkers whose influence on my thinking goes so deep as to have become largely unconscious. I should have known better, I suppose: all they really had in common was extraordinary intellectual powers and creative gifts of the highest order. Beyond that it was differences all the way down: Derrida the subtlest, most dialectically agile and speculatively far-reaching of theorists, Empson – in his later years at least – a bluntly plain-speaking rationalist and humanist who turned to theory of his own very resourceful but idiosyncratic kind when he felt it was called for but otherwise regarded it with deep suspicion, even loathing. The outcome was predictable, though to me disappointing: a series of increasingly ferocious letters and none of the hoped-for quotable remarks placing Empson in the context of later, mainly Francophone literary theory. I mention all this because in many ways these poems are the long-postponed upshot of that ancient disappointment. They deploy some of Empson's favourite verse-forms, they share his view of poetry as continuous with the rest of human experience, not hermetically sealed off from it, and they do quite a bit of 'argufying' (his word for the sort of rational but not strictly logical discourse that doesn't mind dirtying its poetic hands with a range of debatable topics). They have also picked up no

end of practical tips from his incomparable books *Seven Types of Ambiguity* and *The Structure of Complex Words*.

Derrida and Empson make an odd couple so that bringing them together like this does at times create certain detectable pressures and strains. In a way that's just the point: to see how things might go with a poetry inspired or influenced by two such highly creative and eminently gifted thinker-writers whose work yet exhibits such a range of conflicting priorities, beliefs, and commitments. Besides, several pieces here make use of a verse-form that Empson himself devised for a poem called 'The Teasers', one that he counted a failure owing to its somehow running out steam but which he none the less considered a 'beautiful invention' in formal terms. Its main distinctive feature is a line-break – a kind of caesura – midway through the second line of what thus becomes a hybrid tercet-or-quatrain. I don't agree with him about 'The Teasers' being a failure but I do very much agree that the form is a lovely one and well worth reviving. It works, I think, through a complex of verse-music, prosody, syntactic suspense and rhyme-guided or rhyme-afforded ideation which is what the critic F. R. Leavis might have meant (but didn't quite) by his phrase 'creative-exploratory' as applied to literature. I hope that a fair number of these pieces live up both to that challenging specification and to the very different kinds of challenge offered by Derrida's nonpareil texts.

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Swansea, September 2020
Christopher Norris

Hedgehogs

Hospitality

It is as though the laws (plural) of hospitality, in marking limits, powers, rights, and duties, consisted in challenging and transgressing the law of hospitality, the one that would command that the 'new arrival' be offered an unconditional welcome.

Of Hospitality

No hospitality where every guest
 Receives a ready welcome, every host
 Extends full liberty to make the most
 Of every privilege, and where the test
 Is that he count no protocol transgressed
 By those who count his claim an empty boast
 Unless they get to carve the Sunday roast
 Or bed his wife and daughter on request.
 No shame attached if every absolute
 Comes hedged with rules, or every open-door
 'You're welcome' has restrictions framed to suit
 The time and place, though purists may deplore
 Such making-do and saintly types dispute
 Such canny reckoning of the moral score.

Forgiveness

Yes, there is the unforgivable. Is this not, in truth, the only thing to forgive? The only thing that calls for forgiveness? If one is only prepared to forgive what appears forgivable ..., then the very idea of forgiveness would disappear.

On Cosmopolitanism and Forgiveness

‘To err is human’, so the poet said,
 And followed up: ‘but to forgive, divine’.
 For gods alone it holds, his noble line,
 Since ‘human’ means ‘mock-godlike’ if we’re led
 To think forgiveness absolute instead
 Of always having somehow to combine
 The tribute laid at that unearthly shrine
 With what gives human kind the go-ahead.
 Yet how speak of forgiveness if it goes
 No further than the guilt-remission due
 To equals, paid as debt or duty owes,
 And so forfends all thought we might outdo,
 In grace or gratitude, God only knows
 What workings-out of cost and revenue?

The Gift

For there to be a gift, there must be no reciprocity,
return, exchange, counter-gift, or debt ... For there to be
a gift, it is necessary that the donee not give back,
amortize, reimburse.

Given Time

What's in our gift has naught of giving's grace.
No gift but drives the donor to excess.
Give faster, give big-time lest you lose face.

Just trading gift for gift won't hold the pace
When rivals are up-trading more for less:
What's in our gift has naught of giving's grace.

Spend within means and you'll have quit the race;
Just blow the lot, no time to second-guess.
Give faster, give big-time lest you lose face.

That double-entry stuff won't help your case
When balanced books find no one to impress:
What's in our gift has naught of giving's grace.

Where spendthrifts speed the thrifty must give chase,
Or raise the stakes with all that they possess:
Give faster, give big-time lest you lose face.

Potlatch, not potluck: here the winner's place
Is theirs who take most risk with least redress;
What's in our gift has naught of giving's grace.

Yet it's gifts offered in that hyper-space
Beyond all recompense that the gods bless:
Give faster, give big-time lest you lose face.

Then you'll give more than's good for you, embrace
The supererogatory, and stress:
'What's in our gift has naught of giving's grace;
Give faster, give big-time lest you lose face'.

Différance

The activity or productivity connoted by the *a* of *différance* refers to the generative movement in the play of differences. Differences are the effects of transformations, and from this vantage the theme of *différance* is incompatible with the static, synchronic, taxonomic, ahistoric motifs in the concept of structure.

Positions

See written here, the instant it occurs,
 That graphic signifier making plain
 How quickly *différance* sets off the chain
 Of senses linking 'differs' and 'defers',
 How metaphysics trembles, *khora* stirs,
 Strange tremors agitate the textual plane,
 And practised brushers-up against the grain
 Acquire new purchase as old structures blur.
 Be sure it's *à la lettre* that you read,
 Make text your law, let intuition go,
 And see the play of *différance* exceed
 All logocentric bounds as fault-lines show
 Time figured spatially yet space then freed,
 Dehiscent, to rejoin time's halting flow.

The Magic Writing-Pad (Freud)

Following the way of the metaphors of the path, of the trace, of the exploration, of the march grooving a pathway opened by effraction through the neuron, the light or wax, wood or resin to inscribe violently in a nature, in a matter, in a matrix ...we ask ourselves what did Freud do.

Writing and Difference

What metaphor but writing fits the bill?
 The others all had surplus stuff to add,
 All but that toy, the Magic Writing Pad,
 Whose hidden traces haunt my memory still.
 I trawled the sciences for terms to fill
 My need, but the analogies were bad,
 Loose-fitting, otiose, or clearly had
 Unwanted kinds of physics-overspill.
 Then I recalled the plaything: one clean sweep
 And my inscriptions vanished, yet were there
 Deep-layered in the wax and sure to keep
 Their form intact, like that unconscious share
 Of thoughts and memories that came in sleep
 Or tripped our tongues when we were least aware.

Autoimmunity

Between the immune and that which threatens it or runs counter to it ...the relation ...is neither one of exteriority nor one of simple opposition or contradiction. I would say the same about the relationship between immunity and autoimmunity.

Rogues: two essays on reason

So many things may turn auto-immune.
They self-inoculate on every scale
Till, at some point, the safety-systems fail,
The organism ceases to fine-tune,
Its daily antibody-counts balloon,
And then – the climax to this sorry tale –

The pull-back call goes out to no avail
As darkness falls in that last-blink saloon.
So likewise nation-states self-immunise
Against some real or fancied foreign threat
Which turns out their own death-wish in disguise,
While anti-virus programmes prove dead-set
On self-destruct and hawkish types advise
We stake our all on a wild gambler's bet.

The Animal

As with every bottomless gaze, as with the eyes of the other, the gaze called 'animal' offers to my sight the abyssal limit of the human: the inhuman or the ahuman, the ends of man, that is to say, the border-crossing from which vantage man dares to announce himself to himself, thereby calling himself by the name that he believes he gives himself.

The Animal Which Therefore I Am

1

So keen they are to stress the species-gap!
 So keen they are
 that animals not bear
 Some likeness to themselves across the bar!

Descartes's to blame when they walk head-in-air.
 Descartes's to blame
 when they contrive to star
 In tales that place us humans centre-frame.

It's like a map with two zones: near and far.
 It's like a map
 that carries no place-name
 But those that duly honour homo sap.

From thought's armchair those ruminants took aim.
 From thought's armchair
 they took their chance to slap
 The creatures down or pack them off elsewhere.

‘Should something jar give them the dunce’s cap!
 Should something jar
 then just remember they’re
 Far lower than our lowest avatar.’

Yet why this shame beneath her level stare?
 Yet why this shame
 as my cat-commissar
 Sees me undressed and plays her teasing game.

Stuck leg-in-trap or struck by speeding car;
 Stuck leg-in-trap
 the stricken beast may claim
 Due sympathy, like us on our last lap.

Why should she spare my blushes, archly tame?
 Why should she spare
 the species handicap
 I feel who cast around for bathroom wear?

We deem subpar what our genes can’t bootstrap.
 We deem subpar
 those traits we humans err
 In thinking primitive or plain bizarre.

That’s how we came to live so solitaire!
 That’s how we came
 to count the abattoir
 No fault of ours or place of evil fame.

When kind-ties snap they leave a lasting scar.
 When kind-ties snap
 the break will surely maim
 Both sides though one appear to take the rap.

Hurt past repair while all goes on the same.
 Hurt past repair
 while some refuse to tap
 The creature-root of inter-species care.

2

Let's not delude ourselves with idle dreams!
 Let's not delude
 our waking thought with that
 Old fantasy of shared solicitude.

The beasts have their own life-world habitat.
 The beasts have their
 own life-worlds that include
 Just those with conspecific traits to share.

Not what it seems, that vision wish-imbued.
 Not what it seems,
 that extra-kindly prayer
 For creature-ties beyond old Adam's schemes.

My caveat: false fellowship's a snare!
 My caveat:
 don't trust those mythic themes
 Of Ark-bred closeness on Mount Ararat.

We'll get things skewed by playing hybrid teams.
 We'll get things skewed
 if having them to bat
 Re-starts some age-old inter-species feud.

The contacts rare, nothing to marvel at.
 The contacts rare

and such that change of mood
Or fear can drive the beast back to its lair.

In genes and memes the Eden-strife's renewed.
In genes and memes
it bids us somehow square
The clashing needs, the variant life-regimes.

A concordat, but not *sans frontières*.
A concordat
on terms each party deems
Enough to nip the budding autocrat.

Death and Writing

The trace I leave to me means at once my death, to come or already come, and the hope that it will survive me. It is not an ambition of immortality; it is fundamental. I leave here a bit of paper, I leave, I die; it is impossible to exit this structure; it is the unchanging form of my life. Every time I let something go, I live my death in writing.

Learning to Live Finally: the last interview

1

I write, and every letter strikes me dead.
A structural necessity declares:
'Always a chance I'll die before it's read'.

A curious thought, no proper cause for dread,
Though apt to catch the writer unawares:
I write, and every letter strikes me dead.

Of course each scribbler tends to look ahead,
Launch bottle-notes, hope he's the one it spares.
Always a chance I'll die before it's read.

'The letter killeth', so the scripture said,
And mocked our writerly survival prayers.
I write, and every letter strikes me dead.

'Go back to source, trust living speech instead',
Some say, but script alone survives and there's
Always a chance I'll die before it's read.

Speech leaves no trace, its echoes swiftly fled,
 While script may eternize the sense it bears:
 I write, and every letter strikes me dead.

It's writing lets our thoughts endure and spread
 Though, like as not, we'll miss our living shares:
 Always a chance I'll die before it's read.

Though *scripta manent*, still we'll be misled;
 Their bronze inscription neither knows nor cares.
 I write, and every letter strikes me dead.

And should some zealous supervisor shred
 That life-text, the last word may not be theirs:
 Always a chance I'll die before it's read.

No scribbler's whim but hope- and terror-bred,
 That graphic shadow cast on life's affairs.
 Always a chance I'll die before it's read;
 I write, and every letter strikes me dead.

2

Often I think, 'what of me might survive?',
 Then, swift as thought, reply: of this be sure,
 That what lives on of you will not be pure,
 Inviolable, unscathed, or counted 'live'
 So long as nothing deathlike comes to rive
 The living instant, leave no link secure,
 Undo time's flow, and so have you endure
 Its non-endurance as you may contrive.
 Live on through those, my writings? so I think,
 Or hope, at times though writing bears the mark,
 Like nothing else, of how that broken link

Haunts every word, how written signs loom dark
 With every future risk, and how the ink,
 Though lately dry, may quench the living spark.

At every point on every scale it splits
 Apart the specious present, opens wide
 That temporal rift as instants subdivide
 And punctual self-identity admits,
 Despite itself, the scission that unknits
 The transcendental subject, gets inside
 The time-lapse capsule where we transients hide,
 And spurns our every plea to call it quits.
 No cause for grief: the afterlife recedes,
 Along with soul, if by 'surviving' you've
 In mind what meets the terrors, hopes and needs
 Of mortal kind; but should my thesis prove
 Correct it's one that he who runs may read
 As jumping every other-worldly groove.

My point: whatever living-on we might
 Just hope for, it's most surely not the sort
 They offered, but the kind that death cuts short
 Once and for all though leaving us to write,
 Meanwhile, of life, death and the rest despite
 Our knowing in advance how death's retort
 To life's brave show has always been the snort
 Of sovereign mockery that serves them right
 Who flout its law. Yet shift perspectives, take
 An immanent, not life-transcendent view,
 And see how life-times valued for the sake
 Of life alone may have us judge anew
 Their claim to yield a death-adjusted stake
 In life's capacity to see us through.

It's that capacity that bids we steer
 A course not over-sold on open seas,
 Prepared to voyage them, not drift at ease
 In coastal waters, but aware that we're
 Earth-denizens, this side of death's frontier,
 And that, if there's some immanent reprise
 We might expect, it's not the sort to please
 Those tuned to music from another sphere.
 For just conceive it riven from within,
 The time of life we know can only last
 A mortal lifetime, and we might begin
 To see how present-future, present-past,
 And that non-simple present might unpin
 The temporal fix that held survival fast.

Think also how it's *différance* that shows,
 At every point, time's ceaseless ravelling
 Of plain tense-logic, how it waits to spring
 Split-second syncopes from start to close
 Of every life, and at each instant throws
 Life forward another instant till the string
 Of nows just-past and nows not-yet may bring
 Survivance sure as any mortal knows.
 No afterlife but has to have its source
 This side of death, no living on but finds
 Its opening in time's momentary course,
 While each concatenated link unbinds
 Those futures yet to come, that occult force
 Of pure survivance glimpsed between the blinds.

Letters

One of the paradoxes of destination is that if you wanted to demonstrate, for someone, that something never arrives at its destination, it's all over. Once the demonstration had achieved its aim, it will have proved what it was not supposed to demonstrate. But that, dear friend, is why I always say 'a letter can reach its destination, etc.' That it need not always be a piece of luck.

'For the Love of Lacan'

In the beginning, in principle, was the post, and I will never get over it.

The Post Card: from Socrates to Freud and Beyond

1

Not every letter finds the right address.
We check the postcode, but they don't get through.
Some unknown system glitch is our best guess.

No text so clear it's destined to express
The writer's gist, intent, or point of view.
Not every letter finds the right address.

It's an old tale: why fret when critics stress
Their own pet themes and twist the sense askew?
Some widespread system glitch is our best guess.

Checked twice in proof before it went to press:
 How then should such anomalies accrue?
 Not every letter finds the right address.

Of course you'll always get the odd success,
 The text conserved, the mailman bang on cue:
 Some one-off system glitch is our best guess.

For it's by destinerrance we progress
 Past sending or receiving just what's due:
 Not every letter finds the right address.

Why count those missing letters dead unless
 You've checked for postal codes you misconstrue?
 That we're the system-glitch is our best guess.

Through glitch and swerve we're driven to confess
 Such hit-and-miss the best that we can do
 As one stray letter finds the right address.

No sorter's care, no critic's faithfulness
 Will keep their twin deliverances true:
 Systemic system-glitch is our best guess;
 Not every letter finds the right address.

2

That most arrive – that much we can't deny!
 With letters as with texts, the slips are rare:
 How spot them if the fail-rate goes too high?

We'll just lose track once errors multiply
 Beyond the point where we can cross-compare:
 That most arrive – that much we can't deny!

At L'Ecole Freudienne the alumni
 Take Lacan's lead, find errors everywhere.
 How spot them if the fail-rate goes too high?

I read him and perceive the alibi
 He seeks in saying mailmen always err:
 That most arrive – that much we can't deny!

There's things he won't allow to signify,
 Like that last bait in Poe's ingenious snare.
 How spot them if the fail-rate goes too high?

It's just such telling twists elude the eye
 Of letter-sleuths who fail to read what's there:
 That most arrive – that much we can't deny!

Poe's tricky narrative may help us spy
 Truths waiting *poste-restante*, still fit to share.
 How spot them if the fail-rate goes too high?
 That most arrive – that much we can't deny!

‘That Dangerous Supplement’ (Rousseau)

Jean-Jacques chooses to be absent and to write. Paradoxically, he will hide himself to show himself better, and he will confide in written speech: ‘The part that I have taken of writing and hiding myself is precisely the one that suits me. If I were present, one would never know what I was worth’. The admission is singular and merits emphasis: Jean-Jacques breaks with others, only to present himself to them in written speech. Protected by solitude, he will turn and re-turn his sentences at leisure.

For the concept of the supplement ...harbours within itself two significations whose cohabitation is as strange as it is necessary. The supplement adds itself, it is a surplus, a plenitude enriching another plenitude, the fullest measure of presence. But the supplement supplements. It adds only to replace. It intervenes or insinuates itself in-the-place-of; if it fills, it is as one fills a void.

Of Grammatology

1

See how the word strikes back on every page,
That strange word ‘supplement’, my blessing-curse.
No call for writing in that happier age.

