

POETS, POSTSTRUCTURALISTS, AND THE NUMINOUS

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There are broadly speaking two possible points of view concerning the relation of language to the numinous; that it can, if with difficulty, be truly indicated; and that any attempts to speak of it will be ineffectual, and perhaps self-deluding.

Variations of the second position can be found in a number of linguist-philosophers and critical theorists. Jacques Lacan, for example, is rightly described as thinking that "the quest for the pristine, word-free structures of thought ... is frivolous".¹ In contrast to his master, Freud, Lacan's concept of language is not of a semi-transparent veil through which the real may be discerned, however dimly, but of a medium by which the very idea of truth itself undergoes a continual reformation. When we recall that this language is - in Lacan's description of it - pervaded at every point by desire which can neither be satisfied nor openly declared, it is clear that 'numinous', far from naming that which is truly extra-ordinary, can be nothing more than a disguised wish given transcendental status.

A representative of the opposite camp, Georges Bataille, musing on some connections between romanticism and religion, writes:

Literature, connected since romanticism with the decadence of religion in that it tends to lay a discreet claim to the heritage of religion, is not so much cognate with the content of religion as it is with the content of mysticism which, incidentally, is an almost asocial aspect of religion. Similarly, mysticism is closer to the truth than I can possibly say. By mysticism I do not mean those systems of thought on which this vague name is conferred. I refer, rather, to the 'mystical experience' to those 'mystical states' experienced in solitude. In these states we see a different truth to that which is concerned with the perception of objects, or indeed of the subject, connected, as it is, with the intellectual consequences of perception. But this is not a formal truth. Coherent discussion cannot account for it. It would be incommunicable if we could not approach it in two

ways: through poetry and through the description of those conditions by which one arrives at these states.²

I would like for a moment to focus on the last part of this excerpt. There, Bataille does two things: he credits the veracity of what he calls 'the mystical experience'; and he assumes that such experiences are communicable, by way of poetry, or through "the description of those conditions by which one arrives at these states". Not in terms of "coherent discussion", that is to say.

Both versions of human consciousness in its relation to what seems to lie beyond the merely human are defined by an idea of language which each presumes to be true. But Lacan and Bataille, in their 'phrasing' of that relation, in presenting that presumption as self-evident, reverse each other's grammar. Those of Bataille's persuasion believe that what he calls 'the mystical', and I shall call 'the numinous' or 'the divine',³ supercedes rationalizing expression - 'coherent discussion'. While those who incline Lacan's way will see such notions as 'the mystical' or 'the numinous' as being contained by language - inscribed within it completely, and allowed a patina of mystification only by the dissembling operations of desire.

I want eventually to depart from this sceptical post-structuralist turn which I have used Lacan to typify,⁴ and make two proposals. At the last, that certain post-structuralist approaches, in particular Derrida's, may indeed be made to operate as "descriptions of the conditions by which one arrives at mystical or numinous states" - though 'pre-conditions' would perhaps be more accurate, prologues to what is hardly to be admitted as possible within the terms of their own arguments. I will also outline, before arriving at that point, some of the quite different ways in which certain poet-metaphysicians, for want of a better phrase, also move one towards an intimation of what an experience of the numinous would be like.

My aim in general is to argue that there are important points of connection between the attention given to the numinous by a certain type of poet, and Derrida's post-structuralist explanations, whose appeal is ultimately to the conceptual, even though he uses reason against itself in a kind of ju-jitsu whereby the pretension of intellect to comprehensive knowledge is wrestled to a stand-still.

Perhaps it can be granted, from our post-Kantian, post-New Criticism perspective, that both positions, as a living Adept describes it,⁵ do compel a presumption of (or about) Being. Given that such a presumption must be made, there is a crucial difference between one

who works with binary oppositions in order to question the ultimate validity of the way of thinking they represent - Derrida's position, as I read him - and those who try to find ways to dispense with binariness altogether - my poet-metaphysicians, as I shall take them.

At this first mention of this group of poets, it will be useful to distinguish several positions among them. For all their differences, what they hold in common is an impulse to turn language from binariness (preferring 'binary' to 'dualistic' when the focus is on language rather than the experience it represents), and a refusal of that grounding in logic at which Bataille hints. Their appeal, also - though Bataille does not quite make this point - is fundamentally to the affective, a veneration of that which joins with its objects of contemplation, dissolving boundaries. This faculty they hold to be inimical to reason, which, they think, achieves decisiveness by installing separateness in human consciousness.

In some, though, the circumventing of conceptual mind goes no further than a movement back to sheer, thoughtless, perception - Blake's 'cleansing' of the doors of perception, for instance, or Keats' cry for a life of 'sensations rather than thoughts'. But there are others - sometimes they are the same apostles of perception in a different mood - the Keats who in the 'Ode to a Grecian Urn' invites the urn to 'Pipe to the spirit, ditties of no tone', for example - who invoke an awareness which is prior even to perceptual mind.

