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Medievalism: Testing Ground for Historicism(s)? Round table discussion with Peter Haidu, Alexandre Leupin and Eugene Vance

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In 1989, a *New History of French Literature* was published in English, under the banner of Harvard University. Striking in its non-traditional presentation of the canon, it seeks to emphasize historical and cultural aspects of French literature from contemporary critical perspectives. Unconventionally organized, the commentaries still spring from chronologically arranged dates. Yet the issue of historicisms as modes for the examination of texts is side-stepped. The introductory statement addresses the fluidity of national, political, linguistic and textual frontiers for literature and critics today. Peter Haidu (UCLA), Alexandre Leupin (LSU), and Eugene Vance (U of W), medievalists of French, Swiss and American birth respectively underlined this fluidity, as they sat around hi-fidelity recording devices in the French Department *lectorium*, in UCLA's Royce Hall, a 1929 exact, if oversized, replica of the Milanese Romanesque church of Sant'Ambrogio (c. 1100), and addressed the theoretical issue elided, in particular as it illuminates—or confuses—medievalism.

Word processing techniques have progressed over the last eight centuries, nevertheless the editors still faced the all too medieval problematic of transcribing the discourses. How does one not bury the voice?

I

Statements

PETER HAIDU

The challenge is not a one-way street: a post-structural medievalism and historicism challenge each other reciprocally.

"Historicism" designates a variety of methodological vices.¹ Though much criticized, it still exists, and can disguise itself as the *dernier cri* in the pages of *Speculum*.² As that historiography which collocates continuity, teleology, and the operation of a free-standing, independent, self-conscious subjectivity, historicism is not a reliable model for medievalism. Discontinuities repeatedly cut across medieval temporality: barbarian invasions, Christianity, the beginning of vernacular writing, the Black Plague are so many major gashes obviating medieval continuity. Beyond these evenemential discontinuities, there is the crucial epistemological discontinuity imposed by the Renaissance, which rips the hermeneutic connection between the 20th century reader and pre-Renaissance textuality, making a mediated form of analysis such as semiotics the requisite acknowledgment of medieval alterity.³ Teleology is the great gift of the Middle Ages, which gave us the first grand narrative: its teleology of salvation and redemption, transformed into various secular mythologies, is one of the banes of the contemporary intellectual struggle. A contemporary historiography which would restore medievalism to its historical importance will prefer a form of genealogy which acknowledges the interdependence of subject and object. And a free-standing subject, prior to the texts, operating as their source and origin and efficient cause, is a mere will-o'-the-wisp for the medievalist: many of our texts are anonymous, and where a name exists (Chrétien de Troyes, Marie de France, Renaut de Beaujeu), it is an insubstantial label which tells us nothing about the individual, his or her "background," his or her subjectivity, other than what can be gathered from the texts which are to be explained. Even at the end of the Middle Ages, "Christine de Pizan" is little more than her own textual creation; and who believes that a *dossier judiciaire* such as accompanies the name "François Villon" gives us privileged entry into a realm of subjectivity prior to his texts? The kind of secondary documentation that feeds traditional literary history by allowing the scholar to elaborate the figure of the poet or writer apart from his or her properly literary texts—journals, diaries, reviews, mani-

festoes—are absent from the documentary record. So flimsy is the historical documentation that a case has been made that the authors as well as their creations are fictive constructs. The instance of the individual writer mediating between concrete texts and social structure or historical process, remains an empty slot in the medieval case, incapable of being furnished with the “historically situated authorial consciousness” sought by historicism.⁴ Individual subjectivity in medieval France is a product of the text, not its precondition.

It is not any theoretical objections therefore devolving from contemporary theory that cancels historicism, it is the character of historical documentation itself. It is the epistemological conditions of the discipline which make the medieval case a perfect set-up for post-structuralism, quite aside from the inherent value of the theory. It is post-structuralism, at least in certain of its forms, which most adequately recognizes the historiographical problematics of “reading medieval.” And that is true particularly for those forms of post-structuralism whose ambition is a *historical* reading of medieval textuality, an intellectual effort disregarded by those who inveigh and complain about a supposedly “massive dehistoricization” of literary reading.⁵ All the wailing and complaining emanating from traditionalist positions, whether of literary history or social history, about the limitations of post-structural approaches, cannot change either the gross characteristics of the period, our relation to it, or the character of its historical documentation.