Now writing fills my hours yet can’t assuage
The self-contempt that, hour-by-hour, grows worse:
See how the word strikes back on every page!

The supplements accrue at every stage
 As I find new personae to rehearse:
 No call for writing in that happier age.

Unending substitutes: the writer's wage.
 My first was Maman, soon exchanged for nurse.
 See how the word strikes back on every page!

In passion's living throes I'd still engage
 With fantasies too vivid to disperse.
 No call for writing in that happier age.

Behold me now, all Europe's favourite sage,
 Yet culture-spoiled as nature turns perverse.
 See how the word strikes back on every page!

I'm nature's exile, rattling at my cage,
 As culture steals my pen and signs coerce.
 No call for writing in that happier age;
 See how the word strikes back on every page!

2

One day my texts will find a reader quick
 To see my nemesis in that one word,
 That dangerous 'supplement' that makes absurd
 My back-to-nature talk and lets him pick
 My arguments apart to show the trick
 Of non-bivalent logic that incurred
 The cost, for me, of bringing out a third
 Truth-value: neither box the one to tick!
 He'll spot, that reader, how the constant switch
 Of values nature/culture skews the poles,
 How harmony queers the true melodic pitch,

And how the imp of arche-writing trolls
 Those dreams of pure self-presence that bewitch
 Our thought lest speech and script invert their roles.

O none knows better, none with better cause
 Than I, to rue the power of writing's spell,
 This 'I' whose life's been one long quest to tell
 My own life-story, seek the world's applause
 (Got catcalls back instead), reform its laws
 And politics, urge nature to rebel
 Against corrupting culture, and raise hell
 When priests make mortal sins of human flaws.
 All this I strove to bring about by means
 Of writing, most insidious of all
 The culture-bred conditions and routines
 That hold our natural faculties in thrall,
 Turn living speakers into script-machines,
 And trade live accents for a lifeless scrawl.

Worse still, he'll track that supplemental twist,
 That *bouleversement*, at work each time
 My text makes bold to tell the world how I'm
 Much prone to fantasise and find I've missed,
 By 'conjuring absent beauties', just that blissed-
 Out real-life sharing of the most sublime
 Erotic joys, content instead to mime
 The act in thought like any onanist!
 That 'dangerous supplement', he'll say, that lack
 Of present satisfaction that requires
 Perpetual substitutes, yet doubles back,
 Through all the joyless loves and spent desires,
 To me, self-author of these woes: Jean-Jacques,
 Against whom every written trace conspires.

3

What speaks to us is melody alone.
 No harmony can touch the human heart.
 Let nature sound in each unsullied tone.

The curse takes hold when lower voices drone,
 When lines run parallel, then draw apart:
 What speaks to us is melody alone.

Those lines impose an order of their own,
 The realm where music's misadventures start.
 Let nature sound in each unsullied tone.

Have harmony corrupt that magic zone
 And hear how swiftly nature yields to art.
 What speaks to us is melody alone.

The voices jar, but now our ears have grown
 So used to it no discord's off the chart:
 Let nature sound in each unsullied tone.

I curse each contrapuntalist, each clone
 Of Rameau, for those scores so chic and smart.
 What speaks to us is melody alone;
 Let nature sound in each unsullied tone.

4

His operas wow the court, mine goes unplayed.
Le devin du village, my poor love-child.
 Tastes so depraved, who needs their accolade?

His scores are multi-staved, a note-cascade!
 Mine are pure water, *melos* undefiled.
 His operas wow the court, mine goes unplayed.

Those courtly types count me the renegade,
 One born to pipe my 'native woodnotes wild'.
 Tastes so depraved, who needs their accolade?

His tract on counterpoint's produced a trade
 In 'school of Rameau', copy-book compiled.
 His operas wow the court, mine go unplayed.

No purer song, no lovelier serenade
 Than accents passion-bred and simply styled?
 Tastes so depraved, who needs their accolade?

I'll not pay court to Rameau's hit-parade
 Though it's on his poor stuff that fortune's smiled.
 His operas wow the court, mine goes unplayed;
 Tastes so depraved, who needs their accolade?

5

I sense him still, that reader, text in hand
 And looking sharp for yet more ways to catch
 Me out, more problem passages to latch
 His own text onto, till my writings stand
 Revealed as stuffed with loads of contraband,
 With suspect binaries he'll soon dispatch
 At will and leave my faithful heirs to scratch
 Around for ways to save the Rousseau brand.
 Then – neatest trick of all – he'll have the nerve
 To say I said it first, to make me out
 The auto-deconstructor in whose *oeuvre*
 Each statement's instantly exposed to doubt
 By that split-second, self-subverting swerve
 That says: don't ask me what I'm on about!

In truth his major quarry's none of these,
 For him, first points of entry but much more
 The nature/culture thing, the chance to score
 Big-time and put his deconstructive squeeze
 On the root binary that guarantees,
 Or so I thought, each item in the store
 Of goods and ills I'd gladly answer for
 Despite his holding all the master-keys.
 For it's when culture first contrives to leave
 Its mark on nature that the rot begins,
 That letters ruin speech, that voices weave
 Their contrapuntal web, and true love sins
 With those false simulacra that deceive
 Love's eye and soul like shapely mannekins.

6

My shadow self he seems, *moi redoublé*.
 I glimpse that future gloss between the lines.
 His words or mine? Sometimes I cannot say.

Through a glass darkly: that's the price I pay
 For every thought of mine his gloss declines.
 My shadow self he seems, *moi redoublé*.

Often enough it's my own texts that lay
 The traps and tripwires built to his designs!
 His words or mine? Sometimes I cannot say.

So strange yet so familiar, the way
 My text self-deconstructs, self-undermines!
 My shadow self he seems, *moi redoublé*.

He says: 'you napped as it led you astray,
 That supplement, but learn to read the signs!'

His words or mine? Sometimes I cannot say.

The counter-logic rules we two shall play;
It's my perplexity his text divines.
My shadow self he seems, *moi redoublé*.

They alternate like rhyme-schemes ABA,
Those texts of ours entangled, intertwined.
His words or mine? Sometimes I cannot say.
My shadow self he seems, *moi redoublé*.

7

No fact can vouch the truth of what I wrote.
Why think my famed 'confessions' bear truth's seal?
How soon self-reckoning yields to anecdote.

My future reader never fails to note
The warts-and-all, the 'unknown Rousseau' Spiel;
No fact can vouch the truth of what I wrote.

I see, years on, those pages he'll devote
To questioning these things I say I feel.
How soon self-reckoning yields to anecdote.

So many heartfelt passages he'll quote
To show I self-invent, not self-reveal;
No fact can vouch the truth of what I wrote.

It's tricks of his that have me by the throat,
That floor me by their undeceiving zeal!
How soon self-reckoning yields to anecdote.

We're both embarked on the same leaky boat
That has us skirt the coastline of the real:

No fact can vouch the truth of what I wrote.

For he and I both know the asymptote
Of truth and fiction cuts a tattler's deal;
How soon self-reckoning yields to anecdote.

'Nothing outside the text!' I hear them gloat,
His foes, yet whence the extra-text appeal?
No fact can vouch the truth of what I wrote.

He'll fix it so the sceptics far outvote
The fideists: how much my texts conceal,
How soon self-reckoning yields to anecdote!
No fact can vouch the truth of what I wrote.

Structuralism and Poetry

If it recedes one day, leaving behind its works and signs on the shores of our civilization, the structuralist invasion might become a question for the historian of ideas, or perhaps even an object. But the historian would be deceived if he came to this pass: by the very act of considering the structuralist invasion as an object he would forget its meaning and would forget that what is at stake, first of all, is an adventure.

Thus, the relief and design of structures appears more clearly when content, which is the living energy of meaning, is neutralized. Somewhat like the architecture of an uninhabited or deserted city, reduced to its skeleton by some catastrophe of nature or art. A city no longer inhabited, not simply left behind, but haunted by meaning and culture.

Writing and Difference

‘A ruined city’, buildings all intact,
 Its structures undisturbed, horizon still
 Skyscraper-packed, yet with no crowds to fill
 Its streets and squares, no movement to attract
 The gaze, no sign of life – a city sacked,
 Laid waste by nature or by human will,
 The drive of mutant capital: just kill
 All living things, keep concrete assets stacked!
 That’s how they strike me, poems after they’ve
 Received the structuralist treatment, a critique
 Alert to every slightest detail save
 Whatever vital power required you seek
 That poem out; whatever in it gave

That form the living energy to speak.

And yet, how think the poet's *vouloir-dire*,
 Their will-to-mean, once launched in lyric flight,
 Could by that power alone achieve the height
 Of pure expressiveness, and so rise clear
 Above those structural features that, for mere
 Quotidian tasks and purposes, just might
 Be all there is to language but whose blight
 Lies heavy on the bard or balladeer?
 We fancy, with Rousseau, that living speech
 Took rise from music, music from the throes
 Of passion, sad or joyful; yet with each
 Advance we learn again how structure goes
 Far back and down beyond expression's reach
 And names the scent of every lover's rose.

Between these shifting poles my thought still swings,
 The claims of structure, logic, system, rule,
 Or theory and – more often out-of-school –
 The opposite priority that brings
 A mind responsive to whatever springs
 From sources veiled at structure's vestibule,
 Or to that living force the linguist's tool
 May cleave in twain yet fail to clip its wings.
 Years back I once described it as a choice
 Of paths, an *aporia* where my one
 Thought-destiny announced, in Husserl's voice,
 The way of abstract rigour I'd begun
 Beneath his spell, while polysemic Joyce
 Enticed me with the web of words he'd spun.

No fixing that dilemma, exit shut
 Unless, like me, you seize both horns and try
 To mend the rift: on the one hand apply

That fine conceptual rigour and clear-cut,
Methodical approach that Husserl put
Above all else, and on the other ply
My Joycean course, let language-seas run high,
Yet steer a tight course through the concept-glut.
You call my prose 'poetic', and I bask
A moment in that title, then respond:
Undoubtedly one part of thinking's task,
That poet-role, though bear in mind the bond
With sense and logic when you come to ask
The best way back from thinking's far-beyond.

Life, Text, Error (Paul de Man)

The writer writes in a language and in a logic whose proper system, laws, and life his discourse by definition cannot dominate absolutely. He uses them only by letting himself, after a fashion and up to a point, be governed by the system. And the reading must always aim at a certain relationship, unperceived by the writer, between what he commands and what he does not command of the patterns of the language that he uses.

Of Grammatology

1

No guarantee we'll say just what we mean,
Or speech-intent take form in verbal gist:
Best think we come late on the language-scene.

Could *vouloir-dire* but see behind the screen
Of *langue* they'd strike it dumb, those targets missed:
No guarantee we'll say just what we mean.

Choose words with care, yet still they intervene
To mock the hand-on-heart expressivist.
Best think we come late on the language-scene.

So much that's scarce intended stands between
The writer and those structures that insist:
No guarantee we'll say just what we mean.

How should intent control the sense we glean
When *langue* delivers some unlooked-for twist?

Best think we come late on the language-scene.

For what but *langue* can jolt the speech-routine
 Of fixed intent, re-pitch the monodist?
 No guarantee we'll say just what we mean;
 Best think we come late on the language-scene.

2

The fault-line runs through my text as through theirs.
 Each insight brings its own penumbral shade.
 How reckon up such intertextual shares?

Woe to the rash interpreter who dares
 Claim he, and not his author, makes the grade.
 The fault-line runs through my text as through theirs.

Short-lived though radiant the insight flares
 In skies that darken as surroundings fade:
 How reckon up such chiaroscuro shares?

Luciferous like his, the light it bears,
 My Yale-School friend by darkness self-betrayed.
 The fault-line runs through my text as through theirs.

Not merely splitting deconstructive hairs,
 My case for him, but lifetimes jointly weighed:
 How reckon up such lucifugal shares?

For it's a gift relationship that pairs
 Source-text and commentary, not goods to trade:
 The fault-line runs through my text as through theirs.

No balancing the books so insight squares
 With blindness like a debt precisely paid:

How reckon such unreckonable shares?

Think rather that each text of his declares
Hard insights, dark though visibly arrayed:
The fault line runs through my text as through theirs.

Think also it's where common judgment errs,
Not reading truths revealed in errors made.
How reckon up such consequential shares?
The fault-line runs through my text as through theirs.

Freud: speculations

To be sure, the theme of play is there. However, if one understands the fort/da beyond what it seems Freud intends to say, then one may exceed the limits of the game toward the play of the world where the fort/da is no longer simply the relation of subject to object. It is, instead, that which has absolute command over all experience in general. Freud, on the other hand, always ends up finding his interpretations insufficient. One by one, he throws them away and moves on to another. He always has to take one more step: he moves onto another which he also throws away until finally he retains no single interpretation. He himself is doing fort/da with his interpretations and it never stops.

Derrida, *The Ear of the Other*

1

Why should old men not chance to speculate?
 I see him in his cradle, Sophie's child,
 And think: dear Sigmund, you'd have called it wild-
 Side stuff ten years ago, this sudden spate
 Of theorising where I blithely skate
 Clean over all the findings you compiled,
 The rules of evidence, the case-books filed,
 Only to chase ideas and trust to fate
 As your life nears its end. Why chance my arm,
 Risk mockery, and spoil a lifetime's work
 Of human benefaction, just to charm
 Some idle moments with a childish quirk
 Of fancy that must surely threaten harm

To all you've done and have the sceptics smirk.

But then I tell myself: 'one thing they'll thank
 You for, those heirs of yours, is just that gift
 For speculative thinking where the drift –
 Obscure at first, so apt to draw a blank
 With types more risk-averse who'll call you crank
 Or worse – turns out at last to mark the shift
 To some new paradigm, some future rift
 With thought-routines in place when you broke rank.
 For what you'll show our followers, those equipped
 For such a task, are reading-skills unknown
 To any till you taught them to decrypt
 The occult characters, to cruise the zone
 Of darkness legible, and scan the script
 Of those late texts like a Rosetta Stone'.

2

I dream that future reader, one who'll see,
 As I do, the whole complicated tale
 Of grief and loss, of comforts doomed to fail,
 And mothers gone despite that silent plea,
 All figured in the (call it) allegory
 Of baby Ernst and how, instead of wail
 For Mum, he'd let the string-and-bobbin trail
 Over the cradle's side, then shown such glee
 When one tug pulled it back. He'll recognise,
 My reader, what it took to make that leap
 'Beyond the Pleasure Principle', how strong
 The forces of resistance, and how steep
 The cost when Id declines to go along
 With Ego's self-insurance plan to keep
 Its happiness-machine from going wrong.

And more: he'll have the well-trained exegete's
 Uncanny-canny gift for seeing through
 Sir Ego's frail defences to the view
 From that far side where my late thinking meets
 Its destiny, where caution vainly beats
 The speculative bounds, and we renew,
 My revenant and I, the bond that drew
 Us both to think beyond whatever cheats
 Desire of its true end. Like me he'll trace,
 In that child's *fort/da* game, the to-and-fro
 Of supplements – pain/pleasure, mother's face
 Absented then restored, the undertow
 Of death-in-life held back awhile by grace
 Of one hiatus in time's lethal flow.

Time was my younger self would scarce have let
 His older, scapegrace counterpart advance
 Such weird ideas or lead them such a dance,
 Those analysts brought up, like him, to set
 Their sights on neuroscience, own their debt
 To Charcot, and renounce whatever chance
 They had to speculate or break a lance
 For theory and its risky claim to get
Jenseits des Lustprinzips. He'd say: your role,
 My dreaded visitant, is not to post
 These wild hypotheses but gain control
 Of them, as once you did, lest you play host
 To crackpot notions that could make the whole
 Of our life's work a gloating sceptic's toast.

Two different views they have, myself-when-young
 And him, my ideal reader, when they hit
 On 'keeping it in the family' as fit
 Enough departure-point to grasp what hung
 On baby's cradle-game. 'Keep it among

Us heirs of genuine science, stay legit',
Exhorts Freud Junior, keen that I not quit
The path of truth and virtue, or be swung
Onto some errant course. The other notes
How that child's game at once revealed to my
Attentive gaze a way to clear the motes
Or planks of *déjà vu* and train the eye
To catch asquint some little scene that floats
Hypotheses to frame life-histories by.

Friendship and Death

Here again, the difference between the effective and the virtual, between mourning and its possibility, seems fragile and porous. The anguished apprehension of mourning (without which the act of friendship would not spring forth in its very energy) insinuates itself a priori and anticipates itself; it haunts and plunges the friend, before mourning, into mourning.

The Politics of Friendship

Your death or mine: all life-bonds have an end.
 'Survive' entails 'outlive': you-me, me-you?
 A quitclaim deed at best, the title 'friend'.

Why think survival-interests can't extend
 Beyond the unit self to friendship's two?
 Your death or mine: all life-bonds have an end.

The mourning starts, the obsequies impend
 From the first absence that gives grief its cue.
 A quitclaim deed at best, the title 'friend'.

Always the thought: those intervals we spend
 Apart are lined with 'one-way' signs all through!
 Your death or mine: all life-bonds have an end.

Not that it's always death they must portend,
 Those missing dates, but still the gist holds true:
 A quitclaim deed at best, the title 'friend'.

Too easily we say 'such ties transcend
Whatever harm the death of one may do'.
Your death or mine: all life-bonds have an end.

One thing Sir Ego cannot comprehend,
That fear not his alone to self-subdue.
A quitclaim deed at best, the title 'friend'.

I die your death, you mine: no mystic blend
Of destinies but friendship's *après-coup*.
Your death or mine: all life-bonds have an end.

It's why the noblest friendships may offend
The social norms, the communal taboo.
A quitclaim deed at best, the title 'friend'.

There's grief in store, on that you may depend,
When true as well as false friends bid adieu.
Your death or mine: all life-bonds have an end.
A quitclaim deed at best, the title 'friend'.