Such poets - I will give several examples shortly - at such times, tend not to embark upon the visionary voyage 'inward', or at least not to remain satisfied with it - as Blake is satisfied, in his prophetic books - because such a journeying appears to them to be a return to a disguised version of the dualism enshrined in rationalist explanations, in which the seeker remains forever divorced from what is sought, as signifier is from signified, grammatical subject from its object, and original meaning from descriptions of it.

Having in effect just characterized Wordsworth's revulsion at the idea of 'murdering to dissect' - feeling, for him, being a value because it tends to dissolve dualities, and reason a dubious thing because it tends to establish differences as though they were irrefutable principles - I want to consider a passage from *The Prelude*, as an example of the way in which he tries to bring binaries together, making them register affectively as though they were actually one:

for I would walk alone,

Under the quiet stars, and at that time
 Have felt whate'er there is of power in sound
 To breathe an elevated mood, by form
 Or image unprofaned, and I would stand,
 If the night blackened with a coming storm,
 Beneath some rock, listening to notes that are
 The ghostly language of the ancient earth,
 Or make their dim abode in distant winds.
 Thence did I drink the visionary power;
 And deem not profitless those fleeting moods
 Of shadowy exultation; not for this,
 That they are kindred to our purer mind
 And intellectual life; but that the soul,
 Remembering how she felt, but what she felt
 Remembering not, retains an obscure sense
 Of possible sublimity, whereto
 With growing faculties still growing, feeling still
 That whatever point they gain, they yet
 Have something to pursue.

(Bk 11, pp.302-22)

I want to focus upon a series of connected phrases in this passage by which Wordsworth makes fainter the denotative boundaries of the language he uses: 'elevated' 'unprofaned', 'shadowy exultation' 'possible sublimity' and 'aspire'. Wordsworth's 'real time' situation is that of a seeker submerged by what he wants to admire. He stands "under the ... stars", and also "beneath some rock". He is not only separated from these significant parts of the world to which he is trying to relate, but is quite dominated by them. However, he turns this position of (topographical and existential) inferiority around, by moving the reader between a series of concepts whose nuances modify, and even cancel, their denotations. To run through these shifts in sense more rapidly than Wordsworth allows in his verse: 'elevated' signifies 'morally or intellectually on a higher plane', but also 'raised above the ground or other surface'; 'profane' signifies 'impure, defiled', but also 'debased'; and 'debased' signifies 'to lower in status, esteem, quality or character'; (it also invokes 'profound', I think, signifying 'coming from or situated at, a depth'); 'exultation' signifies 'to leap for joy' (L *exultare* 'to leap up'); and 'sublime' signifies 'lofty, great or exalted in thought', and also 'to elevate', from L *sub* - under, up to + *limen* - threshold, "under, up to (the) threshold".

Wordsworth's topos, spiritually speaking, is thus displaced from the inferior location he provides for himself in his report of where he stands. (It was Shelley who typified this initial place of recognition as "something wrong about us, as we stand"). He tells us that as a seeker for union, he is separated from the great things he contemplates. That is how the verse works denotatively - as a placement of the speaker's apparent life. But the connotative play his verse sets in train, 'what it tells' us, subconsciously, is another story. It tells us that down may be up, and is indeed on the point of becoming so; that the very moment of standing lowered (or 'debased', or 'profaned'), is also the moment of being 'exalted', or 'elevated'. So that, to be 'profound' is also, in terms of the way one is made to feel about what is said, paradoxically to find oneself "coming up from a depth" (an 'inferior' position). To stand under the stars adoring, is by that fact to be raised up into spiritual conjunction with them: to be 'sub-limed'.

Wordsworth's 'argument' for the possible non-duality of experience (he speaks only of a "possible sublimity"), that is to say, is directed towards winning a subliminal assent from the reader. And this is attempted by connotative play which transgresses several basic, rational "givens" - up/down = good/bad.⁶

I have begun to consider some types of poetry as communications made direct to the feeling centre, which are, also, denials of the mastery of conceptual mind. In itself this is hardly a new position for critics of literature to take, insofar as criticism, especially by poets themselves from Wordsworth and Shelley to Houseman to Stevens to the Beats and beyond, has tended to see human well-being, no less, disturbed by a war which rages between two antagonistic modes of consciousness, represented by intellect and feeling. I am not sure, even so, that what is actually experienced in the poetry itself as an unutterable schism, has been sufficiently noted, nor that its implications for the place of the poet in society, and his or her version of what society might be, are often given their due weight. In any case, my interest is not so much with those battle lines which poets have been inclined to draw up, but with those places where they try to step across them.

In T.S. Eliot one finds a poet much more overtly aware than Wordsworth of the need to heal those divisions - between thought and feeling, man and society, human and divine - which seem to be re-established by his every attempt to make sense of his existence. *Four Quartets*, in particular, as well as deserving to be read as one of the early Modernist ur-texts, sets up a commentary on its own attempt to

'purify the language of the tribe' which ought to be read as post-modernist, I suggest. But it also faces in another, more venerable direction, looking back to a tradition in English metaphysical poetry,⁷ in which consciousness expressed as feeling situates itself over against the numinous, sometimes as erotic or bodily play. (In Eliot's case the eroticism is treated negatively, or suppressed.)

