

metaphysical concept: “I don’t dare say ‘fundamental,’ ‘originary,’ ‘transcendental,’ ‘ontological,’ or ‘infra-structural,’ and I think it has to be avoided” (again, compare Derrida’s “Some Statements and Truisms,” in Carroll’s *The States of “Theory,”* esp. 88–90).

I hesitate to respond further at such remove from my essay, which appeared more than a year ago. Taking my inspiration from Gasché, I argue that Derridean deconstruction is not a method for reading or a domineering institutional project but a kind of thinking at the historico-institutional space or place that we might call the end or closure of philosophy. I refer the interested reader to my *Double Reading: Postmodernism after Deconstruction*, which takes up these subjects in the context of literary criticism, and to Gasché’s *The Tain of the Mirror*.

JEFFREY T. NEALON
Penn State University, University Park

Understanding and Approving of Derrida

To the Editor:

H. R. Swardson’s letter criticizing Jacques Derrida’s fragmentary prose style (Forum, 108 [1993]: 1167) begins with an interesting sentence:

Since I teach English composition and since you saw fit not just to publish but to seek out an article that begins with the following three sentences (Jacques Derrida, “The Other Heading: Memories, Responses, and Responsibilities,” 108 [1993]: 89–93), I would like to know how you (or anybody who understands and approves) would answer the succeeding questions about the second sentence—as asked, say, by students who open *PMLA* knowing that it is the leading journal in a profession they have committed their English education to.

This unsuspecting reader was at first puzzled by the muddle this sentence appeared to present. But closer inspection revealed the veritable phantasmagoria of possible audiences the author had to consider before delivering it whole. Consider that besides Derrida’s translators, the editors of *PMLA*, and perhaps even Derrida himself, these audiences might well include all those readers of the journal who understand and approve of Derrida’s theory and style; who understand and approve of his theory but fail to understand his style, although they approve of it; who understand both his theory and his style and, while approving of the former, take exception to the latter; who approve

of both his theory and his style and understand his style but not his theory; who understand and approve of his theory but neither understand nor approve of his style; who approve of his theory while not understanding it and understand his style while not approving of it; who understand neither his theory nor his style but approve of both; who approve of his theory, condemn his style, and fail to understand either; who thoroughly understand his theory and his style and approve of the latter but persist in disapproving of the former; who although misunderstanding and disapproving of his theory both comprehend and applaud his style; who understand his theory and style but reject both; who understand but disapprove of his theory and approve but miss the point of his style; who understand his theory but not his style and denounce both; who are unable to approve of his theory or to understand it or his style but nevertheless approve of the latter; who misunderstand and disapprove of his theory and inveigh against his style despite understanding it; who scorn both his theory and his style and are totally ignorant of both; and who just don’t like Derrida. And the members of these manifold audiences furthermore might approve of, disapprove of, understand, or fail to understand any or all of Derrida’s translators, editors, critics, and other readers. Need I go on?

Swardson’s sentence is a miracle of clarity.

COILIN OWENS
George Mason University

A Postmodern Elegy

To the Editor:

I was fascinated, even occasionally amazed, by Jahan Ramazani’s recent contribution to the study of contemporary elegy, “‘Daddy, I Have Had to Kill You’: Plath, Rage, and the Modern Elegy” (108 [1993]: 1142–56). Ramazani adeptly analyzes and contextualizes Plath’s significant contributions to the Anglo-American elegiac tradition. I was surprised, however, that in meticulously placing Plath within a distinct literary genre—composed by precursors such as Jonson, Dryden, Swinburne, Yeats, Auden, and Lowell and contemporaries such as Sexton and Rich—Ramazani did not extend the trajectory to include postmodern poets whose elegiac thematics owe a distinct debt to the “harsh ambivalence” of Plath’s own. An example is Eileen Myles, whose “On the Death of Robert Lowell” foregrounds elegiac ambi-

guity, a wry sense of the anxiety of influence, and a canny insight into pop culture (this poem originally appeared in Myles's *A Fresh Young Voice from the Plains* [New York: Power Mad, 1981]; it is reprinted below by permission of the author). In the poem, Myles feigns hatred for the patrician Lowell, a white-haired exemplar of the dominant culture, and for his WASP background. But as she dramatizes the nuanced inward rage characteristic of Plath's "Oedipal antagonism" (Ramazani 1143), a repressed homage is evident beneath the poem's parodic confessionalism.

O, I don't give a shit.
 He was an old white haired man
 Insensate beyond belief and
 Filled with much anxiety about his imagined
 Pain. Not that I'd know
 I hate fucking wasps.
 The guy was a loon.

Signed up for Spring Semester at MacLeans
 A really lush retreat among pines and
 Hippy attendants. Ray Charles also
 Once rested there.
 So did James Taylor . . .
 The famous, as we know, are nuts.
 Take Robert Lowell.
 The old white haired coot.
 Fucking dead. (ellipsis in orig.)

By the final line, the narrator's initial embittered nonchalance ("O, I don't give a shit") has yielded to a melancholy resignation to loss ("Fucking dead"). However ironically, Myles pays tribute to a poet whose passions for sensual description and for biographical lucidity are also her own.

Z. BART THORNTON
The Kinkaid School