Freud (Jensen's Gradiva)

An archive is not only the history and the memory of singular events, of exemplary proper names, languages and filiations, but the deposition in an arkheion (which can be an ark or a temple), the consignation in a place of relative exteriority, whether it has to do with writings, documents, or ritualised marks on the body proper.

Archive Fever

What archivist but dreams lost origin?
No source more proximate can end the quest.
The ark secure, let fantasy begin.

Why seek her here, amidst Rome's dust and din?
The scarred remains of Pompeii suit her best.
What archivist but dreams lost origin?

It's playing hunt-the-source, that scholar's sin
Of mine that so disturbs my nightly rest.
The ark secure, let fantasy begin.

Lost prototypes haunt every tale I spin,
A bas-relief with fleeting forms impressed:
What archivist but dreams lost origin?

Still it's Gradiva, not a spectral twin,
I met in Pompeii at her shy behest.
The ark secure, let fantasy begin.

Construe it as you will, my need to pin

That image down: a voyeur's interest?
What archivist but dreams lost origin!

Scholar and scopophile, types close akin;
One latent troll, the other manifest.
The ark secure, let fantasy begin.

Stay safely stored so I, your stalker, win
Those plaudits due the necromancer-pest:
What archivist but dreams lost origin?

Things archived, tombed, encrypted deep within –

All these we lost-ark raiders can attest:
The ark secure, let fantasy begin.

It's when they're soul-incised on vibrant skin,
Those letters, that some boundary's transgressed.
What archivist but dreams lost origin?
The ark secure, let fantasy begin.

The Beast and the Sovereign

I know a sentence that is still more terrifying, more terribly ambiguous than 'I am alone', and it is, isolated from any other determining context, the sentence that would say to the other: 'I am alone with you'. Meditate on the abyss of such a sentence: I am alone with you, with you I am alone, alone in all the world.

The Beast and the Sovereign

1

Joint solitude has terrors all its own.
 'I am alone with you', says king to beast.
 'All but we two can share this much at least,
 The thought: I'm not the only one alone.'
 The sovereign rule says he who takes the throne
 Shall dine apart amidst the merriest feast,
 Maintain his state, and wait till mirth has ceased,
 Or maybe life itself, before he's shown
 Some human love, or hate. The beast in its
 Decreed subaltern place must likewise take
 Upon itself the solitude that pits
 Non-human against human, and would make
 Of that strict binary a trial of wits
 Where humankind makes sure to fix the stake.

Some say 'alone with you' – our common lot,
 'Us' humans, one that opens the abyss
 Of such joint solitude as they must miss,
 Those dumb beasts in their lowly species-slot,
 Since, happily for them, they can't know what

Cruel deprivation might have led to this
 Blank state of theirs, this exile from the bliss
 Of knowing ours a doubly tragic plot.
 I ask those heirs of Descartes: why suppose
 That they, that I, or anyone could know,
 Across that gulf, the least part of what goes
 To make us same or different, I who show
 Forth kingly, they who sport the courtier's hose,
 Or Aesop-beasts that mock the status quo?

2

We trade our solitudes, the beast and I,
 Exchange the unexchangeable, conspire
 In those vast silences, and so acquire
 (Though I'm deceived in this, my courtiers cry)
 The one resource that lets us just get by,
 We two, on jointly lacking all desire
 For that fine fellowship they so admire
 Since drawn more tightly each time they deny
 The bond to king or beast. No dream of cross-
 Communing, species-hopping, or the old
 Horse-whisperer's trick; much more the albatross
 Of crimes atoned, as in the tale he told,
 The poet-mariner whose pious gloss
 Still lets his crossbow strike the warm flesh cold.

Why count my solitude a lesser curse
 Than his or theirs, the creatures Adam named
 At God's behest and, by that action, framed
 The narrative that had his sons asperse
 Non-human animals by the reverse
 Manoeuvre that made 'beast' an insult aimed
 Exclusively at human types who'd shamed
 Their species – such the ancient grudge we nurse

Against our creature-kind! That's why I hear,
In those three words 'alone with you', the sound
Of every beast whose call's unheard, the fear
Of isolation doubled, and – what crowned
Heads suffer most of all – the crystal sphere
Of majesty that hedges them around.

Faith

Our faith is not assured, because faith can never be, it must never be a certainty.

Respect for this singular indecision/oscillation or for this hyperbolic outbidding between two originarities, the order of the 'revealed' and the order of the 'revealable', is this not at once the chance of every responsible decision and of another 'reflecting faith', of a new 'tolerance'?

Faith and Knowledge

The Knight of Faith crusades in no good cause.
 'Have faith', they say, or 'keep the faith', or 'be
 Thou faithful unto death', or chide us 'ye
 Of little faith'; but if no doubt gives pause
 To Valiant-for-Truth, then it's our flaws
 Alone he blames for that long-ebbing sea
 Of faith that Arnold witnessed and that we,
 Yet farther gone, remark as it withdraws
 And leaves us doubters beached. Yet how conceive
 A faith so strong, so doubt-proof, so secure
 Against the sceptic's wiles that it can leave
 The faithful with no dark nights to endure,
 No restless days of striving to retrieve
 What once their inner light showed clear and sure.

Of this alone be certain: faith that lacks
 That sceptic undertow, that edge of doubt
 In its own rectitude, is faith with clout,
 The kind that finds no slightest cause to tax

Itself with such sophistic prickle-backs
 But takes its chance to flush the heathens out
 Through holy wars, destroy the creeds they tout,
 And – nice touch! – cover up its lethal tracks
 With liberal pieties. To unconceal
 Faith's aporetic structure, bring to light
 Its unthought axioms, may tame the zeal
 That claims God's blessing for some latest fight
 When oil-supplies run low, or help reveal
 How faith gave death and rapine the green light.

It's at this limit-point the creeds unstitch,
 Disclose their dark-side linings and betray,
 If read aright, the penalty we pay
 When that 'intolerable neural itch'
 Of Auden's grouse takes shape in every witch-
 Hunt down the ages, every passion-play
 That's acted out for real, and every day
 Some Grand Inquisitor elects to hitch
 His wagon to God's star. To analyse
 How faith-talk works, the way it undermines
 Its own fake protestations in the guise
 Of holy scripture, is to read the signs
 As truth vacates the field and power applies
 Its lockdown strategy between the lines.

Text and Secret: Ariadne

A text is not a text unless it hides from the first comer, from the first glance, the law of its composition and the rules of its game Its laws and rules are not, however, harboured in the inaccessibility of a secret; it is simply that they can never be booked, in the present, into anything that could rigorously be called a perception.

Dissemination

Therefore we will not listen to the source itself in order to learn what it is or what it means, but rather to the turns of speech, the allegories, figures, metaphors, as you will, into which the source has deviated, in order to lose it or rediscover it—which always amounts to the same.

Margins of Philosophy

Not like a book but like a text I read
Your words, your silences, the secret law
And enigmatic rules of this, the game
You play and labyrinth wherein you hide.

Game settled, code in place, the rules agreed –
That's how they hold you to a hard-won draw,
Those canny structuralists, though it's the same
Routine each time the binary code's applied.

Some trick to catch it out, that's what I need,
Some way to overleap the maze, ignore
The rules, switch codes, and break the mythic frame

That had me take your fragile thread as guide.

Yet who's to say a Theseus quickly freed
From that long quest will slay the Minotaur,
Escape the maze, and issue forth to claim
The waiting Ariadne as his bride?

You'll say: 'what price that high heroic breed
If he then dumped her on an alien shore
In crazed lament, till Dionysus came
And fetched her off – all mythemes cut-and-dried,

In classic structuralist style, but without heed
To vows foresworn, emotions wild and raw,
And every living trace of joy and shame
Erased like Theseus on the outbound tide'.

Yet, ephebe, why suppose a reading keyed
To volatile emotions could restore
Some hidden depth beyond what any tame,
Since culture-coded, reading might provide?

More likely you'll miss out on all that she'd
Conveyed by nuance, hint, and the rapport
Of transient contacts without common aim
Beyond those gestures glimpsed from either side.

For it's the key withheld, the code decreed
Decryption-proof, by which the guardians swore
When they resolved no sailor's yarn should shame
Forsaken Ariadne, or confide

Those secret griefs for all that she might plead
Her right to thread the maze of metaphor,

Shun exit-signs, and prismaticise the flame
Of love-turned-hate by mirrors multiplied.

Iterability

Every sign, linguistic or non-linguistic, spoken or written (in the usual sense of this opposition), as a small or large unity, can be cited, put between quotation marks; thereby it can break with every given context, and engender infinitely new contexts in an absolutely non-saturable fashion.

Margins of Philosophy

1

No end of ways that speech-acts veer off-beam.
They jump the tracks, swerve wide of first intent.
Each variation brings a change of theme.

Most speakers like to run a tight regime
But contexts change till who knows what they meant?
No end of ways that speech-acts veer off-beam.

Maybe it's some disturbance way upstream,
Some context-shift, that tweaked the way it went.
Each variation brings a change of theme.

Sense fixed by act of will – the speaker's dream,
Now fancied free of rocks to circumvent!
No end of ways that speech-acts veer off-beam.

As meanings go we're lucky to redeem
The gist of our own messages once sent:
Each variation brings a change of theme.

Junk *vouloir-dire* and take one for the team!
 It's communal, that sense-adaptive bent.
 No end of ways that speech-acts veer off-beam.

Those lawyers and philosophers may scheme
 To fix the drift but find their time's ill-spent:
 Each variation brings a change of theme.

How think to shield the context-hungry seme
 From every sense-conferring accident?
 No end to ways that speech-acts veer off-beam;
 Each variation brings a change of theme.

2

Always the thought: whose words are these I cite?
 The intertext so vast, the links oblique.
 Too late we come to claim a speaker's right.

The phrases iterate and put to flight
 All hope they're mine to mean, intend, and speak.
 Always the thought: whose words are these I cite?

What iterates must soon come back to blight
 The wish that words-in-context be unique.
 Too late we come to claim a speaker's right.

We think: just keep the verbal rigging tight
 And don't have speech-acts spring a context-leak!
 Always the thought: whose words are these I cite?

'It's how the truthful turns into the trite',
 We say: 'how quote-marks launch the hide-and-seek'.
 Too late we come to claim a speaker's right.

My saying so they deem a joker's slight,
 A licensed free-for-all to snatch and sneak.
 Always the thought: whose words are these I cite?

For think again: what else could expedite
 Your speech-intent save formulae to tweak?
 Too late we come to claim a speaker's right.

It's like poor Crusoe's desert-island plight,
 Billed 'lone survivor' in a two-man clique.
 Always the thought: whose words are these I cite?

What whispering multitudes you must invite
 Aboard each time you sail down Speech-Act Creek.
 Too late we come to claim a speaker's right.

Those phrases travel far and travel light,
 Repacked with season's goods from week to week.
 Always the thought: whose words are these I cite?

Sense-traces linger on, but never quite
 Enough to recompense that lost mystique:
 Too late we come to claim a speaker's right.

Best kid yourself 'my one-off purport might,
 Just might, get through by some linguistic freak'.
 Always the thought: whose words are these I cite?
 Too late we come to claim a speaker's right.

Bricoleur / *Engineer*

[The bricoleur] is adept at performing a large number of diverse tasks; but, unlike the engineer, he does not subordinate each of them to the availability of raw materials and tools conceived and procured for the purpose of the project. His universe of instruments is closed and the rules of his game are always to make do with 'whatever is at hand'.

Mythical thought is therefore a kind of intellectual 'bricolage'. The characteristic feature of mythical thought is that it expresses itself by means of a heterogeneous repertoire which, even if extensive, is nevertheless limited. It has to use this repertoire, however, whatever the task in hand because it has nothing else at its disposal.

'Structure, Sign and Play in the Human Sciences'

Let none despise the humble *bricoleur*,
 That fixer-up with all his scrap-heap gear,
 Nor overly admire the engineer
 Whose blueprints gleam where adhoc notions blur.
 For it's by *bricolage* those amateur
 Contraptors get things up and running, steer
 Inventive routes around the gadget-sphere,
 And so provide the expert *ingénieur*
 With project-kits in plenty. How begin
 Such grand designs if not by having those
 Heath Robinson constructions underpin
 The sweeping spans, the fine-tuned ratios,
 And all the hi-tech miracles they spin
 From bits some crafty *bricoleur* once chose.

Your lo-tech myth inventor plays the game
 To rules that change as new stuff comes to hand,
 As plots combine and mytheme-stocks expand
 Or jigsaw parts reshuffle in the frame,
 Till a Gestalt-shift shows how just the same
 Small box of tools can build the wonderland
 Of myths, tales, customs, kinship-systems and,
 Let's not forget, of Oedipus left lame
 And blind by savage fate. Admire the skill
 In plot-design, the finely engineered
 Encounters and reversals, if you will,
 But bear in mind how often they've appeared
 On time yet scarcely managed to fulfil
 Our need for ends tied up or problems cleared.

Who'll chide the engineer if she reverts
 To *bricoleur* once in a while, or nabs
 Some cast-off piece of kit that's up for grabs
 And, trusting more to luck than skill, inserts
 It at the crucial point where it exerts
 A new effect unknown in all the labs
 And lecture-halls where none think to keep tabs
 On suchlike junk, or deign to bet their shirts
 On how it might just work. They often call
 It 'primitive', the kind of thought that runs
 Such makeshift ways around perchance to fall
 On some quick problem-fix; yet he who shuns
 The path of chance and *bricolage* may trawl
 For streamlined fish but miss the tasty ones.

Vice-versa too: the *bricoleur* may slip,
 If gadgets work, into the engineer's
 Accustomed thought-grooves where like-minded peers
 Dictate one's research-path and thereby tip

The balance so that project teams-manship
 Wins out, group-interests set the course for years,
 And any unprepared-for shift of gears
 Will strike the management as apt to trip
 The whole thing up. Take Lévi-Strauss, the first
 To side with mythic *bricoleurs* against
 Conceptual engineers, yet so well versed
 In structuralist lore that everything's condensed
 Into a few crisp mythemes, or – at worst –
 Dragooned, anatomised, and theory-fenced.

Ingénieur and *bricoleur*: they stake it out
 Between them, that large territory where thought
 Takes care to guard its home domain, to sort
 True claims from false, and so let reason scout
 Its furthest boundaries; at which point doubt
 May enter as to whether its report
 Lacks evidential credence in the court
 Of last appeal where *bricoleurs* may flout
 All previous handings-down. Their counsel pleads
 The hands-on knowledge case: one that entails
 An adept's willingness to follow leads
 Way out along or off the well-worn rails
 It travels when the cautionary needs
 Of guild-compliance prove a god that fails.

Survivance

Each time I let something go, each time some trace
leaves me, 'proceeds' from me, unable to be
reappropriated, I live my death in writing.

Learning to live ought to mean learning to die – to
acknowledge, to accept, an absolute mortality –
without positive outcome, or resurrection, or
redemption, for oneself or for anyone else. That has
been the old philosophical injunction since Plato: to be
a philosopher is to learn how to die. I believe in this
truth without giving myself over to it. Less and less in
fact Deconstruction is always on the side of the yes,
on the side of the affirmation of life.... My discourse is
not a discourse of death, but, on the contrary, the
affirmation of a living being who prefers living and
thus surviving to death, because survival is not simply
that which remains but the most intense life possible.

Derrida, *Learning to Live Finally*: the last interview

'Nostalgie': don't count it one of those,
Let's say, non-trivial puns my groupies raise
Into a full-scale project while my foes,

The 'serious' types, deplore the French malaise
That has this joker playing fast and loose
With 'ordinary language', or the ways

In which their text-book rules of language-use
Run into just the problems that those rules
Were set up to conceal. Else they'll produce

Such threats to law and order in the schools

Of logico-linguistic rectitude
That naught will serve to sink the ship of fools

Named 'deconstruction', one entirely crewed
(They'd have us think) by sophists, muddle-heads,
And all the monstrous, thought-perverting brood

Of reason's enemies.

But losing threads,
Forgetting what I said just moments back
Is one big problem with these powerful meds

They've got me on, these latest drugs that stack
The odds against survival not so high,
Or leave me less aware of them for lack

Of focus or attention. It was my
'Nostalgie' that sent me off on that
Brief detour, my desire to overfly

Once more those land- and seascapes, marvelling at
How swiftly I'm transported back in time
To what I'd call my 'native habitat'

Except for this habitual sense that I'm
Forever on the move, in transit, caught
Mid-flight while scurrying between one crime-

Scene and the next, at home in every port
And none, a dweller in the space between
The cities, conferences, schools of thought,

The books, the people, and the might-have-been
As well as actual life-events that loom
In near-death retrospect. Too peregrine,

Perhaps, for my own good yet gave me room
 To see all round and, sometimes, just beyond
 The unexamined truths that we assume

Hold everywhere and somehow correspond
 To laws of thought or common-sense hard-wired
 In every brain that's subject to the bond

Of language, truth and logic.
 Yet I tired,
 Eventually, as aspects of my cure
 Seemed worse than the disease and so required

That any final *journée de retour*
Au pays natal be played out in a space
 Where history yields to memory while the lure

Of childhood scenes or youthful days of grace
 No longer means one more exhausting trip
 By land and sea, too much for me to face

These days. So it's another Proustian dip
 Into that wondrous yet deceptive zone
 Of *temps perdu* where memory tends to skip

The awkward bits, the scenes that you'd disown,
 Or all the painful episodes that came
 Of my Algerian 'background', one I'd grown

To think exerted no compelling claim
 On my allegiance, yet whose travails forced
 My own responses way outside the frame

When colleagues too simplistically endorsed

Some fixed 'position' on the war and then,
Like friends of couples bitterly divorced,

Seemed to find fault with what they thought my Zen-
Like failure, or refusal, to declare
Just 'where I stood' on independence when

The chips were down.