Both of these perspectives - the post-modernist and the 'metaphysical', converge in Eliot's meditations upon the language by which he must struggle to convey his sense of a pre-linguistic, or supra-linguistic state. The following passage, for example - from Section V, of 'East Coker' - goes much further than lamenting the poor fit language makes with that timeless sense he has tried to articulate. For Eliot tells us both that language is useless in trying to convey anything worth reporting, and that anything he might manage to say well can be recognized by that fact as not worth saying at all. No better ducking-stool was ever made by poet for himself:

and every attempt
 Is a wholly new start, and a different kind of failure.
 Because one has only learnt to get the better of words
 For the thing one no longer has to say, or the way in which
 One is no longer disposed to say it. And so each venture
 Is a new beginning, a raid on the inarticulate
 With shabby equipment always deteriorating
 In the general mess of imprecision of feeling,
 Undisciplined squads of emotion.

What I am calling a 'post-modernist' despair (which emerges particularly here in a distaste for affective messiness) in Eliot is clearer in this particular passage than the other facet I have mentioned, his sensitivity to a realm - for him, a domain of signification, rather than 'pure' existence, I think - beyond language. This second aspect is given more prominence, though, in another meditation on language earlier in the poem - Section V of 'Burnt Norton':

Words move, music moves
 Only in time; but that which is only living
 Can only die. Words, after speech, reach
 Into the silence. Only by the form, the pattern,
 Can words or music reach
 The stillness, as a Chinese jar still

Moves perpetually in its stillness.
 Not the stillness of the violin, while the note lasts,
 Not that only, but the co-existence,
 Or say that the end precedes the beginning,
 And the end and the beginning were always there
 Before the beginning and after the end.
 And all is always now. Words strain,
 Crack and sometimes break, under the burden,
 Under the tension, slip, slide, perish,
 Decay with imprecision, will not stay in place,
 Will not stay still.

There is a distress at language itself here, certainly. But this is, too, a description of what words may accomplish, after they are done with one, or after one has done noticing what they fail to perform.

They may, Eliot thinks, indicate: a "stillness" beyond post-modernist self-containment, which he (later in the same passage) equates both with timelessness and with love. We might note in passing Eliot's debt to Keats in this matter - especially the hardly accidental connection, given Eliot's praise of that poet in his essay 'Shelley and Keats',⁸ of the "unheard music" of the first part of 'Burnt Norton' with Keats' "ditties with no tone" in the 'Ode on a Grecian Urn'. Keats' appeal to the Urn to 'speak' silently a non-linguistic truth, is of course made verbally - it 'sounds', from within his poem and in the reader's head - and it is this troublesome division between the speaker and his art which is the 'deep' subject both of Keats' 'Ode', and, I suggest, *Four Quartets*, one which both poets try to resolve by proposing that very dividedness as the subject of their meditation.

But I am also suggesting that Eliot's dis-ease in the presence of his own speaking, and his dissatisfaction at the entire conceptualizing mode, are framed by another more venerable idea of what language might accomplish. It is the idea that the marking of a limit also necessarily suggests a 'beyond' to the line one draws, a substantial formlessness sketched in (or 'echoed' in, since both Keats and Eliot use the idea of a soundless sound) by those very boundaries which seem to establish an ultimate separation between things. Eliot's Chinese jar suggests an ultimately significant something beyond itself, precisely because it finishes; or, because it finishes precisely.

Just as Wordsworth never entirely leaves behind the division between mind and nature, body and spirit, and the two functions or types of mind (represented by 'first vision', and 'philosophic mind')⁹

which provide the goad to his meditation upon the numinous, Eliot's fitful vision is associated with an inwardness which tends to disregard or even despise the physical, and establish consciousness at its most sublime as a kind of semi-spectral, bodiless feeling state.¹⁰ As such, it re-inscribes another version of the duality I have been considering, one in which visionary fascination with inner states produces a kind of divorce from the body.

This type of address to the numinous, in which a kernel of god-awareness is held in mind like a jewel in a casket, is a feature of most metaphysical and religious traditions, and I offer an example from a section of Robert Bly's book *News of the Universe: poems of twofold consciousness* (San Francisco: Sierra Club Books, 1980). In my view, the first of the two poems I quote from this section, by Kabir, the 15th century Indian poet, does not achieve the non-dualism of which Bly speaks in his introduction, but seems rather to reinscribe the kind of dividedness it tries to speak against:

The Clay Jug

Inside this clay jug there are canyons and pine mountains,
and the maker of canyons and pine mountains!
All seven oceans are inside, and hundreds of millions of stars.
The acid that tests gold is there, and the one who judges
jewels.
And the music from the strings that no one touches, and the
source of all water.

If you want the truth, I will tell you the truth:
Friend, listen: the God whom I love is inside.

Perhaps the most striking thing about this, and the poems which follow, compared with the Eliot and Wordsworth passages, is its simplicity and directness. For Kabir, language evidently is no opaque addition to the world, a grafting-on which never quite 'takes', but as much a given of his experience as a clay jug or pine mountains.