One mode of historicist self-legitimation is particularly misleading. It attempts to counter the modern critiques of empirical knowledge—coming from phenomenology, from the scientific theory of indeterminacy, and the centrality of language argued by (post-) structuralism—with a particular cognitive strategy that claims historical objectivity. It attempts to view the past through a perspective attested in the period in question, thinking thus to avoid the imposition of presentism upon past historical experience. The strategy is deceptive. Past historical societies are not flat, uniform, and cohesive: they are variegated and conflictual, otherwise they would not be historical. All the perspectives attested in a given period of the past are discourses situated within the conflicts of that period. Thus, Robertsonianism imposed a narrowly defined interpretation of the clerical perspective upon the interpretation of secular texts. In doing so, it selected, in the medieval scenes of conflict, the antagonist of the laity which had produced the texts, an antagonist which defined

itself in hostility to the values of that secular world, and specifically its texts. To claim objectivity for this procedure is ridiculous. An overt presentism is preferable to the covert politics of such historicist strategies.

The complaints of traditional historicism regarding the unsettling news of the (post-)structuralist revolution become tiresome: complaints are no substitute for intellectual argument countering the views one dislikes. The appeal to the authority of tradition *per se* can have no intellectual weight, when that is precisely what is in question: such appeals merely run with reactionary times. Nor can the slash and burn rhetoric which reduces the forms of post-structuralism to the clichés of the Sunday supplements, ignoring among other subtleties specifically those efforts made to historicize semiotics and deconstruction. These are the techniques of TV spots in political campaigns, not the dialectics of theoretical discourse. It is regrettable to see members of the left deploy Willie Horton tactics, and to have them sponsored by the Medieval Academy of America.

In spite of these deformations of intellectual discourse, the fundamental tenets of historicism cannot simply be written off. The criticisms of these tenets, entirely justified, do not resolve the issues to which the tenets were a response. The tenets of historicism—continuity, teleology, and subjectivity—mark the sites of problems that are still with us. Discontinuity appears only across the face of continuities, genealogy (which continues to acknowledge the need for history) is partly teleology reversed, and the question of the subject returns to haunt us ineluctably. Instead of the complaints that are the standard fare historicists indulge in, what is required is a renewed exploration of how we can construe the relations of the textual structures to a diegesis which is the near face of “representation” and how we can imagine and theorize the relations of that representation to the represented—recognizing their ineluctable differences as well as their identities. Historical discourse points in two directions simultaneously: the events it purports to describe, and the “generic story form” with which it construes those events as structure or process.⁶ It is the interface between those two faces of history—and of language—that is in question. Is it possible for language, discourse, and text to be sui-referential, self-reflexive, and hence modernist, on the one hand, and on the other, a critical representation of values at work in society, and to function, furthermore, as an agent of historical change, rather than simply as an index to change occurring else-

where? Careful semiotic and deconstructive readings of medieval texts show that both are possible, and simultaneously so. Textuality operates, not as an ideological exemplum or as a mimetic reflector of "social reality", but as a critical actor in the *différends* of its social formation.

Textuality is an institution, and medieval conventionalism institutionalizes textuality with immediate proleptic retroactivity. Medieval text gives itself as repetition, as "re-text," even and especially when it is at its most revolutionary. All invention is immediately "covered" by its own, self-reflexive conventionalization, and offered in the guise of ornamental redundancy and amusement. Meaning cannot simply be "read off" textual surface; decoding the dissimulative text implies a major effort.