God knows I'd had my share
Of friendships strained or broken, even threats
Of violence, for my choosing not to square

With either side, not merely hedging bets
But seeking to talk down those over-sold
On any nationalist politics that lets

The wars go on by sticking to the old,
The zero-sum or winner-takes-all plan
That's always figured in the tale as told

By epic bards and their descendant clan
Of strategists whose thinking's set the mark
For 'rational' debate. My work began,

Way back, by saying: let's renounce those stark
Dichotomies, those all-or-nothing modes
Of thought that leave us truly in the dark

About such conscience-wrenching episodes
As civil wars, events that cannot leave
Us standing there at history's cross-roads,

Like some fore-cautioned Oedipus who'd cleave
To no fixed path, yet also let us know,
Should we take sides, how intricate the weave

Of truth and falsehood, motives high and low,
 And every second thought that might have checked
 Our first response.

No doubt such scruples go

Far back but via routes so indirect,
 So roundabout, that I'm hard-put to tell
 Just what led me so closely to connect

The quest for native roots with the old spell
 Of logocentric thought, the old desire
 For some sole origin where it can dwell

In perfect self-communion, or aspire
 To speak a native tongue ideally free
 Of alien intrusions, or require

That spoken signs, not written, come to be
 The soul's assurance of a true *rappor*-
 A-soi, the pure and simple guarantee

Of truth itself. It's why I tried to shore
 Up such great piles of counter-evidence,
 Those diverse texts and sources that all bore,

If indirectly, on my growing sense
 That writing formed the contrapositive
 To that primordial metaphysics. Hence

'Nothing outside the text', or – lest I give
 My old antagonists a chance to bend
 The gist – 'no outside-text', no life to live,

No memory, no world to comprehend,

No British-style empiricist appeal
To sense-experience, and no way to lend

The past some meaning. In each case we deal
With one chief form that proto-writing takes,
Whether it's geo-science sets a seal

On our best knowledge, geometry that makes
Of writing or text-analogues its sole
Means of transmission, or – and here the stakes

Go high for old-school Freudians – the whole
Route-map of mind that tries to do without
That magic writing pad, that *sous-parole*

Of texts where nothing's finally rubbed out,
Where every sign is there in palimpsest,
And no Cartesian cogito brings doubt

To its premeditated end.

The rest

Is what you'll read in any bluffer's guide,
Whether they treat my writings as the best

Thing since *pain tranché* or opine that I'd
Far better cease them now lest I betray
My ignorance once more. So woe betide

The reader rash enough to disobey
Authority's strict ruling and to read
Those texts of mine where mischief (so they say)

Has free rein to corrupt the youth and lead
Impressionable types to think they've found
Dubieties of sense that far exceed

The grasp of any reasoning held sound
 By classical logicians. Thus the great
 Philosophers who might purport to ground

Their thought in rules of rational debate
 Are close-read solely with a view to what
 Perplexities their writings generate,

What aporetic twists of logic blot
 Their copy-book, or what strange demons haunt
 Those texts so deconstructionists can spot

Their opening and see a way to taunt
 The master-thinker with some errant trope
 Revealed and used unblushingly to vaunt

The ephebe's skills. 'Just give them enough rope
 And then they'll hang themselves!', or so it goes,
 The standard push-back line of those who hope

To show that mine's the wily sophist's pose
 In a new form, another bid to cut
 Philosophy back down to size and close

All thought-theatres where the sage could strut
 His intellectual stuff while other sorts,
 Less prone to such grandstanding, either shut

Their ears or entertained subversive thoughts
 Of reason's overthrow.

 All this they said
 Of me and my 'disciples' in the courts

Of orthodox opinion, duly spread

By indolent philosophers or fools
And charlatans, old scholiasts who'll tread

The same well-trodden path though now the rules
Have changed, though there's no longer the recourse
To sheer self-evidence, and though the schools

No longer press their doctrine with the force
Of 'straightforward' textual warrant, even when
They instance revelation as the source

Of all their wisdom. For it's only then
That they find out where doctrine's limits lie,
Where thought confronts the textual clinamen,

The swerve of sense that's indicated by
A rift between authorial intent
(Or overt gist) and what they signify,

Those errant tropes that say: whatever went
Sans dire, struck you interpreters as plain
Good sense, self-rated as self-evident,

Must now be reconsidered, read again
With a shrewd eye to senses that may prove
Too much for readers anxious to maintain

The standard view. When writing jumps the groove
Of fixed belief then either they react
With some well-practised stock defensive move

To head the challenge off, or think they've cracked
An occult protocol that guarantees
Their own pet strategies will soon extract

Those aporias fit to put the squeeze
 On other readings. This ensures the text
 Yields problem passages enough to please

Like-minded types while signalling the next
 Few dozen classic works that can be made,
 Each time, to leave the other lot perplexed

And their lot all the better placed to trade
 Up tenure-wise.

Forgive me: didn't wish
 These musing to become a new parade

Of old complaints or final chance to dish
 The dirt on those, my readers fit though few,
 Who've had their fill of taunts like 'gibberish',

'Sheer nonsense', 'sophistry', and all the slew
 Of mindless jibes and jabs that they saw fit
 To send our way, that self-appointed crew

Of academic watchdogs who'd commit
 The grossest libel rather than devote
 Their precious time or pennyworth of wit

To seeking out and reading what I wrote
 Instead of spouting third-hand press reports,
 As when they tried to swing the Cambridge vote

Way back in '92. Well, 'takes all sorts
 To make a world', as Wittgenstein's supposed
 To have placed top amongst the wisest thoughts

In all folk-wisdom, so if Homer dozed
 Once in a while then why blame those who took

Time off when reading me, or simply closed

Their minds to any passage that might look
Too complex or demanding at first glance,
And better skimmed or skipped in case it shook

Their preconceptions. 'Just a merry dance
He's leading you', the pundits all opine,
Not wondering if, by some unlikely chance,

Their never having read a word of mine
Might leave them less than well-equipped to speak
With such authority. *Tant pis*: their line

Of talk's encouraged mainly by a clique
Made up of 'common readers' long averse
To reading, tabloid journalists who seek

To boost their readership, and – even worse –
Rogue academics anxious not to yield
Their cherished spot so willing to rehearse

Whatever tale best helps them clear the field
Of bother-headed sorts with new ideas
That, soon enough, may see those upstarts wield

The power they once enjoyed.
Yet as it nears
So quickly, day by day, the death prepared
For, written of, or mused upon for years

In ways sometimes elliptical though shared
At least with some few readers, this all seems
Like *vita ante acta*. Once I cared

About such things, not long ago the themes
 Of raw polemics, but now left behind
 For my loyal exegetes or PR teams

To deal with in whatever way they find
 Most fitting or, as nowadays I'd urge
 My partisans, the way that best combined

The wish that ancient quarrels not emerge
 Afresh with keeping up a watching brief
 For gross misreadings of the type that verge

On downright travesty. Such a relief
 In many ways, this mind-state that can feel,
 At times, like some quiescent *Leitmotif*

Now setting its long-dreamt redemptive seal
 On certain texts and life-events that held,
 As once it seemed, no pattern to reveal,

No Proustian charge of recollection spelled
 In cryptic characters. They strike me now,
 At my life's end, as if at last compelled

To yield that hidden charge and so allow
 A retrospect where time no longer holds
 The master-key and memory may endow

Past happenings, like texts, with subtle folds
 And future intimations apt to catch
 The seasoned traveller out. They break the moulds,

The framing narratives, that we attach
 Routinely to the kind of episode
 Whose real significance might else unlatch

All story-links, re-scramble every code,
 And leave us striving, like Rousseau, to spin
 A self-protective yarn wherein what's owed

To factual truth takes detours more akin
 To fictive discourse.

They're the kinds of tale
 I'm often drawn to, those that may begin

By seeming to supply the 'safety-rail'
 Of author's meaning we fall back upon,
 Us text-interpreters, by way of fail-

Safe readerly assurance we've not gone
 Too far off-track, but then contrive to knock
 Such props aside as some odd *denouement*,

Some knot of complications, comes to block
 All recourse to authorial *vouloir-dire*
 And send a sense-unravelling seismic shock

Back through our best conjectures. That's when we're
 Compelled to think again, to question our
 Most cherished axioms, and henceforth adhere

To protocols of reading that empower
 Philosophy in its essential task,
 Much frowned-upon as that may be: to scour

Its canon of great texts and dare to ask
 What errors, slips, and motivated swerves
 From source may too conveniently mask

Behind a pious gloss. This duly serves

To pass them off when offered in accord
 With all the ways in which those classic oeuvres,

From Plato down, have found themselves restored
 To an 'authentic' reading sanctified
 By custom or by scanners who ignored,

When called upon, all evidence that vied
 With suchlike fideistic views and raised
 The reading-stakes. For what had they to hide,

Those worthy exegetes who mostly lazed
 Their way through texts till some odd detail snagged
 Their eye and, momentarily amazed,

They soon resolved to leave that detail tagged
 'Anomaly' or 'minor problem', keep
 Whatever doubts they had securely gagged,

And so preserve the self-protective sleep
 Of reason that's required if we're to stick
 With rule and precedent.

 'All we like sheep

Are gone astray', the message goes, 'so pick
 The winning side, line up with the elect,
 Stray not from the sure path that gains a tick

On their route-map, and don't let intellect
 Or a shrewd eye for detail have you turn
 Self-traitor and recruit you to the sect

Of deconstructors whose misreadings earn
 Them nothing but the censure brought to bear
 By those, the faithful, wise enough to learn

From their elders and betters'. Satan's snare,
 No doubt, the kinds of reading I've essayed,
 Where certain models – Marx, *Eighteenth Brumaire*

Of Louis Napoléon among them – played
 A leading role in showing how the world
 'Outside' the text might find itself portrayed,

Its tangled logics patiently unfurled,
 By treating them as would a reader trained,
 Like Marx, to wrinkle out the subtext curled

In that vast range of books from which he gained
 The proto-deconstructive skill to tease
 Forth meanings the old pedagogues had strained

To keep from view.

His lesson: always seize
 On just those surface signs of deeper strife,
 Those symptoms that reveal the pincer-squeeze

Of forces, whether 'textual' or 'real-life',
 Inscribed as rifts and contours we can trace
 Like Plato's skilful butcher though the knife,

Unless new-honed and fashioned for each case,
 Must yield facsimiles too rough or crude
 For Marxist purposes. We'd best keep pace,

We heirs of his, with motions that elude
 The grasp of readers reckoning to pass clean
 Through textual 'obstacles' and so conclude

With a life-history that links each scene

Securely to the next in just the shape
Required by devotees of the big screen

Or novels that leave room for an escape
From any nagging sense that things are not,
In truth, at all like that. Listen agape,

O my biographers who'd seek to slot
All those life-episodes, plus hopes and fears,
Plus my text-archive and your own best shot

At making sense of it, into the years
Of my foreshortened life-span. For you've one
Big thing to learn: how it's lived in arrears,

This life of mine whose work you think now done
And dusted, put to bed, once you've contrived
A seamless fit of life-to-text, or run

The Irvine archive gamut and arrived
At some coherent story-line whereby
To rest content your labours have revived

Both readers' interest and, you might think, my
Life-interest in thus having you collapse
The life-text binary.

Hear how I shy

From that skim-reader drive to close the gaps
That writing opens up, though sometimes prone –
And all the more of late, as illness saps

My strength – to seek redress or else atone
For long-since faded episodes with some
Ghost-scripted reverie where scenes half-known,

Half-dreamed or reimagined quickly come
 To haunt the space of memory. That's when I'm
 At last relieved of any need to plumb

Archival depths by incidents that prime
 An art of recollection now redeemed
 From any documentary paradigm

Of telling how-it-was from how-it-seemed,
 Or now, five decades on, of making good
 On aspects of my life's work inter-themed

With aspects of my life. Things understood
 From a conflicted standpoint in my youth,
 Like the Algerian War, split nationhood,

The 'language question', or the mix of truth
 And wishful thinking in my early take
 On Camus, would require a super-sleuth

To track them back to source yet often make
 More sense, I find, when left to self-arrange
 In new configurations for the sake

Of calling up yet also making strange
 One's bygone selves. Those avatars display
 How prone we heirs of Rousseau are to change

Our stories over time, how we convey
 Life-episodes askew, set out to spill
 The beans but then discover that the way

Of memory's one that no fact-checker's drill
 Can regulate, no discipline reduce

To any fixed procedure, yet which still

May leave the reckoner with no excuse
For certain willed lacunae. Else the lack
Of truth or accuracy spells abuse

Of one condition on our questing-back
For past events, that is (think Paul de Man)
The rule that we not let oblivion stack

The odds against remembrance till we can,
By editing the record, get to wipe
Our own slate clean. Like Nietzsche's superman

We'd shape past lives at will and – true to type –
Conceal, repress or purposely revoke
All episodes that else might earn a gripe

From stubborn literalists or simple folk
Not gifted with that sovereign power to mould
Their *vita ante acta* in bespoke

Self-justifying ways.

 If truth be told
My texts have done their share to put it round,
That strategy that places truth on hold,

Or (as I'd rather say) suggests we're bound,
In conscience, not to sell life-stories short
Or think their gist's straightforwardly to be found

By disregarding all that we've been taught
As canny readers. So we learn to note
Each complicating detail, afterthought,

Or self-subverting twist in what they wrote
 And thereby prove the most resourceful guides
 To how some disregarded anecdote

May show what the received life-history hides,
 Or how some errant trope may controvert
 The standard line.

My point: a whole lot rides

On whether we're sufficiently alert
 To details we're encouraged to ignore,
 Things 'out of character' that disconcert

The authorised biographers who store,
 For future use, such detail as confirms
 Not just how their biographees should score

In human, ethical or social terms
 But how effectually they work to calm
 Our nerves by sealing tight the can of worms

Marked 'Nietzsche, Freud and Co.'. If soothing balm
 For troubled souls is requisite then best
 You stick to narratives that seek to palm

You off with rounded characters, un-messed
 Up lives, well-made (since long familiar) plots,
 Full closure, *vraisemblance*, and the rest

Of those smooth ways of joining up the dots
 As tact requires. Yet still they lie in wait,
 The masters of suspicion who'll tie knots

In any tale that thinks to tell things straight,
 To speak directly what's conveyed aslant,

Or take as read what lives may intimate,

If ever, then as their last moments grant
Some respite from the meaning-quest that drives
Us retro-fabulists.

Why say we can't

Consider them as meaningful, those lives,
Unless reframed from scene to scene as though
In some director's cut which so contrives

The settings, shots and screenplay that there's no
Proleptic plot-device or life-line kink
That shatters the illusion, like Rousseau

Caught out by every logic-twisting link
Of contraries that sends his text askew
From its express intent? Again: why think

There's some life-narrative that must hold true,
Some providential story-line that tells
Our tale as from a God's-eye point of view

While every life, like every text, compels
The opposite conclusion? Then our sole
Security may come when thinking dwells

Most fixedly on that which finds no role
For fixity nor any dwelling-space
Beyond the instant when it cedes control

To such contingencies as find a place,
If anywhere, in zones of sense that fall
Way off our life-plot checklist or embrace

An openness to tropes deemed off-the-wall
 By providentialists who'd much prefer
 Their lives to skip the drastic overhaul

This asks of them. I mean to cast no slur
 On 'naïve realists', the kind who press
 The case for history as 'how things were

Historically', a principle no less
 Imperative when making the attempt,
 As here, to write a life and acquiesce

In no self-serving ploy to hold exempt
 From blame the self that puts up a façade
 Of textual gamesmanship just to preempt

More awkward questions. Yet the truth comes hard,
 Needs working at, eludes the placid gaze
 Of ego-strokers, and decrees them barred

From ever getting so far through the maze
 Of sense and symptom as to know they've sailed
 Close up to Id's far coastline, so can raise

Truth's cryptic banner high.

For me, I've failed
 In all my work if I've not helped you see
 How my Nostalgie was what entailed

(Not it alone but, so it seems to me,
 The big thing furthest back) my old mistrust
 Of typecast binaries, my constant plea

That thought grow complicated where it must,
 And that such complications not obscure

But sharpen to a leading point the thrust

Of counter-thoughts that shun all premature
Appeal to what's self-evident to those
Self-certain types who know the truth for sure,

No questions asked. Not their way to disclose
Whatever conflicts might yet give them pause,
What sudden qualms disturb their night's repose,

Or – my case constantly – what brings the laws,
So-called, of thought and judgment up against
Some instance that requires an exit-clause,

A rule suspended, as the tremor's sensed
Across the fine assurances we've piled
So high they strike us now as if dispensed
From any thought of wrongs unreconciled.

The Pharmakon (Plato)

[O]ne can no more ‘separate’ them [writing and the *pharmakon*] from each other, think of either one apart from the other, ‘label’ them, than one can in the pharmacy distinguish the medicine from the poison, the good from the evil, the true from the false, the inside from the outside, the vital from the mortal, the first from the second, etc.

Dissemination

1

All signs point back to *arché-écriture*.
How think beyond the trace, the hidden script?
Look first to poisons if you’d seek a cure.

In Plato’s Pharmacy the quickest tour
Shows pick-and-mix charts written up then flipped:
All signs point back to *arché-écriture*.

You soon find out: no antidote that’s sure
To heal the harm, restore the heartbeat skipped.
Look first to poisons if you’d seek a cure.

We trust the pharmacist to keep it pure,
That stuff prescribed, but he remains tight-lipped:
All signs point back to *arché-écriture*.

Mercurial gods say written signs endure
And travel far while speech is soon outstripped:
Look first to poisons if you’d seek a cure.

For that's the sticking-point in script's brochure,
 The way it keeps the balance firmly tipped:
 'All signs point back to *arché-écriture*'.

For Plato it's the sophist's easy lure,
 The trickster's alibi, the fraudster's crypt.
 Look first to poisons if you'd seek a cure.

But read again: one script he'll not abjure
 Is 'writing in the soul', *pneuma*-equipped.
 All signs point back to *arché-écriture*.

A metaphor, but let that not obscure
 His need to fly on wings so lately clipped.
 Look first to poisons if you'd seek a cure;
 All signs point back to *arché-écriture*.