A second thing about this poem which also characterizes each of those I will instance from this point: it takes it as read that it is the way in which personality is presented which provides a key to the mysterious connectedness of which it speaks. This is true of all the truly non-dualistic poems I have encountered: their speakers all

presume that personality, the locus of dilemma for the post-modernist, even in its deceptive appearances, can be stated plainly; that there is no need for one aspect of the post-modern 'turn', which is to say, the production of a rhetoric which will track mimetically the strategies of self as it tries to seize substantiality by its own cleverness.

Kabir's poem, in contrast - and it seems to me to be true of many which try to capture in words an experience of what I have been calling the numinous - does finally re-instate divisions between an (object) world which is the product of the divine, and an inner experience which gives that world its genesis and value. Everything, in the end of this poem and therefore through all the moments which may be imagined to precede it, is tied up around this in-forming presence, this inwardly contained token of divinity: "the God whom I love is inside".

According to the poet-metaphysicians to whom I now turn, it is precisely such a separation, however minimal, sublimed, or redolent with the backwash of the Other, which must always limit one's coherence with the numinous, however astonishing the vision of completeness, however close one feels oneself to the extraordinary. Even to come brilliantly near, for these writers, is still, always, never to be near enough. (The third Ch'an patriarch put the the essence of this matter well: "Make a hairsbreadth difference and heaven and earth are set apart").¹¹

In the poem which follows, however, - 'Fish' - by the contemporary Zen Buddhist Shinkichi Takahashi, there does seem to me to be a resolution of dualisms, which, as I have already suggested, is based upon a play with the idea of personality. By the poem's end, the writer's feeling of selfhood as separate from the world's 'selvings', has been so undermined that a conclusion which might previously have seemed no more than whimsical or bizarre, is felt as an amazing obviousness which one had, unaccountably, overlooked:

I hold a newspaper, reading.
Suddenly my hands become cow ears.
They turn into Pusan, the South Korean port.

Lying on a mat
Spread on the bankside stones,
I fell asleep.
But a willow leaf, breeze stirred,
Brushed my ear.

I remained just as I was,
Near the murmurous water.

When young there was a girl
Who became a fish for me.
Whenever I wanted fish
Broiled in salt, I'd summon her.
She'd get down on her stomach
To be sun-cooked on the stones.
And she was always ready!

Alas, she no longer comes to me.
An old benighted drake,
I hobble homeward.
But look, my drake feet become horse hoofs!
Now they drop off
And, stretching marvellously
Become the tracks of the Tokaido Railway Line.

It is notable that the poem which follows this in Bly's collection 'Snail' by the same poet, in which the same point of view is attempted, is not as successful as 'Fish', because - I think - it uses a third person narration. Somehow, it is an understanding of the ego-'i, that apparent centre in which all distinctions arise, which has to be re-arranged before the desired sense of oneness may 'bleed through'.

At the conclusion of 'Fish', Takahashi introduces the ultimate threat to this self sense - death - in the gentler guise of decrepitude, only to bury that in a humourous statement of the ultimate identity of capriciously appearing particulars. Drake's feet equals horse hooves equals a railway line equals - anything else whatsoever which pops up, obviously. Only laughter is appropriate; relief from the ordinary clench of self at something momentous which Takahashi has made seem so ordinarily plausible.

In the following poems, from Da Free John's collection *Crazy Da Must Sing, Inclined to His Weaker Side* (Clearlake, California: The Dawn Horse Press, 1982) this equality of things arising, including the self-sense in the numinous and as one of its manifestations, is even more compellingly conveyed. It is accomplished, as it is in Takahashi's poem, because the writer insists upon the fullness of the personal, before going on to proclaim that all things are, equally, Other as well as oneself. The self-sense is not denied, that it is to say, as it may tend

to be in Buddhist and Advaitic practice alike,¹² - not to mention Eliot's poetry, which has behind it his doctrine of the impersonality of the poet - but proclaimed as one among a series of arising forms, each of which may be re-cognized as an expression of the Real, each of them at once immanent and transcendent.

For one speaking from this position, maya (forms as illusory) has no meaning except as appearances presenting themselves to a limited point of view. And even these forms of dualistic perceiving are understood as forms in Consciousness, all of which are to be permitted; understood; but not seized upon. For such a speaker, terminology shifts irretrievably from the 'coherent'.

For example - and crucially - it will be both true and not true that 'samsara and nirvana are the same': true for the one who speaks from that realized 'existence-place',¹³ but not true for one who has not yet realized that state. That is to say, 'samsara and nirvana are the same' cannot be brought to pass by fiat, neither by linguistic strategy - language in utterance - nor by thought - language privately rehearsed.¹⁴ Indeed, the thinking and speaking of such philosophies is one of the principal ways in which one may prevent the admission into ordinary awareness of one's always present grounding in the numinous:¹⁵

#11

I stand before you in all my forms.
Do not expect me to appear in
just one light.
To understand the differences is not
to stupefy the world.
It is to know that the world is
conscious.