This self-reflexivity does not imply the exclusion of the social and the historical. On the contrary, the extraordinary self-reflexivity of medieval textuality is a mode of its social ontology. Chrétien does not settle for inserting the image of the romance in the romance of the *Knight of the lion*, he goes farther, and implicates the romance-writer, at the service of the dominant class, within the representation of its culture, right after having narrated its harsh exploitation of the poor and the defenseless in proto-Marxist terms of surplus value.⁷ Self-reflexivity incorporates social, economic, and political dimensions in its complex mirrorings.

The attitudes of the traditional historicist historian would limit textuality to the mimetic function—Auerbach is still its critical hero. In that respect, it shares the same principles as what, a short while ago, was still referred to as "vulgar Marxism." Contemporary theory takes a more complex view. The diegesis of the text may well incorporate elements of social and political structures (where would those elements come from if not from social reality?), but the text's role is more active than mere reflection. It transforms those elements in profound ways. The figure of Charles, in the *Chanson de Roland*, can hardly be construed as the mimetic image of the kingship to which it is contemporary, especially in the earlier phase of the poem's development. During the reign of Philip I, around 1100, the traditional dating of the Oxford *Roland*, the French Capetians are at the nadir of their power. It is only under his son Louis VIth, that the king will begin to exercise effective suzerainty over his vassals in the Ile-de-France. This "meaning" is not stated in the text, but it is inscribed in the text, which labels Charles both king and emperor. The figure

of Charles represents a transformation of kingship, thanks to its junction with the ideologeme of Carolingian mythology and the seme of "empire." In mimetic terms, as a representation of a supposed "reality," the text lies outrageously, and is as factitious as it is fictitious. But is the figure of Charles to be accounted as having no effectivity in the realm of politics, which will see effective kingship develop to the point where the bases of the nation-state can be laid a hundred years or so after 1100, under Philip Augustus? Or should we leave open the possibility that the text, already characterized as transformative of the elements given by its encoding, may also be performative in its socio-historical insertion?

As distinguished from the superficial skirmishes to which the opposition of history and post-structuralism has given rise, the careful study of the medieval text as simultaneously structural and historical, may serve to dispell some of the false dichotomies which beset knowledge. One does not examine the forms and structures of the text first, and then look for its relations to a context. All codes, and all decodings, are historical. The text, medieval and other, is social *ab initio et origo*: textuality is a social fact. The medieval text is social, hence historical, therefore political. It is so in complex and unpredictable ways, and must be read as such, from the opening of the very first page. Its linguistic meanings, its formal organizations, its constitutive structures, are always already social, and historical, and political.

ALEXANDRE LEUPIN

J'aimerais commencer par un plaidoyer *pro domo*. Ce qui m'a toujours étonné dans les rapports et comptes rendus de lecteurs sur mes livres, c'est le reproche d'essentialisme, d'an-historicisme ou d'a-historicité de ce que j'essaye de faire avec la littérature médiévale. Cette critique m'étonne parce que je crois faire un travail qui est historique dans le sens où j'essaye toujours très précisément de déterminer les conditions d'énonciation d'un texte. Ces conditions ne sont pas évidemment dans les faits, dans l'histoire et peut-être dans l'histoire sociale mais elles sont dans un symbolique rhétorique, théologique etc., à partir duquel j'essaye de définir ce qui fait le texte littéraire.

Ceci dit, j'aimerais commencer par développer le problème de l'historicisme chez les historiens eux-mêmes, à partir d'un point extrêmement précis qui est celui de la falsification des documents du