2

In every text a key-word takes the strain.
 Here it's the marvel-working *pharmakon*.
 Strive to contain it and you'll strive in vain.

The scholars scoffed: 'late Plato, softening brain',
 Or 'early text: that writing-myth tacked on'.
 In every text a key-word takes the strain.

I said: 'this text, the *Phaedrus*, may contain
 Such complex truths as you've not hit upon;
 Strive to contain them and you'll strive in vain.

Just read it closely, read against the grain,
 And see those tensions rive the lexicon:
 In every text a key-word takes the strain'.

Thought-tremors bring word-tremors close in train,
 Dark rifts of sense where once the Sun-god shone.
 Strive to contain them and you'll strive in vain.

'What logic might draw out that ravelled skein',
 They ask, 'find concept-room for that black swan?'
 In every text a keyword takes the strain.

You scholars spurn my readings lest you gain
 Insights too keen from the word *pharmakon*.
 Strive to contain them and you'll strive in vain.

It's bivalence requires the set refrain:
 'Let truth speak clear, invite no antiphon'.
 In every text a keyword takes the strain.

Look out for them, those lexemes that sustain
 Its thought-disruptive stereopticon.
 Strive to contain them and you'll strive in vain;
 In every text a keyword takes the strain.

Touch and Sight

In thus opening up a gap and making room for the hiatus of noncontact at the heart of contact, this spacing makes for the trial of noncontact as the very condition or experience itself of contact, the *selfsame* experience itself of the same open forever – and spaced out by the other.

This detour by way of the foreign outside, no matter how subtle, furtive, and elusive, is at the same time what allows us to speak of a ‘double apprehension’ (otherwise there would be one thing only: only some touching or only some touched).

On Touching – Jean-Luc Nancy

How free the mind held captive by the eye,
By optic metaphors and terms of art
From vision’s realm? You’ll find them in Descartes,
Locke and the rest whenever mind turns spy
On its own workings, or elects to try
Some well-worn item from the lengthy chart
Of visual tropes that stealthily impart
Their bias if we fail to question: why
This age-old prejudice? We’ve senses five
To conjure with, so it’s by no means clear
(Note that one!) how the eye first came to thrive
So far beyond the sense domains of ear,
Nose, tongue, or – most of all – the flesh alive
With touching’s power to bring the distant near.

Through touch we learn an *entre-nous* discreet
Though intimate, an exercise of tact

Or reticence where visual knowing lacked
 The touch of secrecy that lets us meet
 As love or courtesy require, not greet
 Each other eye-to-eye as if the fact
 Of love or friendship bids we straightway act
 In ways picked up in bed or on the street
 Where stray looks intertwine. A touch may stroke
 Or strike, it's true, and nothing guarantees
 That gentleness on one side won't provoke
 An untoward response; yet each reprise
 Of its mild reprimand to go-for-broke
 Leaves room for face-offs touch might yet appease.

Let vision rule without that haptic pause
 Of *connaissance* and soon we'll come to view
 The signs of love and friendship – the I-You
 Of tact-made-flesh – as just another cause
 For self- and other-watching by the laws
 Of social optics or vain quest to do,
 By their sole means, what's properly for two
 To bring about by touching that withdraws
 Or draws by shared behest. That little phrase,
 'Tout autre est tout autre', says as much:
 That tact's wise reticence may keep our gaze
 From fixing it that others feel the clutch
 Of vision's comprehension that surveys
 Them eyeball-close but brings a Midas-touch.

Self and Secret

If my secret self, that which can be revealed only to the other, to the wholly other, to God if you wish, is a secret that I will never reflect on, that I will never know or experience or possess as my own, then what sense is there in saying that it is my secret, or in saying more generally that a secret belongs, that it is proper to or belongs to some one, or to some other who remains someone.

Derrida, *The Gift of Death*

They keep no secret who possess its key.
 'No secrets here' it says, that key they hold.
 They think the secret's theirs and theirs alone;
 Not so, unless it's one they never knew.

Just think of Moses and the Lord's decree.
 He heard it, bore the tablets down, and told
 The calf-adoring rabble they should own
 His sole authority, but then made do

With reading them straight out when all could see
 Him thinking 'that lot's in for a good scold'
 Without much sense, beyond the vengeful tone,
 Of how to get God's proper message through.

Faith tells us it's a mystery, that which we
 Must not presume to guess at yet make bold
 To count amongst the secret things best known
 Amongst the true believers, fit though few.

Or – limit-case – take Abraham when he,
 Faith's hero-victim, opted to blindfold
 Son Isaac for blood-sacrifice till shown
 A substitute from God's non-human zoo.

For faith's a secret that the enrollee
 Can't hope to know for certain once enrolled,
 One that, if truly shared, still can't be blown
 Since veiled in secrecy between the two.

'My secret' hides from all, including me,
 At once sole keeper of that hidden gold
 And yet its endless seeker through a zone
 Of trackless plains where I'm as lost as you

For that's the secret heart of secrecy
 That leaves its *confidantes* out in the cold:
 How it's by nescience shared that they postpone
 The time of truths revealed, the reckoning due.

Though some declare 'the truth shall set you free',
 Some others know they've likely been paroled
 From doing time so long as they atone
 For secret crimes of which they've not a clue.

It's what they knew who looked to nobody,
 And least of all themselves, when they extolled
 In foreign lands and tongues a faith long thrown
 On secret ways as persecution grew.

It's why my knowing exegetes agree
 There's some encrypted name my texts withhold,
 While I, Reb Derrissa, have lately grown
 To reinscribe myself 'Marrano Jew'.

Rogues

The most 'roguish' of rogue states are those that circulate and make use of a concept like 'rogue state', with the language, rhetoric, juridical discourse, and strategico-military consequences we all know. The first and most violent of rogue states are those that have ignored and continue to violate the very international law they claim to champion, the law in whose name they speak and in whose name they go to war against so-called rogue states each time their interests so dictate.

Rogues: two essays on reason

1

It comes back like a boomerang, your schtick
Of using that word 'rogue' to tell your friends,
Home and abroad, that now you're out to kick
Some foreign ass, that this is where it ends,
How it's a fight that only fools would pick,
And so they'd better strive to make amends
Or face your wrath and live to rue the day
They chose the rogue's and not the good guy's way.

It leaves his hand, sweeps high and wide, then quick
As thought comes back to strike the hand that sends
The charge since *rogue's* a label that can stick
To chucker as to chucked-at – just depends
On who's the rogue whose local bailiwick
Is under threat and who's the rogue who lends
His threat an extra boost by some display
Of moral zeal and talk of hell to pay.

Old wars involved not boomerang but brick,
 The sorts of word and weapon one defends
 Against by building fortress walls as thick
 As can be, or by language that descends
 Just so far and no further: out to lick
 The foe alright, but if the volley bends
 Right round and back then keener to obey
 That rogue-revealing sign and quit the fray.

‘Outside the text’, all this, but do take note:
 If there’s some logic in this strange affair
 Of how we grow more roguish as we gloat
 Over those roguish others, or ensnare
 Ourselves more deeply as we get by rote
 The old rogue-calling rigmarole, then where
 Can its first principles be found if not
 By deconstructing that infernal plot?

They call me ‘apolitical’ and quote
 Me out of context to establish their
 False view of me as one who’s out to bloat
 The sphere of some *monde extraordinaire*
 Wherein the teeming signifiers float
 Free of all earthly ties in the thin air
 Of that far off pan-textual wonderland
 While phantoms multiply on every hand.

You’ll see why the nay-sayers get my goat
 With their unceasing jibes if you’ll just spare
 A thought for how the readings I devote
 To ‘dead white male philosophers’ lay bare
 The twists of logic Trump & Co. promote,
 Those ‘free-world’ demagogues without a care
 For their own roguery who blithely fling

The rogue-word out when profit pulls the string.

2

It's double-edged, that argument of mine
 About 'the text' and how its borders trace,
 Like worldly boundaries, a fragile line
 Criss-crossed by rifts, by checkpoints out-of-place,
 And fractured entities that recombine
 As world and text turn out to interlace
 In ways unknown to those whose mindset sticks
 Well short of any dialectic fix.

That rogue-talk gives the cautionary sign
 Of lethal stuff ahead, an insult-race
 Cranked up to reinject some moral spine
 Into their latest power-grab, profit-chase,
 Or killing spree devised to redefine
 The rules of who wins out and so saves face
 In the rogue-calling match and who'll be sped
 Straight up the line till exiled, gaoled, or dead.

'You rogue!' once meant you'd taken quite a shine
 To some rascally fellow who'd disgrace
 The two of you next thing, not like the swine
 Who use it now to tell their voter-base
 A new rogue-state is in the firing-line
 Since lately deemed a total waste of space,
 Most often one that, just a few weeks back,
 Was chief attack-dog in the loyalist pack.

It's how you might expect the word to go
 When states, like bodies, start to manifest
 The crash of systems locked in counterflow,
 Of antibodies rampant, and the rest

Of what goes wrong when self-defences grow
 Too powerful and the forces they invest
 In killer strategies like Shock and Awe
 Turn back to self-indict their every flaw.

Rogue, voyou: words that rogues and voyous throw
 Around to show they've passed the good-guy test,
 Yet whose pandemic spread just goes to show
 How roguery thrives, how viruses infest
 Our words and thoughts, and how we've ceased to know,
 As lockdown grips, what language-demon's messed
 With our vain quest to keep 'auto-immune'
 From turning on us like a snagged harpoon.

Let's not deceive ourselves, who've read Rousseau,
 With talk of feelings 'naturally' expressed
 In living speech before the dead escrow
 Of culture laid its ominous bequest
 On these our latter times when all we owe
 To nature, all the ways her presence blessed
 Our lives and language, must endure the curse
 Of culture like Jean-Jacques put out to nurse.

For, auto-immunised, we're prone to no
 Such Rousseauist nostalgia, nor possessed
 Of textual strategies to land a blow
 On either party in the long slugfest
 Of rival rogues, of word-kill foe-on-foe,
 But left to tell the long-declining West
 How closer reading might, however late,
 Bring fresh immunogens to our rogue state.

Hedgehog

The poem can roll itself up in a ball, but it is still in order to turn its pointed signs toward the outside. To be sure, it can reflect language or speak poetry, but it never relates back to itself, it never moves by itself like those machines, bringers of death. Its event always interrupts or derails absolute knowledge, autotelic being in proximity to itself. This demon of the heart' never gathers itself and gets off the track (delirium or mania), it exposes itself to chance, it would rather let itself be torn to pieces by what bears down upon it.

I am a dictation, pronounces poetry, learn me by heart, copy me down, guard and keep me, look out for me, look at me, dictated dictation, right before your eyes: soundtrack, wake, trail of light, photograph of the feast in mourning ...

Che cos'è la poesia?

1

A witness borne, a signature event,
Inscribed and dated, yet required to take
Its chance with every comer, every phase
Of a reception-history set to spill
Its inmost secrets, speak the crypted name,
Or draw biographers to peek and pry.

No autograph, no care to say what's meant,
Can save it from the next unlucky break,
The poem-hedgehog bound to spend its days
In search of some dark hiding-place until
Night falls and traffic, like unwanted fame,

Brings headlights streaked across a hostile sky.

What refuge from the life-threats they present,
 The scholar's slip, the copyist's mistake,
 The critic's faulty ear, or all the ways
 We find to smooth the hedgehog's bristling quill
 Or proffer theory-nostrums fit to tame
 That prickly shape crouched at the next cat's-eye.

A nightly cull, a routine accident,
 Like first drafts dug out for promotion's sake,
 Lines garbled, clumsy shots at paraphrase,
 Translations botched, and all those over-kill
 Techniques to deal with poems lest they shame
 Or prick the conscience of some driver-by.

So curious, too, the ways around they went
 To do it, like the hare that raced to shake
 The hedgehogs off, that pair of them who'd craze
 Their panting pursuivant by standing still
 At start and finish-lines so he became,
 In time, the one to tire, collapse and die.

2

Don't fret about authorial intent,
 Grimm's tale suggests, if certain poems make
 The kind of long-run creature sense that plays
 By rules resistant to the poet's will
 Since wagered on an auto-dodging game
 That's worth it only if the odds stack high.

So many obstacles to circumvent,
 And so few fragile shibboleths to stake
 Against the quick traversal that betrays

Each living poem to the culture-mill
 Set up, like roads and rogue events, to maim
 Or crush what's braced to bristle and defy.

No poem knows how far afield it's sent,
 Who'll read it, or what passions it might wake
 In, maybe, just one reader, she who pays
 The sort of rapt attention that may thrill
 To hedgehog sightings far beyond the frame
 Imposed by guides with route-maps to supply.

Poems are vagrant creatures and frequent
 A nether world where blinding headlights snake
 Across their path while each near-miss relays
 The message: keep it up, that night-watch drill,
 You whose myopic vision begs you claim
 A view no bird or plane can overfly.

Poem as hedgehog: label it my bent
 For catachrestic figures that cry 'fake'
 At all placating strategies and raise
 Their spines against all poems that fulfil
 The hedgehog-stroker's customary aim:
 To have no obstacle drive sense awry.

'Get me by heart', it pleads, 'lest you repent
 The stanza garbled, the skim-reader's ache
 For words now lost, the singing line that stays,
 Devoid of sense, for memory to grill,
 And every sad lacuna you should blame
 On hearts too flighty to get poems by.'

Aporia

I keep the word *problem* for another reason: so as to put this word in tension with another Greek word, *aporia*, which I chose a long time ago ...without really knowing where I was going, except that I knew what was going to be at stake in this word was the 'not knowing where to go'.

Crossing this strange border and 'letting oneself be carried beyond the limits of truth' must be possible, indeed inevitable, in order for such a *defect* to exceed the singular cases, and thereby spread its contagion to the point of becoming 'general'.

Aporias – awaiting (one another at) the 'limits of truth'

Just one path taken: sticking-point uncrossed,
 Thought-troubling aporia soon appeased,
 A slightly different hike, a passage eased
 By sage reflections drawn from Robert Frost.
 Let thinking take both paths and there's a cost
 In mind-tracks twisted, reckonings tight-squeezed
 By unresolved elenchus, logic teased
 Beyond itself, and thought's assurance lost.
 Some comfort to be had from paradox,
 From faith in deeper truths past logic's reach,
 But not when aporia double-locks
 Your reasoning on two paths of thought where each
 Proves sound by ticking every logic-box
 Yet honours logic only in the breach.

Frost's cracker-barrel wisdom rather leads
 The cynic to interpret it as mere

Home-grown US folk-wisdom, that idea
 Of paths less travelled, self-reliance creeds,
 And – hard to miss for anyone who reads
 Twice over – how the element of sheer
 Contrariness, as celebrated here,
 Is the stock myth on which that culture feeds.
 Then you may reasonably come to think
 That aporia brings some positives,
 Like getting staid logicians not to blink
 At certain contradictions, and (what gives
 The lesson heart) self-checking lest we shrink
 Our choice to forking paths where Frost-man lives.

Yes, it's the old Marrano in me, that
 Deep sense of non-belonging, that distaste
 For all groups ethnic, land- or language-based,
 And every claim to native habitat
 Advanced on shaky grounds of who begat
 Whom way back when, ensuring those displaced,
 Like our lot down the centuries, were faced
 By paths with signs that said: don't hang your hat!
 That's maybe why my thinking's found its sole
 True nostos in the exile's home domain
 Of aporia where no guards patrol
 The thought-frontiers, where polyglots profane
 All sacred words, and thought exacts no toll
 When dialethic paths broach new terrain.

Joyce/Husserl

[There is a] choice of two endeavours. One would resemble that of James Joyce: to repeat and take responsibility for all equivocation itself, utilizing a language that could equalize the greatest possible synchrony with the greatest potential for buried, accumulated, and interwoven intentions within each linguistic atom The other endeavour is Husserl's: to reduce or impoverish empirical language methodically to the point where its univocal and translatable elements are actually transparent

Edmund Husserl's *Origin of Geometry: an introduction*

Like every apocalyptic eschatology promised in the name of light, we are heirs to these *Lumières*, cannot and must not forgo the *Aufklärung*; must keep enough apocalyptic desire (clarity, revelation) to deconstruct apocalyptic discourse.

'Of an Apocalyptic Tone Recently Adopted in
Philosophy'

1

Two ways it might have gone with me, two quite
Distinct, you could say diametric tracks
My life's-work might have taken, though it smacks
Of pride to say as much and does invite
The quick riposte that I've gone on to write
So much that bears the message: just relax
Your categories, make the library-stacks
Your happy hunting-ground, and take delight

In jumping border-lines. So write like Joyce
 When that's your wish but carry on your twin
 (Long-standing and nowise conflicting) choice
 To 'do philosophy', yet do it in
 Your own distinctive register or voice
 And show those ancient rivals near akin.

Flat wrong, that genial yet sloppy take
 On all the texts I've written, all the ways
 I've tried to bring it home so he who pays
 Due heed will not need telling what's at stake
 At every stage as reading strives to make
 Best sense of passages where logic plays
 The role of guard-rail till its torsions raise
 Their aporetic head and force a break
 With rules like bivalence. No question here
 Of 'free play' as my careless readers choose
 To take the phrase, but as an engineer
 Might use it, one who fettles fits or screws
 Things down just fine or firm enough to clear
 The stress-points with least energy to lose.

I called it 'Joycean', though some prefer
 'Performative', that multivocal mode
 Of writing that, I grant you, breaks the code
 Of academic discourse and may stir
 Mistrust or scorn, yet often lets occur
 Some striking turn of phrase or episode
 Of language-led discovery that's owed
 To my 'penchant for wordplay', as Messieurs
 Les Philosophes complain. Where they go wrong
 Is through the rigid mind-set that denies
 All thought that two such aims might get along,
 The quest for a word-music that takes rise
 From polysemia and the solo song

Of Husserl's quest for truth in logic's guise.