As you see,
I do not hesitate to become
anything.
One who understands
enjoys my fearlessness.
He grasps the humor of this present state.
He is the organ of my sighs.

#3

I don't care anymore

to keep silent about it.
 I have never been born or
 died, but I have been
 conscious of you without
 interruption, always.
 You are my own form.
 All of this is my own form.
 I tell you unequivocally,
 all of this is my own form.
 There is only one experience,
 one event. Creation is one
 thing, one form.
 It is my own, and your
 mind is a shattering
 of light by which I see you.

These two aspects, an undoing of the self sense, and a humour or play in realization, are characteristic of many evocations of this state, in which an all-pervading presence is gathered into consciousness. In some way which cannot be described as completely as it may be experienced, the merely human is felt to have always also been that transcendent Other which was previously read off from the world as separate from it, or to stand over against it. To underline these points of difference between 'metaphysical' poetry of this sort, and that of poets such as Kabir: neither of these things - humour,¹⁶ and conclusive dissolution of the boundaries of self - seems to mark the great mystic poets, insofar as their journey is presented repeatedly in terms of a quest without resolution in human terms. Inspiring though they may be, lightness of touch in respect of their sense of themselves is not a notable feature of Henry Vaughan's writings, nor, to take one other example which is typical in its way of this kind of extraordinariness, in St. John of the Cross.

The divisions between self and not-self, too, in the work of such writers, rather than being dissolved, seem to be re-inforced by a general placement of attention upon the inward, visionary, journey,¹⁷ and, even, by the very insistence upon the relative greatness of whatever is pictured as exceeding the merely human.

I come to my argument for the value of certain post-structuralist writings by way of this notion of humour, which I read as having important points in common with post-structuralist play. I want to suggest that such critical writings, somewhat in the manner of a secular

spiritual exercise, can bring one to the point at which the ordinary self-sense is, at least, made ripe for dissolution. In doing so, I have as my point of departure an essay in which the writer, David Loy, with unusual erudition and sympathy, argues that Derrida, in particular, takes only the first two of three steps completed in Madhyamika Buddhism in dissolving one's disturbed dependence upon self-presence.¹⁸

In David Loy's view, the end-point of Derrida's discourse against logocentrism remains bound to the limitation it argues against, insofar as it is still "inscribed within an endless recirculation of concepts, even if (Derrida does) not grasp at the ones that are supposed to bring Being into our grasp." Thus, according to Loy, insofar as we lend ourselves to Derrida's deconstruction, we:

still retain a self-existing ground of our own (language as a whole) which is therefore anxious about its feared lack-of-ground, because the relation between language thought and the rest of the still-objectified universe remains unresolved and unresolvable in this fashion.

The key elements of this critique are the idea that Derrida's discourse always returns one to an "endless recirculation of concepts"; which in turn sets up an anxiety about realization (or liberation, or enlightenment); which in its turn guarantees that this realization will not occur. (There is a third proposition in Loy's argument, which is that Madhyamika Buddhism is more conducive than Derrida's to a "deconstruction of self-existence", and therefore to liberation from false identification with the egoic or self-sense. I am not concerned here to try to consider the relative merits of a Madhyamika deconstruction against the Derridaean model - if I were, I should probably agree that the Buddhist practice is the more profound. Rather, I am arguing for the value of Derrida's criticism in itself.)

It seems to me that Derrida can be taken in a way which is almost the reverse of Loy's reading of him. I mean that, far from returning the reader to an endlessly recirculating conceptual series which exacerbates the desire for a significant resting-place, even as it creates the anxious knowledge that such a place of rest is impossible, Derrida's work can promote a peculiar openness, the charged sense of an unspeakable immanence always about to come over into language; an expectation, consequent upon the exhaustion of trust in language, and similar in its mood to Simone Weil's 'waiting'. I am aware that what I

am now saying will appear in some quarters as outright heresy - and I suspect, were he to be asked, that this might also be the response of Derrida himself. Fortunately, Derrida's insistence in a number of places that his own discourses, like all others, can be construed only insofar as they, too, are deconstructed, provides authority from within his writings to promote this present heterodoxy.

Drawing upon the best known early revisionist of Derrida, Paul de Man, the matter can be put in this way: all texts, according to Derrida, are implicitly deconstructive of their own arguments. De Man adds that those moments at which they most offer themselves for deconstruction will be those where their authors are least able to see that this is what they are about. (Typically, the authors whom Derrida and de Man choose to critique, are those whose modes of discourse undermine their major premises - Rousseau, Saussure, Husserl, and so on.)

What I am suggesting is that Derrida's attack upon the transcendental signified likewise allows back in - indeed, serves - the concept of the numinous (which I do not feel he distinguishes from a 'transcendental signified') by means of the very discourse he unfolds to argue against such a thing. And that he is, as both he and de Man have taught us that one must be, most unaware of this fact (textually, at least) where it is most actively occurring.