Moyen Age. Ils se plaignent très souvent que les documents sont falsifiés, que les moines trafiquent des reliques etc.: mais cette plainte n'est recevable pour ce qui concerne le Moyen Age qu'à la lumière d'une mentalité positiviste moderne. Pourquoi n'est-elle pas recevable? Parce qu'elle ne tient pas compte de la mentalité symbolique du Moyen Age, pour laquelle il importe de plier les faits à une explication vraie. A cet égard le faux médiéval est symptôme de la vérité et il se rapproche de façon évidente de l'écriture littéraire dans le sens où Jean de Salisbury dit que "les poètes mentent pour dire le vrai." Prenons exemple des Serments de Strasbourg qui sont recueillis dans un unique manuscrit 150 ans après l'événement. Sont-ils authentiques? En fait, la question importe peu parce que leur opération peut se faire comme fiction ou comme document authentique en tant qu'ils promeuvent une nouvelle équation dans la culture: l'équivalence langue/nation. C'est là leur vérité. Sont-ils une sténographie fidèle, positive de l'oralité? Non, ils fondent dans l'écriture, dans une langue dont on a montré le caractère synthétique, une idée de nation tout à fait neuve qui recouvre ce qu'on appelle la *Francia occidentalis*. L'institution du français, comme l'a dit Renée Balibar, se fait par une langue fictive. C'est cela qui importe, plus que la correction pseudo-positive des graphies. Là, je suis très proche de toi, Peter.

Dans ce sens, il faut opérer sur le texte une lecture qui repositionne l'historicisme de 180 degrés. Il ne s'agit pas de constater passivement que les choses ont changé mais de constituer une poétique active des énonciations. L'histoire elle-même relève aussi d'une poétique, comme le dit Edouard Glissant. A un moment l'histoire doit se dire, et ce dire obéira aux contraintes, aux injonctions, aux utopies, aux procédures rhétoriques de son temps. C'est-à-dire que d'un côté, il faut mesurer les effets calculables qu'un dire, une profération, une inscription ont dans l'histoire à un moment donné. Inversement cette poétique du dit historique doit aussi être attentive aux efforts de désinscription qui font la littérature.

Ça m'amène à l'historicisme dans la lecture de la littérature. J'aimerais avancer une proposition: la lecture des textes littéraires a une vocation profonde et toujours recommencée à ancrer ce qui est proprement "littérature" dans un texte, à le ramener à une cause "externe." Je donne ici un exemple qui vous paraîtra peut-être un peu ancien pour montrer combien ce désir d'ancrage est fort. Bédier rabat la *Chanson de Roland* sur les routes de pèlerinage, aussitôt qu'il en

découvre l'autonomie poétique. Même s'il décrit cette profération en termes romantiques (le génie d'un grand poète etc.), sa découverte reste pertinente. Le fait est que cette découverte lui fait horreur et qu'il n'a de cesse qu'il ne l'ait réduite. Cet exemple, qu'on pourrait multiplier, fait symptôme d'une peur: celle de voir le texte littéraire se désinscrire du lieu de son énonciation, se désancrer de l'arrimage du sens. Or, cette peur est précisément ce qui fait rater à l'historicisme la dimension littéraire d'un texte: il y a un reste en littérature, qui est de la nature du déchet, de l'inconscient, de l'irreprésentable, alors que l'historicisme doit toujours travailler avec l'hypothèse d'une totalité représentable. Ce reste fait que tout texte se déplace sans cesse à travers l'histoire et revient nous parler dans notre présent. On peut ramener ce reste à la métaphore lacanienne de la *letter/litter* (déchet) qui est à la fois repérable et non-inscrite, c'est-à-dire, comme il l'écrit, *inter-dite*. D'après moi, c'est ce je-ne-sais-quoi qui donne la seule explication possible au fait que huit siècles après qu'un texte ait été écrit nous le faisons revenir dans notre interprétation et nous nous disputons à propos de son sens. A cet égard, une opération uniquement archéologique me semble être faite pour réduire au silence la part de la littérature.

Il faut aussi bien voir que tous ces discours de gestion et d'interprétation, les nôtres y compris, sont aussi (et tu y as fait allusion, Peter, quand tu as parlé de la problématisation objet-sujet), sont en partie littéraires dans le sens où la part du reste et de l'inconscient joue un rôle crucial chez nous, tout comme chez eux et de façon réitérée: par exemple, dans un discours comme celui des Pères de l'Église, il y a de la littérature, et de la meilleure, qui déjoue le calcul de la gestion idéologique ou interprétative.