My 'literary' friends and those *en route*
 For sundry academic pastures new –
 Post-modern, post-enlightened, post- a slew
 Of other bygone -isms – cock a snoot
 At my still taking up some old dispute
 With 'great dead white philosophers', while you
 Who share those points of reference take the view
 That mine's too 'radical' a path to suit
 Your tastes or purposes. So both lots fail
 To see what I'm about, how all my 'games'
 With words are meant, if on a micro-scale,
 To do what Russell did with proper names,
 Unpack and clarify, yet tell a tale
 That complicates his more ambitious claims.

Sometimes, not often, I look through some piece,
 Some text of mine and think: that really hits
 The mark, bids Plato's linesmen call it quits
 With literature, or those patrollers cease
 Their border-checks, since even thought-police
 Of their case-hardened kind can see that it's
 A vain attempt when all the concept-kits
 Devised to do the job from ancient Greece
 On down left gaps to spare. Yet still I quail
 To recollect what efforts it required,
 What constant vigilance, each case of 'fail
 Again, fail better next time' as I tired
 Of showing endlessly, to no avail,
 Just why the Plato strategy misfired.

2

Each utterance a small apocalypse.
 Who knows what some trite sentence might reveal?
 New heaven, new earth may dawn on local trips.

Beware the heightening of tone that tips
 From lucid vigil to the Seventh Seal:
 Each utterance a small apocalypse.

Think Kant v Hamann, ask what best equips
 Sage intellect to mute that wild appeal;
 New heaven, new earth? Let's stick to local trips.

For it's between their fractious memberships
 That schisms grow and hostile votaries kneel:
 Each utterance a small apocalypse.

Think, too, how talk of visions may eclipse
 Enlightenment and its prosaic deal:
 New heaven, new earth puts paid to local trips.

I'll side with Kant when Hamann's spirit grips
 Those rapt illuminati in their zeal:
 Each utterance a small apocalypse.

Be wakeful lest the light of reason slips
 Its bounds and flies to zones more empyreal:
 New heaven, new earth may bring its own bad trips.

Yet I'll rehearse both voices (watch my lips!)
 To find what further cross-talk they conceal.
 Each utterance a small apocalypse;
 New heaven, new earth may spring unlooked-for trips.

3

Some passages and texts there are of mine
 That conjure with apocalypse, but draw
 Back smartly – give me credit! – from the door
 Marked ‘revelation’, or the mystic sign
 Too often clasped by adepts who incline
 To prophecy, or summon shock and awe
 To let prosaic thinkers know the score
 By offering a glimpse of the divine
 Vouchsafed direct. Call those texts, if you will,
 My ‘literary’ works, but kindly note
 What care I take to keep the overkill,
 The end-times rhetoric, contained in quote-
 Mark quarantine for safety’s sake until
 Close-reading brings the needful antidote.

The other line they take: ‘he’s each in turn,
 A *Dichter* and a *Denker*, apt to switch
 Unnervingly mid-text; one moment hitch
 His roving eye to issues that concern
 Us slaves of rule and reason, but then yearn
 For something more inventive, something rich
 In opportunities to soothe the itch
 Of poems lost or novels that might earn
 The *Prix Goncourt*’. What chiefly seems to vex
 Those ‘analytic’ types is being asked
 To read philosophy that opts to flex
 Its wings inventively, go forward masked,
 Like questing Descartes, yet meet all the specs
 For modes of thought more strenuously tasked.

They had their Austin, he of caustic tongue,
 Keen intellect, quick wit, and ear fine-tuned
 To every verbal nuance, yet dragooned

Into the surly crew of those who hung
 A doctrine round his neck, one prized among
 The less acute since keeping them cocooned
 Till 'ordinary language' comes out pruned
 Of every quirk and quip that might have sprung
 Its dogma-busting trap. A lexophile
 Of great resource, that Austin, though too much
 Inclined to fall back on the native style
 Of down-to-earth empiricism, clutch
 At folksy remedies, or run a mile
 From talk that lacks the (Oxford) 'common touch'.

Ask me four decades back just what it meant,
 That buzz-word 'deconstruction', and I'd riff
 For twenty minutes on the ground-theme: 'if
 You think some concept X might represent
 What deconstruction is, or does, you've spent
 Your reading-time in vain'. But then, why sniff
 At such things when in truth the only tiff
 Worth having is the one that always lent
 That word its force. I mean: how justify
La vie philosophique if not through lives
 Transformed by thought, and thought enlivened by
 The rare touch of invention that arrives
 As writing's gift to mind, its open sky,
 And so lives on as long as thought survives?

Heidegger's Geist

Heidegger says that destitution is a movement *proper* to spirit [Geist], proceeding from within it. But this inside must also enclose the spectral duplicity, an immanent outside or an intestine exteriority, a sort of evil genius which slips into spirit's monologue to haunt it All of that, which accepts lie and destruction, is evil, the foreigner: foreign to spirit in spirit.

How are we to explain that in twenty-five years, between these two warning signals ('avoid,' 'avoid using'), Heidegger made a frequent, regular, marked (if not remarked) use of all this vocabulary, including the adjective *geistig*?

Of Spirit: Heidegger and the Question

1

A flat-out use where mention once sufficed:
Hear *Dasein* seal its pact as quote-marks fade.
What choices resonate in that word Geist!

Till then he'd merely cited it, or diced
With portents like the Berlin motorcade;
No need for use where mention once sufficed.

Lip-serve strange gods, placate the Antichrist,
Stay safe and keep your trump card yet unplayed:
What choices resonate in that word Geist!

The Rectoral Address it was that spliced
Your *Daseinsfrage* to the boot-brigade:

A flat-out use where mention once sufficed.

Let's not think use of it alone enticed
Your thought yet not ignore the role it played:
What choices resonate in that word Geist!

No grab for power without its language-heist,
No Putsch that fails to put some Geistlich-grade
Shop-talk to use where mention once sufficed.

I fear it's when your language-pincers sliced
Those quote-marks off you called your spade a spade.
What choices resonate in that word Geist;
A flat-out use where mention once sufficed.

2

You cost me dear and your case haunts me still,
Such depth with such depravity combined!
It draws me back each time against my will.

We few 'left Heideggerians' must drill
Ourselves in your defence although we find
You cost us dear and your case haunts us still.

Our adversaries say: 'how think to swill
The poison out if it then leaves you blind
To how he draws you back against your will?'

I say: 'let's once more scan, for good or ill,
Those texts we've duly glossed and counter-signed:
He cost us dear and his case haunts us still'.

A *pharmakon*, mixed cure and poison-pill,
That endless, thankless task you left behind

For us whom it draws back against our will.

What if authentic *Dasein* should fulfil
Its ownmost quest yet vitiate the mind?
You cost us dear and your case haunts us still;
See how it draws us back against our will!

Invention

Invent in your own language if you can or want to hear mine; invent if you can or want to give my language to be understood.

Monolingualism of the Other

Go there where you cannot go, to the impossible, it is indeed the only way of coming or going.

On the Name

I am careful to say 'let it come' because if the other is precisely what is not invented, the initiative or deconstructive inventiveness can consist only in opening, in uncloseting, in destabilising foreclosure structures, so as to allow for the passage toward the other.

Psyche: inventions of the other

1

What price 'invention' if it merely rings
 The changes on some current box of tricks,
 Updates old products with the latest fix,
 Or finds a tweak to make the best of things?
 Rather it's fresh from source invention springs,
 From thoughts that knock received ideas for six,
 Devise new boxes fit for future ticks,
 And treat new Icarus to heat-proof wings.
 Why use 'invent' to signify what takes

No more than old ideas reworked to suit
 Our needs when, properly, it ups the stakes
 On suchlike stuff to mark the point where boot-
 Strap remedies run out and thinking breaks
 Its ties with every quick-fix stage *en route*.

And yet, no sooner has 'invention' seemed
 To far outsoar the thought-mechanic's sphere,
 Ascend its heaven and trounce the gadgeteer
 Than, once again, what yesterday we deemed
 Pure genius now ranks with marvels dreamed,
 Or those perplexing absolutes whose sheer
 Exorbitance just goes to show that we're
 Much better served by tales less hero-themed.
 Think, rather, how that Janus-word 'invent'
 Turns fissile, how its senses sub-divide
 When tracked historically; how once it meant
 'Discover', 'find', or 'come upon', applied
 To those *trouvailles* that might seem heaven-sent
 To speakers or inventors in their pride.

How then should we, sworn *bricoleurs*, deceive
 Our canny selves that any stretch of wit,
 Of skill, or giftedness could ever hit
 The exit-point where great inventors leave
 The realm of clever tinkering and achieve,
 By native genius, what no handy bit
 Of *bricolage* or nifty retrofit
 Can do with all the neat tricks up its sleeve?
 For it's the same *aporia* that ensues
 Each time that word 'invention' has us seek,
 And fail, to slacken the elenctic screws
 That spell it out: trade genius for technique
 And sell it cheap, or pay your genius-dues
 And seek distraction as the thought-pips squeak.

2

The case has analogues – you’ve surely guessed –
 In ‘hospitality’, ‘forgiveness’, ‘friend’,
 ‘Death’, ‘autoimmune’, and ‘rogue’, words that suspend
 Bivalent truth and falsehood, fail the test
 For univocal sense, and manifest
 The thought-unsettling power that says: no end
 In sight to this, their conjoint dividend
 Of truths unknown since immunosuppressed.
 What text but tells of how invention vies
 With routine gadgetry, and yet concedes,
 Like Newton, that each pioneer relies
 On those who went before; how genius pleads
 Its special case yet bids us recognise
 The well-stocked mind or library it needs.

And yet: I write and, as I write, it grows
 On me again, that obverse of *le style*,
 C’est *l’homme*, the thought-confounding sense I feel
 That Rimbaud’s *j’est un autre* may disclose
 More of invention’s gift than all that goes
 To shore one’s self against the mute appeal
 Of otherness, of traits that might reveal
 Those truths alterity alone bestows.
 ‘Inventions of the Other’: so it ran,
 That sub-title of mine, and so I’d phrase
 It still, the long *dérèglement* that began
 When writing met the narcissistic gaze
 Of ego and required we closely scan
 Each juncture where they drifted out of phase.

Alterity’s where all inventions lack
 Due precedent; where ethics has to face

Its utmost challenge in the unique case
Of every other; where the beaten track
Gives out way past the only safe route back,
So thought must risk prospecting far off-base,
Like all inventors, in a vagrant space
Of paths unmarked in any almanac.
'Invent': it's that aporia bids us tread
A mazy path around the clashing rocks
Of *Kubla Khan*-like mingled awe and dread
As mind turns demiurge, and all our stocks
Of sceptic vigilance that, too deep-bred,
May disinvent that thought-charged paradox.

Performatives (Austin)

For, ultimately, isn't it true that what Austin excludes as anomaly, exception, 'non-serious', citation, is the determined modification of a general citationality – or rather, a general iterability – without which there would not even be a 'successful' performative?

'Signature Event Context'

In the analysis of so-called normal cases, one neither can nor ought, in all theoretical rigor, to exclude the possibility of transgression. Not even provisionally, or out of allegedly methodological considerations. It would be a poor method, since this possibility of transgression tells us immediately and indispensably about the structure of the act said to be normal as well as about the structure of law in general.

Limited Inc

1

The safety-valve's the part with most to tell.
It knows the engine's state and speaks it plain.
What routine checker knows the truth so well?

Rote thinkers often tell me not to dwell
On what's oblique, opaque, against the grain:
The safety-valve's the part with most to tell.

I say: it's just those stress-points that compel
A reading taut enough to take the strain.
What pious glosser knows the truth so well?

Your mainstream exegetes have means to quell
 Such threats as peer-group pressure can't contain:
 The safety-valve's the part with most to tell.

I say: look to the margins if you'd spell
 Them out, those problems tucked away in vain.
 What border-guard knows crossing points so well?

Your normaliser craves that meanings gel,
 That texts cohere and bother-heads refrain:
 The safety-valve's the part with most to tell.

Your safety-valve can feel the pressure swell
 Though normalisers say it's right as rain:
 What boiler-checker knows the signs so well?

I scan the margins, audit (ear-to-shell)
 The etymons, and venture thoughts profane:
 The safety-valve's the part with most to tell.

It's not us sharp-eyed deconstructors sell
 Your Great Texts short but skimmers who complain
 When forced to own we know those texts so well.
 The safety-valve's the part with most to tell.

2

The misfires tell what's up with the machine.
 Defective speech-acts show when uptake fails.
 So many accidents may intervene!

The normal case: we say just what we mean,
 The act holds good, things go as it entails.
 No misfire tells what's up with the machine.

You heirs of Austin want the message clean,
 The norms in place, train firmly on the rails:
 Let no speech-accident now intervene!

Yet some such slip might always come between
 Word and event where circumstance prevails:
 Misfires may show what's up with the machine.

Interpreters, like engineers, may glean
 Much truth along those winding error-trails
 As accidents, like misfires, intervene.

How know when things run smoothly if you screen
 Out every speech-event that fails or ails?
 The misfires show what's up with the machine;
 So many accidents may intervene!

3

What rule except 'exceptions prove the rule'?
 Some norms there are, but none to give them pause
 Who say 'the rule-book changes out of school'.

The heirs of Austin think only a fool
 Or charlatan would add that exit-clause:
 'What rule except exceptions prove the rule?'

They think speech-act and consequence unspool
 Like clockwork, with all parties keeping scores.
 Not so: the rule-book changes out of school.

Apply the norm too rigidly and you'll
 Have yet more misfires plus systemic flaws:
 What rule except 'exceptions prove the rule'?

Best, then, adapt your system or retool
 Lest it's a tricky card your promise draws.
 Learn how the rule-book changes out of school.

It's we, eyes peeled for every mishap, who'll
 Do Austin proud, not that routine of yours.
 What rule except 'exceptions prove the rule'?
 Wise up: the rule-book changes out of school.

4

How tell what change of fortune lies ahead?
 You promise, vow, say plainly 'This I swear',
 Yet time and chance make light of what you said.

The ever-after proved short-term instead;
 The promised joy soon turned to black despair:
 How tell what change of fortune lies ahead?

My friend and colleague Paul turned out twice-wed,
 Both wives still living, and his case, though rare,
 Saw life and times make light of what he'd said.

Let's not go easy on commitments shed,
 On words that, soon as uttered, turn to air
 When some big change of fortune looms ahead.

Yet let's not take their binding force as read
 Or think it's just our job to read with care:
 So often life makes light of what we've said.

I sometimes think it's only when we're dead
 That someone else might reckon up the share
 Of failed performatives that loomed ahead.

The speech-acts multiply, the failures spread
 From text to life till doubt looms everywhere:
 So often life makes light of what we've said.

I grant, some promises are put to bed
 Straight off, some vows just honoured fair and square
 Despite what sticking-points may loom ahead.

But others hit such rough seas that they're led
 To unknown outcomes in some world elsewhere
 As heavy weather batters all they said.

Then even credence-checkers A-to-Z
 Will scarcely say the bottle-launchers err.
 Who knows what turbid currents lie ahead?
 So often life makes light of what we said.

5

I sign my text but who shall countersign?
 No way this scribble might self-authorise!
 It's future uptake seals the dotted line.

That first inscription seems to say 'it's mine,
 This text you read, so copyright applies!'.
 I sign my text but who shall countersign?

For signatures, like speech-acts, must combine
 Mark and re-mark if we're to recognise
 How future uptake seals the dotted line.

Where are they, 'we the people', who enshrine
 Their rights post factum as the parchment dries?
 They sign the text but who shall countersign?

Their Declaration's backed up with divine
Commands, performatives in God's-will guise,
Though future uptake seals the dotted line.

The words prove void should history confine
All sight of them to signatory eyes.
They sign the text but who shall counter-sign?

Else they assemble nowhere but cloud nine,
Those yet unsigned-for states that may arise
When future uptake seals the dotted line.

It's where speech-acts and actions intertwine,
Where that same question springs its late surprise:
'We signed the text but who shall countersign?'
It's future uptake seals the dotted line.

Monolingualism of the Other

I speak only one language, and it is not my own.

One can, of course, speak several languages. There are speakers who are competent in more than one language. Some even write several languages at a time (prostheses, grafts, translation, transposition). But do they not always do it with a view to an absolute idiom? and in the promise of a still unheard-of language? of a sole poem previously inaudible?

Monolingualism of the Other

1

Those who, post-Babel, speak their 'native tongue',
 Or say 'my language' as if it alone,
 That homely space, is one to call their own,
 To truly dwell in – them I count among
 My real *touts-autres*, I who never hung
 My hat on any language-peg, home-grown
 Or other, and would count all nests well flown
 Once I'd moved on, no matter how far-flung
 My later travels. Feeling you're 'at home'
 In some one 'natural language' always seemed
 Like favouring landscapes done in monochrome,
 Or taking scenic journeys often dreamed
 With mental map marked 'all paths lead to Rome',
 The end-point known, the stages duly schemed.

Yet why, you ask, my aporetic phrase
 That links the monolingual with the claim

Of otherness; what stands up in the name
 Of *Vaterland* and *Sprache* with what pays
 Its due respects to diverse language-ways,
 An ethics of alterity whose aim
 Is always to reveal, within 'the same'
 Community or language, that which plays
 The other's role? I say: to clear our minds
 Of that fake post-Babelian mystique
 That yearns to live pre-Babel and so finds
 Its lineage plain – *echt-Deutsch* from ancient Greek –
 Or touts its pedigree with sundry kinds
 Of folkish language-lore and doublespeak.

For that's my point: resistance from within,
 The culture-cuckoo's strategy to wrench
 Some working space of freedom from the clench
 Of their adoptive language, the no-win
 Predicament of one who can't begin,
 As I can't now, to list the ways that French,
 The old oppressor's tongue, became the bench-
 Mark signature of all they've done to spin
 A life-tale far from home. Yet I've remained,
 Five decades on, one who can truly state
 'It is not mine', this privilege hard-gained
 Of swallowing the master's language-bait
 And fashioning 'my own' French style, self-trained
 To leave its mark in each uncommon trait.