This preparation for an always imminent re-entry of the numinous seems to me to be effected in two ways by Derrida. Formally; Derrida sometimes arranges his texts so that they compel the reader to enact the unceasing proliferation of meanings which is (also) one of his principal themes. An obvious example is *Glas*; another, *Nietzsche's Spurs*, in which a commentary by Derrida is laid alongside a text of Nietzsche's, the one moving gradually out of an easy alignment with the other as the two proceed, so that, eventually, the reader becomes acutely aware of his or her part in bringing the two into a meaningful conjunction.

An analogy for the feeling this sets up might be of a film which slips more and more out of 'sync' with its sub-titles, so that, eventually, in order to make sense at all, one would be forced to abandon all idea of relating text and subtitles to a common origin, a 'primal scene' of meaning, and instead concentrate upon reading the subtitles as given moment by moment, in a manufactured accordance with the scene with which they happened to appear, however 'illogical', or 'inappropriate' that co-occurrence might seem. Or, one might prefer to think of this strategy of Derrida's as a pushing of a non-ideogrammatic

language towards the iconic.

Whatever description one finds most helpful, the impact of such arrangements - on this reader, at least - is of a playful, humorous offering to experience of the notion that meaning must be received as a wanton proliferation of forms. And this is not, or at least need not be necessarily, experienced with the kind of anxiety Loy suggests, but, may, at least, induce a relaxation of one's impulse to search for a "non-existent ground" of meaning in language. (If not prakriti experienced as Purusha, then prakriti charged with expectation that Purusha might at any moment also appear).

The second way in which Derrida seems to me to direct one's attention towards the numinous, to embody in his discourse that itch to say something more by the phenomenal than the phenomenal says in itself, is by so arranging his discourse 'over a stretch' that one's expectation of finding a resting place within his language is undermined even as the restlessness itself is produced. Derrida's concepts as he presents them often do not come with a conceptual glue which will hold them together; yet, they give an appearance of cohesion.

For example, in a passage such as the following, taken from 'Differance', one of his seminal articles on deconstruction,¹⁹ there is in effect a reversal of the method we saw in Wordsworth, insofar as Derrida's rhetoric 'scatters' a singleness of interpretation which is apparently offered, into several possible meanings from which the reader must find the sense which best suits her or him.

For us, differance remains a metaphysical name, and all the names that it receives in our language are still, as names, metaphysical. And this is particularly the case when these names state the determination of differance as the difference between presence and the present (Anwescen/Anwescend), and, above all, and is already the case when they state the determination of differance as the difference of Being and beings. "Older" than Being itself, such a differance has no name in our language. But we "already know" that it is unnameable, it is not provisionally so, not because our language has not yet found or received this name, or because we would have to seek it in another language, outside the finite system of our own. It is rather because there is no name for it at all, not even the name of essence or of Being, not even that of "differance," which is not a name, which is not a pure nominal unity, and unceasingly dislocates itself in a chain of differing and deferring substitutions.

There is no name for it; a proposition to be read in its platitude. This unnameable is not an ineffable Being which no name could

approach: God, for example. This unnameable is the play which makes possible nominal effects, the relatively unitary and atomic structures that are called names, the chains of substitutions of names in which, for example, the nominal effect difference is itself enmeshed, carried off, reinscribed, just as a false entry or a false exit is still part of the game, a function of the system.

Derrida argues here against the idea that any Substance, supposed to be ultimately real, has an existence beyond its name. And this, he suggests, holds as much for the name he coins to mark a gap between name and referent - 'difference' - as it does for any other of those names thought in the past to signify this Substance: 'Being', or "God, for example". This is, in essence, in a famous and early form, Derrida's statement of the impossibility of a 'transcendental signified' - of any referent which exists enduringly beyond the play of language, and beyond the human consciousness which uses language to project its conceptual play as 'reality'.

But, at the very moment that he tries to deny the possibility of anything existing beyond a conceptual, linguistically-based play, and by the very same rhetorical move, Derrida invites a return of the transcendent. He says, on the one hand, "That there is not a proper essence of difference at this point, implies that there is neither a Being nor truth of the play of writing such as it engages difference". But also, and equally, "This unnameable is the play which makes possible nominal effects, the relatively unitary and atomic structures which are called names".

By this second statement he establishes a factor, pre-nominal, and constant (since it generates naming, and meanings which are 'relatively' unitary) which feels as though it does possess, 'in-itself', a substantial existence prior to language. He has, I think, re-established in the form of that very word by which he would deny Substance - difference - the sense of a constant prior to expression, one which furthermore gathers to itself the mystique proper to that which exists but cannot be specified.

So that here - going to Bataille, once more - a "pre-existing disposition to play which makes language possible as a unitary structure but which cannot be named", functions, I propose, very much in the manner of those Transcendental Signifieds - 'Being', 'God' and the rest - Derrida has been using this passage to argue against. The rhetorical moves made in this passage deconstruct the proposition it has been set up to argue against, in classic 'blindness and insight', De Manian, fashion.

One might also point out, taking this deconstruction further, that one can hardly have the notion of a 'false exit/entry', which Derrida promotes as indicating the operations of language, without invoking the notion of an entrance and an exit which is true. The very figure Derrida finds to describe the Substanceless, non-transcendent nature of language, that is to say, once again, in his use of this figure of speech, necessarily invokes a feeling for, an idea of, what is true and real.