Pour repérer où la littérature médiévale se sépare de son lieu d'énonciation, il faut revenir à la conception chrétienne que le Moyen Age se fait de l'histoire, en évitant le double piège de la religiosité mystique qui fait de Dieu la cause première, et du scientisme positiviste qui entend faire du Nouveau Testament encore une version d'un mythe. Ce n'est qu'à ce prix qu'on peut identifier la soustraction qu'opère la littérature par rapport aux déterminations juridiques, économiques, rhétoriques, théologiques qui entendent la gérer. C'est le concept de l'incarnation qui joue là un rôle central en ce sens que l'idée de Dieu cesse d'être une idée éternelle, comme chez les Grecs, pour être liée sans retour au devenir humain et précisément

par là à l'histoire. Même si elle ne le sait pas ou ne veut pas le savoir, notre conception moderne de l'histoire dépend de cette fracture fondamentale dans l'histoire de la pensée. A cet égard, le Moyen Age ne peut être que moderne.

J'ai été très intéressé par un mot dans le sujet qui nous a été proposé, c'est le terme de *testing* qui suppose que nous fassions un *experimentum mentis* au sens galiléen. Nulle théorie ne saurait se passer d'une pratique des textes, et là encore le X, la lettre de l'incarnation, qui est aussi un déchet, doit servir de guide au sens où, au Moyen Age, la littérature, inspirée par le modèle christique, fait poétiquement sa théorie dans sa pratique d'écriture. C'est-à-dire que toute théorie s'incarne, de façon parfois perverse.

J'aimerais proposer comme champ d'expérience les premiers textes en vernaculaire. Ils relèvent de toutes sortes de discours: pièces de résistance pour l'histoire, la critique littéraire, la phonétique historique, la rhétorique etc. Si ces approches restent isolées, elles n'ont aucune chance de saisir le dire de ces textes. La phonétique historique manquera, dans son idéologie sténographique, la nouveauté de la promotion à l'écriture que sont ces vénérables monuments. L'histoire s'aveuglera sur leur dimension d'invention profératoire, en les prenant pour des documents: c'est-à-dire la constatation d'un fait, jamais une profération relevant d'une poétique. La critique littéraire les éternisera dans le Ciel des idées.

Partons de l'événement évangélique: celui-ci suppose que le message s'énonce dans la Babel des langues sans que ses sens en soient altérés. "Ils furent tous emplis par le Saint Esprit et commencèrent à parler en d'autres langues suivant les directives de l'Esprit" écrit saint Paul. Il y a là une langue sans langue, celle du Saint Esprit chez saint Paul, celle de l'extase d'Ostie chez saint Augustin, qui dit, sans la dire, la vérité évangélique. Puis il y a les incarnations de la Babel historique des langues: l'une et l'autre sont indispensables à l'énonciation et à l'écoute du message. Il faut l'histoire pour communiquer, mais il faut aussi l'Autre de l'histoire qui est ici théologiquement l'Esprit.

Les premiers monuments en vernaculaire se placent tous dans l'orbite du texte paulinien. Pour ce qui est des Serments de Strasbourg, la profération poétique et historique de l'équivalence entre langue et nation est une coupure révolutionnaire qui se substitue à toutes les formes de transmission du pouvoir féodal et qui ne prendra son sens

qu'après des siècles d'élaboration. En ce qui concerne la *Séquence de sainte Eulalie*, nous nous trouvons en face d'un effort conscient, poétique et artificiel de donner une écriture à quelque chose qui ne fut pas parlé: une langue latinisante ou même provençalisante selon l'hypothèse fugace de Poirion, qui essaie de recouvrir le maximum de territoire de la *Francia occidentalis*. L'alternance des a/e muets, de la graphie Krist/Christus sont à interpréter non comme des maladresses mais comme le rappel volontaire de la langue liturgique dans l'écriture du vernaculaire. Il y a là une profération d'écriture qui obéit à une poétique d'autant plus raffinée qu'elle se dissimule sous la couverture rhétorique d'une *simplicitas* à la Quintilien. Elle fait semblant d'écrire peuple. *Eu-lalein*: bien écrire dès le départ selon des règles plus esthétiques que phonétiques. A ce propos, je trouve que le titre *Paroles Gelées* est fabuleux parce qu'il s'agit bien de geler la parole mais aussi de la dégeler dans la vie de la lettre sur le papier.