2

How so, you'll say, that 'monolingual' tag
 When texts of yours mix languages or cross
 Between them with such ease that any gloss-
 Provider needs to work flat-out or lag
 A Joycean league behind? Yet if I flag

It up, my so-called 'Frenchness', it's because
 That long-ungranted birthright meant the loss
 Of language-worlds elsewhere, the master's gag
 On tongue-ties farther back. It's there you'll catch
 The undertone of otherness that jars
 Or grates with those, the purists, who attach
 Their standard to a discourse that debars
 All trace of alien accents out to snatch
 The crown from Descartes' lucid avatars.

Another point: your cultured polyglot
 May revel in the many-gloried wake
 Of Babel yet, at bottom, tend to take
 A God's-eye view and grant the starring spot
 To just one language, 'native tongue' or not,
 That earns that place for truth or beauty's sake
 And skews whatever gestures they might make
 Toward allowing every tongue a shot
 At centre-stage. Whereas – I'd say – the chief
 Advantage of a life like mine, propelled
 From fringe to centre, is the high-relief
 Impression it affords of all that's held
 Down hard when French still forms the grand massif
 Despite those seismic forces that rebelled.

The otherness I speak of comes from deep
 Within the French I write, a hybrid style
 That skirts around the bourgeois high ground while
 Contriving – I confess – some ways to creep
 Within reach of its citadel and keep
 An eye to that great prize of Francophile
 Ambition, the desire so to beguile
 The arbiters of taste that they might sleep
 The whole procedure through. It's otherness
 Of an intrinsic sort, not some idea

Of pan-linguistic heaven, that might bless
Me with a glimpse of that inland frontier
Where monolingualism feels the stress
Of all that jangles on its inner ear.

Future Anterior

It is perhaps necessary to free the value of the future from the value of 'horizon' that traditionally has been attached to it – horizon being, as the Greek word indicates, a limit from which I pre-comprehend the future. I wait for it. I predetermine it. And thus, I annul it.

The future is not present, but there is an opening onto it; and because there is a future, a context is always open. What we call opening of the context is another name for what is still to come.

A Taste for the Secret

1

Future anterior: what will have been.
Things yet to come, the promissory tense.
In time we'll know what those constructions mean.

Their upshot bides its time behind the screen
Of null truth-values, outcomes in suspense.
Future anterior: what will have been.

Some things we guess at, futures half-foreseen,
As close-linked hypotheticals make sense:
In time we'll know what those constructions mean.

For it's a law that none may contravene:
Look forward and admit your nescience!
Future anterior: what will have been.

Yet *l'avenir* may name a space between
 Where knowledge ends though hope finds recompense:
 In time we'll know what those constructions mean.

Man in the midst might jump the time-machine
 Should *Jetztzeit* seize the day not too far hence.
 Future anterior: what will have been;
 In time we'll know what those constructions mean.

2

What shall have been may loosen logic's grip.
 Strict bivalence requires *a* or *not-a*
 But hope redeemed may give its rule the slip.

The Stagyrite said futurity may flip
 The truth-coin heads or tails, but come the day
 Those one-time doubts can't loosen logic's grip.

Sea-battle pending or an ocean-trip?
 He says: one's true, though it's too soon to say.
 Hope on, you'll not give logic's rule the slip.

My case: that *l'avenir* might yet equip
 Us truth-prospectors with a role to play
 In loosening logic's aporetic grip.

Not yet foredoomed so don't abandon ship
 In fear some naval spat won't go your way.
 Hope on, no need to give that rule the slip.

For there's still room between the gambler's chip
 And harsh necessity to show what may
 Relax, yet not relinquish, logic's grip.

For else how reckon up each chance to tip
Ananke's scales and end her thumb-down sway?
Hope on, no need to give that rule the slip;
What shall have been may loosen logic's grip.

Signed and Dated

Yet the poem does speak! It remains mindful of its
dates, yet – it speaks.

Paul Celan, 'The Meridian'

The stake of the signature – does the signature take
place? where? how? why? for whom?

(Glas)

We must write, we must sign, we must bring about new
events with untranslatable marks — and this is the
frantic call, the distress of a signature that is asking for
a yes from the other, the pleading injunction for a
counter-signature.

'Ulysses Gramophone'

1

How shall a text be dated, signed and sealed,
Some pure deictic *punctum* fix its fate
Or autographic *hic et nunc* dictate
What's there to read, beyond all doubt revealed?
No text but may yet wander far afield,
Face unknown hazards, gain unwanted freight
Of new-found sense, and thereby prove its date
And place, self-witnessed, just another shield
Against time's ravages. That's why, with all
New texts of mine, I think once they're in print:
'How kid yourself your readers will play ball,

That lots of strong misreaders won't new-mint
 Your precious words, or exegetes won't trawl
 Your sentences with eyes and minds asquint?'

Yet equally, when reading Paul Celan,
 How set the dates and signatures aside,
 Ignore the locatives, the details tied
 To real life-episodes, or lines we scan
 More feelingly in knowledge of the man,
 His tortured life and death, or how he tried
 To have Herr Doktor Heidegger confide,
 In Todtnauberg, how deepest thinking can
 Consort with barbarism? Rule them out,
 Those landmarks and deictics, as so much
 Mere extra-textual baggage and you'll flout
 Some principles that most directly touch
 Our shared humanity, then come to doubt
 That words afford a more than verbal crutch.

I half-regret it, that 'il n'y a pas d'hors-
 Texte' phrase of mine, since it's attained such dire
 And headline-grabbing power as to require
 Much time and effort just to shut the door
 On all those misconceived attempts to score
 Debating-points by sundry guns-for-hire,
 Like naïve realists, Marxists keen to fire
 Back charges of 'idealism', or
 Plain muddle-heads. What all of them forget,
 Conveniently enough, is how their flat
 Insistence on a 'real' world firmly set
 Apart from mind (shades of old Diamat!)
 Must sever mind from world and thereby let
 The old Idealist team back in to bat.

'Material', 'materialist' – they fling

These words at me as if a text must float
 In seas of non-existence where the boat
 'Material Events' has naught to bring,
 Where speech-acts have no consequents to spring,
 And there's no way those words that Celan wrote
 Straight down can take his readers by the throat
 And tell them plainly: this was happening
 At just that time and place. No act so bold,
 So forceful and decisive as the act
 Of signature when writing takes a hold
 On past and future, saying 'truth of fact,
 As vouched by this my hand', or else 'be told:
 These marks spell truth no re-write can retract'.

Then there's the way that proper names assume
 The role of common nouns, or – as the heirs
 Of Russell would deny – their equal shares
 Of space in that linguistic changing-room
 Where attributes belong to what-or-whom,
 Where every sponge-like property declares
 The work of Francis Ponge, and where it bears
 Remarking how the *bounds* and *edges* loom
 Throughout Kant's three Critiques. *A jeu d'esprit*,
 As some might say, but further evidence
 Of just how fine and porous it can be,
 The line that severs sense from reference,
 Or how, in truth, it's only in degree
 That proper names must count as lacking sense.

Like signatures, those names are apt to gain
 New sense and urgency in times of flight,
 Of borders, passports, wars, and need to write,
 As well as speak, in ways that make it plain
 One's true-born Gileadite, not out to feign
 The victor's tongue lest native warriors smite

That hapless soul, the captive Ephraimite,
 When swerves of diction led to thousands slain,
 As shaky hands might now. It's then that name
 Turns signature, and signature may turn
 From self-endorsing witness ('I'm the same
 From date to date of signing') to a stern
 Reminder of how tenuous that claim
 Must seem when we've far harsher truths to learn.

2

Such a strange thing, the signature, and caught
 Up in so many clinches, double-binds,
 And strictures of the lethal thread that winds
 Its way through every chapter of a short
 But sanguinary tale. This they report,
 Those Ephraimites, like Celan, whom it finds
 Laid squarely in its path and whom it grinds
 Down constantly until their last resort
 Becomes their final choice. Then putting mark
 To paper is at once the only means
 To signify 'I lived and wrote, so hark
 And heed my living words', and that which screens
 A harsher truth: how writing limns the dark
 Of crypt and script where death's hand intervenes.

It's life-in-death permits I place the seal
 Of unique personhood by way of 'this,
 My electronic signature', and kiss
 Goodbye to marks hand-written that reveal
 Who knows what secret faults. The package deal
 For us subscribers says we can dismiss
 Such fallback myths, peer into the abyss
 With routine dizziness, and get to feel
 At home in cyberspace. Then nothing stops

Us multiplying selves, devising ways
 To fit those selves with false or fictive props,
 Endorsing each seductive lie that plays
 To ego's script, and running fake-news ops
 Ad lib beneath our own untroubled gaze?

'Which I, JD, here sign or counterfeit':
 That's how I chose to round it off, my first
 Assay of Austin's text where I rehearsed
 ('Discussed', 'performed', 'enacted' – won't repeat
 The checklist here) his strategies to beat
 The bounds though every 'genuine' speech-act nursed
 Its 'deviant' counterpart, and so dispersed
 Its 'proper' force in mimicry, deceit,
 Stage-utterance, or jest. Yet it's no jest
 On my part, no vain effort to run rings
 Round donnish Austin, that required I test
 His Oxford-nurtured confidence that things
 Were as he heard and thought them, he who best
 Lent ear to language and its whisperings.

No, it's the nagging fear that they who spoke
 With such fine confidence were those who ruled
 My destiny, decreed that I be schooled
 Apart from friends, shared some unsubtle joke
 At my expense as if not meant to poke
 Their racist fun my way, or ridiculed
 My gall in questioning the wisdom pooled
 By Plato's lofty kind or else by folk-
 Talk hearkeners like Austin. If I'm drawn
 To Plato's boot-leg pharmacy and brood
 With such intensity on that shop-worn
 Yet endlessly seductive multitude
 Of master-tropes then think you find me torn,
 Once more, by put-downs endlessly accrued.

Book and Paper

[W]e should analyse the retention of the model of the book, the *liber* – of the unit and the distribution of discourse, even its pagination on the screen, even the body, the hands and eyes that it continues to orient, the rhythm it prescribes, its relationship to the title, its modes of legitimation, even where the material support has disappeared (the new electronic journals ...generally reproduce the traditional formats, editorial norms, criteria of evaluation and selection – for better and for worse).

Paper Machine

1

Too easily we say its time is past,
Count paper's culture-revenue long spent,
Although signs multiply: it's built to last!

Page, margins, notebook, letter – all that vast
Scriptorium whose shelves we still frequent:
Too easily we say its time is past.

What images revisit when it's classed
A 'paper-clip', the message pinned, not sent.
Watch as signs multiply: it's built to last.

They grow as circuits shrink, and just as fast,
Though Moore's Law rules 'high time the paper went'.
Too easily we say its time is past.

The images recur when we contrast
 Thought's imprint with its virtual element.
 Watch as signs multiply: it's built to last.

Then marks on paper find themselves re-cast
 As graphic witness to a ghost event.
 Too easily we say its time is past.
 Watch as signs multiply: it's built to last.

2

What life escapes its power to make or mar?
 The truth stands plain, deep-written on your skin.
Sans-papiers no balm can heal the scar.

Post-Gutenberg it's still an evil star
 Gleams over migrant, guest, or Bedouin:
 What life escapes its power to make or mar?

We say 'what's written spells the migrant-bar,
 Not what it's written on', but they're close kin:
Sans-papiers no balm can heal the scar.

The logocentric ploy: should conscience jar
 Then spurn material props and search within!
 What life escapes its power to make or mar?

It's written marks on paper say how far
 Our lives shall go, though if we should begin
Sans-papiers no balm can heal the scar.

From how things started out to how they are
 And shall be: just the dots need filling in.
 What life escapes its power to make or mar?

Always some spin-off trope or avatar
 Of paper has you sprawling on its pin.
Sans-papiers no balm can heal the scar;
 What life escapes its power to make or mar?

3

How say where *tekhne* leapt hand to machine?
 It's Plato's cave we occupied all through,
 Rejigged to suit each change of graphoscene.

The allegory adapts from scroll to screen,
 Finds frames to trope and tropes to frame anew:
 How say where *tekhne* leapt hand to machine?

My little Olivetti served between
 Two epochs, pen and Apple Mac, with due
 Adjustment for each change of graphoscene.

Yet, thinking back, those stages all convene
 On paper as it scrolls up right on cue:
 No stage where *tekhne* leapt hand-to-machine.

Some thinkers wish to have the step-change clean,
 Have *Schreibmaschine* stage a master-coup,
 Not opt for step-wise change of graphoscene.

Word-processing needs hands, is what I mean,
 Like my first pen, my Olivetti too:
 No stage where *tekhne* leapt hand to machine.

So likewise thought grows sharper-edged and keen
 By crafts, techniques, and skills it never knew:
 Two-way, that constant change of graphoscene.

Always some new prosthesis, now routine,
 To supplement what hand-and-brain could do.
 No stage where *tekhne* leapt hand to machine;
 Much more a gradual change of graphoscene.

4

Paper and book: how come their hold on me?
 For five decades I scarcely felt the lure
 Of closure; then this late apostacy.

I wrote that text alone could set us free
 From having any longer to endure
 That book-regime: how come its hold on me?

I said, 'Read *De la grammatologie*
 As text, not book, and shun all premature
 Text-closure': now this late apostacy!

Yet times there are when thought puts in a plea
 That some *parergon* serve to reassure
 The dizzy reader: whence its hold on me.

Truth is, I meant no intertextual spree
 But free-play just enough to unsecure
 Rote-reading: call it late apostacy!

Lives end in time so texts are bound to be,
 In mortal eyes, all bookishly impure:
 Why chafe if life-time lays its hold on me?

It's book and paper tame hyperbole,
 Grant time its due, revise the text-brochure.
 By all means call it late apostacy;
 In time you'll get to feel their hold on me.

Law and Justice: Kafka

Our Laws are not generally known; they are kept secret by the small group of nobles who rule us. We are convinced that these ancient laws are scrupulously administered; nevertheless it is an extremely painful thing to be ruled by laws that one does not know.

Franz Kafka, 'The Problem of Our Laws'

It is just that there be law, but law is not justice.

Since the origin of authority, the foundation or ground, the position of law can't by definition rest on anything but themselves, they are themselves a violence without ground.

'Force of Law: the 'Mystical Foundation of Authority''

Why is the parable considered 'Literature' rather than some other discipline such as 'Law' or 'Philosophy'?

Perhaps man is the man from the country as long as he cannot read; or, if knowing how to read, he is still bound up in unreadability within that very thing which appears to yield itself to be read.

Since he is *before* it because he cannot enter it, he is also *outside the law* (an outlaw). He is neither under the law nor in the law. He is both a subject of the law and an outlaw.

'Before the Law'

1

What law but lends itself to vile abuse?

What law but lends

some pretext to the cause

Of rank injustice and ignoble ends?

The rot may reach the spirit of the laws.

The rot may reach

so far down that it bends

Law's rule and makes a case for every breach.

Then it's no use your seeking law's amends.

Then it's no use

imagining you've each

Some higher legal warrant to produce.

All those wise saws have naught of worth to preach.

All those wise saws

law speaks will leave your goose

Completely cooked and you with life on pause.

Bad law bookends itself without excuse.

Bad law bookends

bad law with some new clause

Fudged up to yield the highest dividends.

Such ills beseech we look past lesser flaws.

Such ills beseech

we look to what subtends

Those evils law ensures we can't impeach.

Yet how then sluice the stink when it offends?

Yet how then sluice

the legal sty or bleach

The stains that let its foul bacillus loose?

Law's victim draws what truth it has to teach.

Law's victim draws

the lesson: knife or noose,

The sentence is prescribed, uniquely yours.

2

'Before the law' your country-man must quail.

Before the law

he knows this day in court

Will add a file to his 'case pending' drawer.

Appeals proceed; new charges may be brought.

Appeals proceed

as normal but the more

He brings the more not-guilty pleas he'll need.

That all would fail he'd gathered long before.

That all would fail

he'd known as if decreed

By some unerring law of no avail.

No new report, no hearing date agreed.

No new report

or change to that old tale

Of law's delay that cuts each hearing short.

Huge in the door its keeper brings no mail.

Huge in the door

he banishes all thought

Of some decisive verdict yet in store.

Be sure you read as closely as you ought!

Be sure you read,
 like me, with eye out for
 Such things as practised skimmers may not heed.

Then change of scale has Kafka take the floor.
 Then change of scale
 shows parable close-keyed
 To his *The Trial*, each scene a coffin-nail.

A lifelong tort, bad upshot guaranteed.
 A lifelong tort,
 the sense he's out on bail
 Yet pre-condemned to bear *peine dure et forte*.

3

Mise en abyme: no trivial game to play.
 Mise en abyme
 'before the Law', a thing
 Of darkness, his and Josef's waking dream.

It tells us straight: no rightful law I bring.
 It tells us straight
 to seek no other theme
 Than law's unending summons: stand and wait.

Think ground-hog day endured in law's regime.
 Think ground-hog day
 With no event to spring
 Save further tidings of the law's delay.

What draws the sting is law's entangled state.
 What draws the sting
 (For us, not Josef K)
 Is laws and texts that anti-correlate.

How else redeem the price he had to pay?
 How else redeem
 the fear that had him cling
 To hopes undone with each day's twilight gleam?

A fictive trait lets thought's night-owl take wing.
 A fictive trait
 permits law's rule to seem
 Within thought's means to mirror and negate.

A give-away, that self-empowerment scheme!
 A give-away,
 the trick that lets it string
 The country-man along by *loi cachée*.

No reckoning with law's text-duplicate!
 No reckoning
 once fictioned to display
 Law's image in a convex signet ring.

4

Close readers spy the aporetic snare!
 Close readers spy
 clear symptoms of the strain
 When text demands the justice laws deny.