Derrida in such passages either undermines one's expectation that any such unity can be linguistically achieved by means of the 'formal deconstruction' of the sort he uses in *Glas* or *Nietzsche's Spurs*, or he sets up - willy-nilly - a principle of no-principle in pitching his rhetoric against itself - rhetoric against argument operating as a kind of extended koan - as in the passage from 'Differance'.

This makes in me, not an anxiety in knowing that certainty is impossible, but rather the feeling that a certain amount of important conceptual clutter, even of nonsense, has been shifted aside (compare with Wittgenstein's description of philosophy as "the making of covert nonsense obvious"). To that degree, consciousness itself is clarified.

The effect of this can be to direct the reader to the other side of the ordinary human, a movement of attention which has common ground with descriptions of the numinous given by writers who have tried to celebrate its existence, and away from the universe as a self-enclosed linguistic production. I am suggesting that the deconstructionist moment might not necessarily beat a path to Nietzschean aporia at all, but, if it is permitted to do so, might rather bring us to an ante-room of the sort from which mystics of various types have declared themselves in relation to what lies beyond language.

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1. Malcolm Bowie, 'Jacques Lacan' in J. Sturrock Structuralism and Since: From Levi-Strauss to Derrida (London: Oxford University Press, 1979), p.128.
2. Georges Bataille, Literature and Evil (London: Calder and Boyars, 1973), pp.12-13.
3. 'Numinous' ('Numen' (L) 'a nod of the head' - 'as it were the nod of power of a god') has an etymological development which tracks a point I have wanted to make in this paper: of a

distinction between concepts of the Divine which mark it linguistically and spatially; and those which conceive of it more in terms of a pervading influence which is not precisely thinkable. Thus, numen understood as a spiritual force or influence 'identified with a natural object, phenomenon, or locality' (Webster's Ninth New Collegiate Dictionary) establishes one, polar, attitude to the Divine - as that which must always stand outside the human. Rudolf Otto's later

development of the word in his Idea of the Holy, to designate 'the holy minus its moral factor and without any 'rational' aspect ... (which) can be understood only when there is an existential experience of it' (The Encyclopaedia of Religion, ed. Mircea Eliade (London: MacMillan, 1987, art. 'Numinous'), is closer to those poets I present later in my paper, whose experience of boundaries shifting between the human self and the divine as objectified presence, makes them less inclined to characterize numinousness in terms of place. However, Otto's formulation of divinity in terms of two inseparable, contrasting, elements, the *mysterium tremendum* (that which repels as awe), and *mysterium fascinans* (that which attracts), places him squarely in the company of the dualists. Neither do those scholars who 'have tried to give a completely different orientation to the Latin term by identifying *numen* with a Melanesian word, *mana* ... as meaning an 'autonomous impersonal force', account for the experience of divinity as a Person whose Personality includes oneself, which has been the experience of many writers on the subject, not least those poets I present at the conclusion of this paper.

4. It does seem to me, as I have argued elsewhere ('Circular Ruins: the Logic of Unreason in Education', paper given at the Temasek Symposium Institutions in Cultures, 1991, forthcoming) that a critic who uses a rationalizing discourse to argue that reason is inadequate to truth, or reality, is bound to a paradox which no amount of undermining of one's own *excursus* quite takes care of. Commentaries on Lacan and Derrida, in particular, seem to fall foul of the very operations they attempt to describe in these writers - namely, the endless generation of metalinguistic statements which takes one further away from an original meaning (Lacan), and a 'continual circulation of signifieds which shows that meaning has no foundation

nor epistemological ground' (Loy on Derrida). If I were to write the preceding description of Derrida's work approvingly, how might my own 'continual circulation of signifiers' escape the foundationlessness I describe? If it cannot, then my reader cannot be sure that I am saying something 'foundational' about Derrida. But if I am saying something 'foundational', then what I am saying disproves the very thing for which I approve Derrida - that meaning is, indeed, 'foundationless'. I will, in either event, have produced a version of the paradox of the Cretan Liar, without noticing that I have done so - I mean the one which inscribes on one side of a sheet of paper the statement 'This sentence is false', and writes on the other side, 'This sentence is true'. In this paper, my presumption is that noticing that such a thing is occurring, and locating oneself critically in respect of that noticing - in a sense, embracing the paradox knowingly - can be for the critic a beginning point of realization which corresponds with the more direct methods used by others.

5. Da Free John, 'The Presumption of Being', audiotape, The Johannine Daist Communion, 1983. "The spirit of presumption of the Divine is made on the same basis as we presume that 'I' exists. There is no basis in natural observation for presuming 'I'. If we examine our bodies carefully, we would have to say 'I do not exist'. If scientists were to examine nature thoroughly, and they do, they would have to say 'God does not exist'. On the other hand, you do have a sense of your own existence. And likewise, your intuitive presumption of the Divine is also spontaneous, justified on the basis of a direct realization rather than on the basis of what's happening in Nature."