Ce bien écrire dépend aussi d'une coupure et d'une différenciation par rapport au latin. Ce latin est métaphoriquement mâle parce qu'il est la langue du pouvoir et de l'Eglise. On peut ici généraliser: toute inscription nouvelle suppose en fait une désinscription inaugurale, qui est sa condition même d'énonciation. *Eulalie* est à la fois une inscription neuve du texte liturgico-littéraire en vernaculaire et une désinscription par rapport au texte liturgique latin.

Je propose comme deuxième *experimentum mentis* la désinscription dans l'oeuvre de Guillaume IX, premier texte en provençal. Ici la phonétique historique fonctionne dans une double fiction: la première étant le bas-latin, langue inventée par les philologues, ce que Lacan aurait appelé une élucubration du savoir. Je n'en conteste nullement la nécessité, mais elle doit être toujours présentée comme une hypothèse au sens vraiment scientifique du terme: elle est opératoire. Mais la tentation du philologue est de la réifier empiriquement et c'est là que se place la véritable fiction ou l'imaginaire du philologue. La deuxième fiction est que la phonétique historique déduit toujours l'existence de parlars dialectaux réels à partir d'un monument littéraire anachronique. Les manuscrits datent du 13^e et 14^e siècles, cependant elle ne pose jamais la question si ces dialectes ne pourraient pas relever d'un effet rhétorique. En reprenant l'exemple de Guillaume IX, seul, ou à peu près, le comte de Poitiers atteste du "limousin," du "poitevin" etc. Charles Camproux l'a souligné: "la raison de l'emploi de formes empruntées à d'autres parlars que le parler de Poitiers, parler maternel de Guilhem, ne serait-elle pas simplement

une raison de métier poétique? Autrement dit, ne serions-nous pas en présence d'un problème de poétique et de rhétorique?"

Il faut cependant aller plus loin. La notion d'"emprunt" me gêne parce qu'elle repose presque uniquement sur les effets fictionnels calculés par l'écriture des manuscrits. Il faut la remplacer en bonne méthode par celle de fiction dialectisante, qui permet de saisir que les poèmes visent, comme *Eulalie* ou les Serments de Strasbourg avant eux, une aire linguistique de diffusion maximale.

D'autre part, il faut se rappeler qu'aujourd'hui encore, l'assimilation faite par les *vidas* entre Guillaume IX, prince d'Aquitaine parlant poitevin, et le "cuens de Peitieu" n'est qu'une hypothèse invérifiable. C'est ici qu'il faut faire coupure méthodologique par rapport à un certain historicisme. Car même si l'assimilation était historiquement certaine, rien ne nous assurerait que la langue ou le discours d'un poète soient identiques à ceux d'un grand seigneur féodal.

Sans entrer dans le détail, les poèmes mentionnent nombre de villes et de provinces, s'étendant de Montpellier à Niort, du Poitou à l'Anjou, pour exclure la Normandie et la France. Or, ces noms sont à la base des différentes identifications dialectales; le comte de Poitiers écrira en poitevin, en limousin etc. C'est un cercle vicieux méthodologique dans le sens où le monument littéraire est amené à faire preuve documentaire d'une réalité extérieure qui existe à peine, hormis la trace que, prétendument, il en conserve. Il faut ici inverser le problème: l'écrit profère, par ces noms, l'essence de son projet, son adresse poétique, distribuée de la Gascogne à l'Anjou, dans une langue qui est somme artificielle de parlars dialecticaux qui jouent poétiquement entre eux. De plus, "aller à Niort", c'est ne rien dire, "parler poitevin" ou "normand", c'est parler de façon ambiguë, l'Anjou, c'est la terre de la jou-issance (du joy) et de sa perte, etc.: toutes figures qui s'accordent parfaitement à la poétique même du "comte de Peitieu."