See tremors cleave and furrow law's terrain!
 See tremors cleave
 law's contours and defy
 The border-checks on truth and make-believe.

Foreshocks lay bare those strata forced awry.
 Foreshocks lay bare

how surfaces deceive
The skimmer's scansion like the idler's stare.

No plea will gain the suppliant's reprieve.
No plea will gain
 an answer to his prayer,
Nor ours should we expect it spelled out plain.

It takes an eye with vigilance to spare.
It takes an eye
 sharp-peeled to ascertain
What's apt to pass less watchful readers by.

Go faux-naïve and read in literal vein.
Go faux-naïve,
 yet Kafka's fables tie
New knots in any sense you might achieve.

Just thread with care as tangles multiply.
Just thread with care
 as something snags the weave
Of text and law co-implicated there.

A life in vain the country-man must grieve.
A life in vain
 and hear the guardian bear
Once more, as shades close in, law's old refrain.

‘Will this have been a life ...?’

(pantoum)

It has no sense and cannot be just unless it comes to terms with death. Mine as (well as) that of the other. Between life and death, then, this is indeed the place of a sententious injunction that always feigns to speak the just.

To live, by definition, is not something one learns. Not from oneself, it is not learned from life, taught by life. Only from the other and by death. In any case from the other at the edge of life. At the internal border or the external border, it is a heterodidactics between life and death.

Specters of Marx

I would like to write you so simply, so simply, so simply. Without having anything ever catch the eye, excepting yours alone, ...so that above all the language remains self-evidently secret, as if it were being invented at every step, and as if it were burning immediately.

The Post-Card: from Socrates to Freud

1

Will this have been a life? I scarcely know.
 ‘Nothing beyond the text’: your old refrain.
 A life of signs has signs of life to show.
 Sense fades along the signifying chain.

Nothing beyond the text: your old refrain.

Life-text, text-life: the links run to and fro.
Sense fades along the signifying chain.
 It's signs alone have meaning to bestow.

Life-text, text-life: the links run to and fro.
 Spin spider-like your life-text: *what's to gain?*
 It's signs alone have meaning to bestow.
 You seek and find your seeking's all in vain.

Spin spider-like your life-text: *what's to gain?*
 My texts brought sense to life's chaotic flow.
 You seek and find your seeking's all in vain.
 I seek in texts the way that lives may go.

My texts brought sense to life's chaotic flow.
 Those texts so *recherché*, those thoughts arcane!
 I seek in texts the way that lives may go.
 You're done with life, let writing take the strain!

Those texts so *recherché*, those thoughts arcane!
 That old complaint, thrown at me by Foucault:
 'You're done with life, let writing take the strain!'.
 No life but there to read, for weal or woe.

That old complaint, thrown at me by Foucault.
 You're like the book-crazed, melancholy Dane!
 No life but there to read, for weal or woe.
 Just skip the clever stuff and read it plain!

You're like the book-crazed, melancholy Dane!
 You'd have me read like Fortinbras & Co.
 Just skip the clever stuff and read it plain!
 Plain readers march with regiments in tow.

You'd have me read like Fortinbras & Co.

What harm? You'd live and cover more terrain.
 Plain readers march with regiments in tow.
 Your ditherings prospered his and their campaign!

What harm? You'd live and cover more terrain.
 Take *différance*, that handy portmanteau ...
 Your ditherings prospered his and their campaign!
 ...that says it all: read carefully, read slow.

Take *différance*, that handy portmanteau ...
 The textualist's delight, his precious bane!
 ...that says it all: read carefully, read slow.
 What help for those with *différance* on the brain?

The textualist's delight, his precious bane!
 The same old story, Plato to Rousseau.
 What help for those with *différance* on the brain?
 How else give time-of-life one final throw?

The same old story, Plato to Rousseau.
 It's death-in-life, that thesis you maintain.
 How else give time-of-life one final throw?
 Think how the archives wax as life-signs wane.

It's death-in-life, that thesis you maintain.
 Who knows what promise texts may hold below?
 Think how the archives wax as life-signs wane.
 In archives yet-to-be new lives may grow.

Who knows what promise texts may hold below?
 From life's far margin hear the scribes complain!
 In archives yet-to-be new lives may grow.
 How count the life-costs writing brings in train?

From life's far margin hear the scribes complain!

Too death-obsessed, your end-of-life tableau.
 How count the life-costs writing brings in train?
 How pay, so late, the living debts I owe?

Too death-obsessed, your end-of-life tableau.
 Too text-bound, those survival hopes you feign.
 How pay so late the living debts I owe?
 The cure's a curse, the poisons yet remain.

Too text-bound, those survival hopes you feign.
 Each letter lifts the life/death ratio.
 The cure's a curse, the poisons yet remain.
 Aere perennius: more apropos.

Each letter lifts the life/death ratio.
 No text to match the lifeworld you distain.
 Aere perennius: more apropos.
 See black ice heap your terminal moraine.

No text to match the lifeworld you distain.
 Some texts catch light from life's late afterglow.
 See black ice heap your terminal moraine.
 My texts clear life-ways: see them, row on row!

Some texts catch light from life's late afterglow.
 Quit life for text and thinking turns inane.
 My texts clear life-ways: see them, row on row!
 Your thoughts so rarefied, your plight mundane.

Quit life for text and thinking turns inane.
 False choice: it's life-in-death would have it so.
 Your thoughts so rarefied, your plight mundane.
 Trust no prescription, no thought-placebo!

2

Near death, still it's publicity you seek.
 Things yet to learn, like Hume or Socrates.
 That final interview, your fans' last peek.
 Why disappoint? My weakness: aim to please.

Things yet to learn, like Hume or Socrates.
 You sought to wow your last-word-hanging clique.
 Why disappoint? My weakness: aim to please.
 Still pushing it, that Derrida mystique!

You sought to wow your last-word-hanging clique.
 Read it again, my low-key life-reprise.
 Still pushing it, that Derrida mystique!
 Not pitched to bring the faithful to their knees.

Read it again, my low-key life-reprise.
 Why offer truths so muted, slant, oblique?
 Not pitched to bring the faithful to their knees.
 Truth's messengers have plainer ways to speak.

Why offer truths so muted, slant, oblique?
 Too quickly had, those simple truths you seize.
 Truth's messengers have plainer ways to speak.
 No simpleton, the truth-god I'd appease.

Too quickly had, those simple truths you seize.
 Death's good for one last deconstructive tweak.
 No simpleton, the truth-god I'd appease.
 Let's death's approach not stymie your technique!

Death's good for one last deconstructive tweak.
 No joke, my friend, no joshing this disease.
 Let's death's approach not stymie your technique!

Your voice and mine, they closen by degrees.

No joke, my friend, no joshing this disease.
 I know: just *blame my Schadenfreudlich streak*.
 Your voice and mine, they closen by degrees.
 Trust us to twist the screws till sore spots shriek.

I know: just *blame my Schadenfreudlich streak*.
 Neurotic guilt, that singular *bêtise*.
 Trust us to twist the screws till sore spots shriek.
 Each triple-locked although we share the keys.

Neurotic guilt, that singular *bêtise*.
 A touchy point: *why style yourself so chic?*
 You're back on form: not here to shoot the breeze!
 No rest, no let-up till the last pips squeak.

That touchy point: *why style yourself so chic?*
 An image thing, put on and off with ease.
 No rest, no let-up till the last pips squeak.
 I like to twitch those dress-code binaries.

An image-thing, put on and off with ease.
 No place for thought in salon or boutique!
 I like to twitch those dress-code binaries.
 Haute couture/*prêt-à-porter*? sloven/sleek?

No place for thought in salon or boutique!
 Thought finds its way despite the fashion-sprees.
 Haute couture/*prêt-à-porter*? sloven/sleek?
 Won't cramp it either way, Levis or Lees!

Thought finds its way despite the fashion-sprees.
 I take your point but note a certain pique.
 Another of your null hypotheses!

You'd looks to spare: *why play the scholar-geek?*

I take your point *but* note a certain pique.
 Maybe I bowed too much to fame's decrees.
 You'd looks to spare: *why play the scholar-geek?*
 We dressed to kill, we Camus wannabes.

Maybe I bowed too much to fame's decrees.
 It *made* your thought, let's say, *more* sympathique.
 We dressed to kill, we Camus wannabes.
 You cut a dash in theory's tristes tropiques.

It *made* your thought, let's say, *more* sympathique.
 Plain false: no 'style of thought'; pure journalese!
 You cut a dash in theory's tristes tropiques.
 Why judge a thinker by his devotees?

Plain false: no 'style of thought'; pure journalese!
 Thought has its fads: your case is not unique.
 Why judge a thinker by his devotees?
 Style travels, modern French or ancient Greek.

Thought has its fads: your case is not unique.
 My life's work stands; why chase parentheses?
 Style travels, modern French or ancient Greek.
 Take Socrates for Alcibiades?

My life's work stands: why chase parentheses?
 You said 'truth lurks in margins: now go seek!'.
 Take Socrates for Alcibiades?
 How else track your thought-ravelling lexique?

You said 'truth lurks in margins: now go seek!'
 No paradox but some new thought it frees.
 How else track your thought-ravelling lexique?

What other help for thought-locked detainees?

No paradox but some new thought it frees.
 Thoughts hybrid, mutant, born of doublespeak.
 What other help for thought-locked detainees?
 Dwell longer, see what havoc you can wreak!

Thoughts hybrid, mutant, born of doublespeak.
 Thoughts keen, tight-knit, revealing: not like these!
 Dwell longer, see what havoc you can wreak!
 Thoughts risky, *en abyme*: no guarantees!

Now leave me, *mon semblable*: I grow weak,
 Confuse addressor's words with addressee's,
 And feel those tensile aporias leak
 Away in sense-glissades and vagaries.

‘Learning to Live, Finally ...’

To answer your question, without further delay: no, I never learned-to-live. Absolutely not!

I remain impervious to learning when it comes to knowing-how-to-die, I have yet to learn anything about this particular subject.

Survival in the conventional sense of the term means to continue to live, but also to live after death It does not derive from either to live or to die. No more than what I call ‘originary mourning’. It is something that does not wait for so-called ‘actual’ death. Survival is an original concept, which defines the structure itself of what we call existence, the Da-sein, if you will. We are, structurally speaking, survivors, marked by this structure of the trace, of the testament.

Oral or written, all these gestures leave us, they begin to act independently of us. At the moment ‘my’ book is published ...I become an appearance-disappearance, like that unteachable spectre that will never learn how to live. The trace I leave to me means at once my death, to come or already come, and the hope that it will survive me.

Learning to Live Finally: the last interview

1

It’s come and gone, that ‘final interview’
 I did with the reporter from *Le Monde*
 A few days back, a thing to carry through,
 Or so I felt, although it went beyond
 What most would think the parting gesture due

To friends or readers, those who might respond
 In ways as strange and various as mine
 When it came back for me to countersign.

No heavy weather, no dramatic stuff,
 No death's-door-knocking, above all no room
 For stage-heroics or attempts to tough
 It out, this wretched thing – best try, like Hume
 In his last days, to hold out long enough
 And have my say before the meds resume
 That mind-subduing rhythm that puts paid
 To ordered thought as all the fixtures fade.

I told the interviewer it was not
 At all my comfort-zone, that age-old wheeze
 Of us philosophers to grab the spot-
 Lit death-appointed role, like Socrates,
 And give ourselves star billing in a plot
 Where life's whole purpose is to have us squeeze
 Some late-won wisdom into that last scene
 So 'dying' spells whatever 'life' might mean.

If there's some truth in that then it's a skewed
 And partial truth, one nurtured by the cult
 Of death that's always shaped their attitude
 To life, those warped idealists who'd exult
 (Like Plato) in the moments that conclude
 Our mortal lives and serve to catapult
 Our souls, thus purified, straight off to some
 Up-market precinct of Elysium.

2

Brought face-to-face with it I tend to think
 Back more to that remark of Wittgenstein's

That 'death's not an event in life', and link
 It with the growing sense I have that mine's
 A life lived always somehow on the brink
 Of death, yet always open to the signs
 That finitude, could we but learn to live
 Each moment, might have life enough to give.

Yet 'learning to live, finally's the kind
 Of wishful denouement that never caps
 A true life-story, never comes to bind
 All its loose ends together, close the gaps,
 Or show how, at life's limit, we may find
 Hints of survivance there in every lapse
 Of mortal time alive to what affords
 Us scope for future actions, thoughts, or words.

Read it again, that sentence, and remark
 The turns, twists, double negatives, and all
 The signs of thinking suddenly gone dark
 With what we adepts may too glibly call
 An aporia, warding off its stark
 Insistence that world's-end must soon befall
 My life-world though hope mitigates the fear
 As foreknown future yields to *l'avenir*.

It's the same root dilemma swings me back
 And forth between the thought of readers fit
 (Though no doubt few) who'll remedy the lack
 Of uptake now and, when the downswings hit,
 That melancholy thought of how Jean-Jacques
 Was self-deceived in thinking he'd acquit
 Himself more admirably in the eyes
 Of readers than in living, breathing guise.

3

At worst I think my texts will go unread,
Rate just a passing footnote, or survive
Only in fusty archives where the dead
Bury their dead and everything that I've
Thought, written and (yes!) lived will then be said
To date me way back past the realm of live
Debate. Such the misgivings that invade
My day-wake nights with their encroaching shade.

Yet times there are when I'm prepared to bet
That there'll be future readers who'll surpass
My present-best interpreters, who'll set
New standards of fidelity, outclass
All previous exegetes, and thereby let
My thoughts find utterance 'not as through a glass
Darkly', but in the fine prismatic light
Cast text-on-text as hues refract from white.

Both outlooks far from likely, I confess,
And no doubt psycho-tropically induced
Or brought on by the unremitting stress
Of chemo. Yet the double-demon loosed
On my depleted state was none the less
An old familiar, one that haunted Proust,
Rousseau, and Plato: how the poison/cure
Of writing turns a blessing to endure.

No question, it's the filament that's run
Like Ariadne's thread throughout the maze
Of all my Thesean travails, all I've done
Of good or ill, my very works and days,
Till now, at last, I find the tale I've spun
Somehow prefiguring this last malaise

And asking by what destinerrant quirk
Of geno-script 'the life' became 'the work'.

4

Had Jackie known what Jacques would have to tell
Of this my *avenir*, who might surmise
Which path he'd take, which choice of ways to sell
His boyhood soul: Algerian sea and skies,
Or off to Paris with the living hell
Of war 'at home' to bear and native ties
Tight stretched, yet every chance to have his views,
Though hedged and nuanced, count as major news.

I share their wonderment, my folk who name
Me 'Jackie' still, who greet each lecture-trip
Or latest book as my move in a game
Of some exotic kind, and who can strip
Me momentarily of any thought that fame
Thus come by might have gained me membership
In that high culture – France or academe –
So long the raw provincial's distant dream.

I feel it still, like Camus, how they reach
Across the years, those scenes and sounds of my
Algerian youth, the simple truths they teach
Of humankind and nature, though I'd ply
My myth-debunking trade in every breach
Of sense where history's lesson may defy
The zealot's bid to hold them firm in place
And keep the deconstructor off their case.

Still it was not ambition but desire
For truth, for clarity, for ways to fend
Off false appeals to nature that conspire

With 'human-nature' talk and recommend
 We set our hopes and purposes no higher
 Than Hobbes's bar – that's in the end what took
 Him off, your clever Jackie Nose-in-Book!

5

'Each time unique, the world's end'. So I wrote,
 And say again: each death an end 'unique',
 Though all lives stretch toward its asymptote,
 Since any truth that mortal knowers speak
 Finds voice just on condition they devote
 Their lives to what authentic thinkers seek,
 For Socrates the wise man's final breath,
 For Heidegger their being-unto-death.

And yet 'the world's end'? True enough that I'll
 Not be around to see it all unfurled,
 The wondrous passing show that lasted while
 My consciousness endured, the whole life-world
 I once, like Husserl, strove to reconcile
 With that poor thing the cogito, close-curved
 Somewhere within Descartes' pineal gland
 As life proliferates on every hand.

Who but his heirs, the slaves of solitude
 Close-quartered in their studies – who but those
 With life-world so deprived could so delude
 Themselves as more than briefly to suppose
 My phrase 'the world's end' one on which to brood,
 Like Wittgenstein, as if it might disclose
 What death reveals to solipsists alone:
 A truth that can't be said but only shown.

I think of Valéry: 'il faut tenter

De vivre!', an injunction that negates
 All facile negatives, insists we stay
 On life's side though his phrasing implicates
 The contrary desire, and has us weigh
 Death's agency in script against the dates,
 Names, facts, and living truths that will outlast,
 From Celan's hand, mere tokens of time past.

6

I say it still, when asked: they fail to read
 The affirmation there on every page
 I've written, there whenever thinking's freed
 From unperceived constraints, and at each stage
 Of deconstruction's strategy to lead
 Us through and out beyond the tutelage
 Of that death-spooked affront to life that tells
 How writing must betray the truth it spells.

That affirmation rings in every word
 Of Molly Bloom's soliloquy, the 'yes'
 That's also there, discreetly, to be heard
 In Austin's artful guide to how we bless,
 Name, promise, vow, forgive, or have conferred
 On us, by sheer performative largesse,
 A life redeemed as speech-acts take their cue
 From living script: conserve yet make anew!

I told my interviewers: don't expect
 Socratic counsel, wisdom late acquired,
 Nor – speak it plain – some laggard show of *echt*-
 Authentic insight Heidegger-inspired
 But tainted by long failure to detect
 Thought's treachery in taking what's desired
Pro tempore for that which plumbs the deep

And brings up etymons got on the cheap.

Expect, instead, this last response to their
Fixed habits of misprision, those who choose
To call me nihilist and thereby spare
Themselves the task of thinking that accrues,
While life goes on, to others who yet dare
Affirm once more how much they stand to lose
Of the time left them should it not give scope
For past survivance late renewed in hope.

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