6. See for example The Prelude, Bk.1, ls.221-237; 294-300, and 'Tintern Abbey' ls.93-102. This passage is by no means unusual, rather it is I suggest an example

of a technique which this poet often uses, a fundamental characteristic of the Wordsworthian style. Which is to say, Wordsworth often switches or reverses differences which are topographically reasonable so as to 'establish', poetically, the interconnectedness of things, and of human consciousness with them - to establish the 'interfusing' Presence of which he often speaks, as fact. Wordsworth needs rhetorical extension to establish this - the flow of the poetry is a seduction away from the conceptual - and this would be a possible defence of what is sometimes considered to be his long-windedness. But other poets work towards a non-dualistic presentation (or a dualism which is somewhat undone) using quite different means. Yeats, for example, in the last stanza of 'Among School Children', presents a figure whose effect depends upon its conciseness, of non-dualistic, non-conceptual knowledge as a feeling dance which is not conceptually self-aware, not 'self-conscious', in the normal sense. I take this as Yeats' best poetic representation of the conclusion he reached in a letter written a week or so before his death: 'When I try to put all into a phrase I say: "Man can embody truth but cannot know it".

7. I have no space to argue this, but I would instance among others Mother Julian of Norwich, some of the poetry of Richard Crashaw and much of that of St. John of the Cross, and, in its way, what John Crowe Ransome has to say about poetry and its relation to the objective world in The World's Body.

8. T.S. Eliot, The Use of Poetry and the Use of Criticism: Studies in the Relation of Criticism to Poetry in England (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1986).

9. Especially in the 'Immortality Ode', where 'First Vision' is enhanced, insofar as its loss is noticed by 'philosophic mind'. A division is inscribed at the point

of valuation of that state in which no divisions existed.

10. An example of Eliot's 'bodiless feeling-state' can be found in the third section of 'Burnt Norton', beginning: 'Only a flicker/Over the strained time-ridden faces', to 'Not here the darkness, in this twittering world'.

11. From the Hsin Hsin Mei of Seng-ts'an, Third Ch'an Patriarch, quoted trans Arthur Waley in J.M. Cohen (ed) The Rider Book of Mystical Verse (London: Rider, 1983), p.160.

12. See Da Free John, Nirvanasara: Radical Transcendentalism and the Introduction of Advaitayana Buddhism (Clearlake, California: Dawn Horse Press), pp.104-113.

13. *Ibid.* p.205.

14. Da Avabhasa, The Method of the Siddhas (Clearlake, California: Dawn Horse Press, 1992) pp.205-6. "Truth is the most radical penetration of this whole event. And only at that moment is there happiness. Until then, every thought - every thought - regardless of its content - is in the form of dilemma. You can be thinking 'ice cream cone', or 'Run, spot, run', and you may imagine, because of the content of your thoughts, particularly if they are 'good' thoughts, that everything is all right. But all thought is in the form of dilemma for one who does not understand".

15. There is a curious correspondence of usage of the phrase 'always already' in Sri Da Avabhasa and in the works of Jacques Derrida. On the face of it, the signifieds towards which the phrases point in each writer's usage, are contradictory - for Sri Da Avabhasa, that Condition of Existence in which we all stand, which precedes language; for Derrida, language conceived as an endlessly signifying limitation on absolute referentiality... But I am not so sure: if, as I argue here, Derrida's discourse also points us, willy-nilly, to a condition prior to language, the two writers might be

drawn to the same phrase by a similar impulse to convey what can be said about Reality, though this motivation might well be denied by Derrida. The gap that remains between the deconstructionist idea of difference, and Da Avabhasa's, will be clear from the following, however: "The Universe is conscious. There is consciousness everywhere. There is only consciousness, and a universal event, a simultaneous reality. The form of consciousness is the enjoyment of the Divine Lord. That relationship is reality. It is consciousness. It is unqualified enjoyment. It is the realized actuality." The Knee of Listening (Clearlake, California: The Dawn Horse Press, 1992), p.184. "In truth, there is the Apparent Other, and no Ultimate Other. Therefore, to Realize the Truth Itself, Which is Happiness Itself, and Freedom Itself, is to be "perfectly" Free of "Difference" (or all conditioned "otherness" and All Ultimate "Otherness" or Every Trace of Separation and Relatedness") The Dawn Horse Testament (Clearlake, California, 1991), p.663.

16. This brings to mind John Berryman's tart comment about the inevitable opposition he saw between hieratic seriousness and playfulness: 'A sense of humour/Is fatal to bardic pretension'.

17. Even for Meister Eckhart, one of those who seems most innocent of the separation between self and world, perfection is removed from the one who seeks it, and presented as a future state: 'Become pure till you neither are nor have either this or that; then you are omnipresent and, being neither this nor that, are all things'. Quoted in The Gospel According to Zen (eds) Robert Sohl and Audrey Carr (New York: New American Library, 1970). Sources: the Eckhart translation by C. de B. Evans and R.B. Blakney.

18. 'Indra's Post-modern Net', paper given at the Temasek Symposium,

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19. Jacques Derrida, Margins of Philosophy (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982).