Et encore: cette langue artificielle est déterminée par une autre langue. Cette langue, c'est celle du désir, barbarolexie proférée par le pèlerin pour parvenir à la jouissance d'Agnès et d'Ermessen dans le cinquième poème: l'indéchiffrable "barbariol, barbariol, barbarian," sinon à comprendre qu'il est le chiffre même de la jouissance. Cette langue échappe à la fonction de désignation et de représentation: considérée comme "muette" par les deux dames, elle se soustrait donc à tout imaginaire historique. Son interdiction (dite et indicible) est à rapprocher de l'amie invisible et sans être du quatrième poème:

Amigu'ai ieu, no sai qui s'es
 Qu'anc non la vi, si m'ajut fes.

Du désir nous avons des traces mais elles ne peuvent qu'être inadéquates à leur objet absent.

Que conclure de cet exemple, dont je vois bien le caractère limité? Je dirais que nul historicisme ne saurait rendre compte de cette autre langue, ni même et surtout la phonétique soit-disant "historique." Malgré leur légitimité, ces disciplines ne peuvent que s'aveugler sur le caractère déterminant de l'autre langue, par rapport à la manifestation historique, à la trace écrite que sont les poèmes. L'autre langue, déchet de la représentation, reste rétive à toute identification historique, même si cette dernière peut nous permettre de déterminer le lieu où elle vient à manquer.

Il faut remarquer aussi que le "barbariol" échappe à toute tentative de l'arrimer qu'en pourrait produire le discours de l'Incarnation. Non pas parce qu'il est la marque libératrice d'un désir sexuel (ceci cadrerait parfaitement bien avec la relance du désir que produisent les Pères en l'interdisant) mais parce qu'au contraire de l'Incarnation, il ne peut se manifester empiriquement. Ici, le poème du "dreyt rien" prend tout son sens. Ce néant absolu, il faut l'interpréter à la lettre, et non pas comme fiction, jeu, *riddle* purement verbal. La dimension a-chrétienne du poème apparaît alors pleinement. Je dis a-chrétienne pour ne pas le confondre avec l'hérésie. "Et le Verbe fut fait Verbe," tel pourrait être le leitmotif du "dreyt rien." Rien n'est: ni l'être même qui est cause première de la création *ex nihilo*, ni l'Incarnation. Seuls les mots *sont*, hors toute incarnation, hormis celle qu'ils trouvent sur la page du manuscrit, et, dans nos lectures non en tant qu'objet mais comme projet (le texte littéraire est plus qu'un objet—c'est un projet puisqu'il implique toujours un lecteur futur).

C'est pour cela, sans doute, que le comte de Poitiers est contraint d'invoquer, pour l'autorité de son dire, la seule littérature. Rappelez-vous le poème des dés:

Et en traig le vers a auctor.

Je suis le meilleur poète du monde mais la seule chose qui puisse le prouver c'est le vers lui-même.

EUGENE VANCE

I feel like I've been sitting not at a roundtable, but in front of a high-calibre artillery of written texts. I'm going to proceed differ-

ently, and speak about my experiences as a medievalist over the past thirty years as a way of trying to glimpse where I stand now on the problem of historicism, and of asking where we might go, say, in the next ten years.

My initiation as a medievalist began in 1959 at Poitiers, at the wonderfully interdisciplinary Centre d'Etudes Supérieures de Civilisation Médiévale. I was there for a *stage*, and I had not studied the Middle Ages. I had been working, rather, in the English Renaissance, so this was a real baptism. It happened to coincide with the first meeting of the Société Rencesvals, a learned society devoted to Old French Epic. This meeting gathered many of the great living Romance medievalists in one room at one time. Just to mention a few: Ramon Menendez-Pidal was there, but he refused to speak French; Martin de Riquer, Erec Köhler, Pierre Le Gentil, Jean Frappier, René Louis, Italo Siciliano, Aurelio Roncaglia, Maurice Delbouille, Paul Zumthor—all these were there, and I could go on for five minutes. It was incredible for me as an American greenhorn to be in a world which was devoted to one question: the origins of the *Song of Roland*.

The debate was passionate in ways that I rarely see nowadays in contemporary discussions of medieval culture. It was clear that these people were involved in a way that, to me, was mysterious. Now it's a little bit clearer. This was probably the last spectacular event where there was a consensus that the questions and the agenda of philology were still the only important way of making important critical and literary judgments. All agreed that the issue they were going to fight over was the national origins of the *Song of Roland*. At one point, René Louis even chanted something in order to win an argument. I also realized that I had no place in this debate. These were people who had all come through the thirties and forties, who had been trained as philologists searching for an origin as a basis for a national ethos. Although these scholars were being rigorously historical, they were in fact playing out a historiographical episteme whose underpinnings had been blown away by the experiences of the Second World War. By now, the teleology implicit to philology as a historical science had come to be seen by many as a destructive force.

Indeed, it was just at this time that general linguistics was proposing itself as a new master science promising just about everything to all other disciplines. The search in general linguistics was not for historical origins but for universals. It was a movement whose premises included a reaction against many aspects of the philologi-

cal episteme which had been so ideologically important (not just in Germany, but in all the countries of Europe, and even in America) in generating the Second World War.

In France, after this time, philology quickly lost its momentum. Such was not the case in Germany, and especially Italy. In fact, philology in Italy has kept pace intellectually even until now, because the Italians have been more eclectic and assimilative; nor was there in Italy the same radical cleavage that occurred in France with the events of May '68. The mid-sixties saw the proliferation of linguistically based disciplines: not only structural linguistics itself, but structural anthropology, structural semantics, semiotic theory and also psychoanalytical theory, to the extent that Lacan was reading the linguists, Roman Jakobson in particular, in the early sixties. Thus, linguistics was making inroads into psycho-theory as well.

This was a short-lived moment, I think. The structuralist project quickly led into other concerns which were really all centered on problems of discourse. People also began to realize that even these revitalized models of their disciplines were themselves historically determined in some crucial way that was important to understand. For instance, the American semiotician Peirce was best known by the public of his own time as a theologian, and not as a semiotician. He himself understood the theological and scholastic origins of his semiotics, as well as the context in which he was writing and publishing his semiotic theory. But the semioticians who first edited the Peircean corpus did so in a way to neutralize the theological context of Peircean semiotics. This perception led me to a serious question as a medievalist concerned with problems of discourse: should modern semioticians be cutting semiotics off from its rich history? Can semiotics pretend to be a mature science without recognizing and dealing with its own history? This question was especially pertinent to the reception of Greimas as well. Why is his actantial model so powerful? Greimas is a rigorous, scientific man, but one who does not accept the importance of the early history of semiotics underlying his own semiotic models. Nor is he concerned with discussing his own epistemological development. I have discovered this in two debates with him on this question, in 1972 and 1984.

By contrast, I have been gratified, as a medievalist, to observe how the discourse of Freud is being subjected to extraordinary analysis to see how his models came into place. In fact, the best psychoanalytical criticism in our time, in my opinion, is embodied in the search

for its own foundations, for an understanding of the processes by which this discourse constituted itself in the beginning of this century. The best Freudians are now meta-Freudians, who work in ways that are extremely creative. They are willing, moreover, to problematize the psychoanalytical apparatus in its complicated historical relationship to medieval texts. This kind of concern has been fueled by the Lacanians, because they had in Lacan a master for whom Augustinian psychology, semiotics, and models of mind were never indifferent. It's clear, at the same time, that Lacan was only a superficial reader of Augustine. I don't believe he ever read the *De trinitate* seriously. Had he done so, I think his models would have been challenged and transformed at a very early stage.

After the structuralist period, it seemed to me as a medievalist that it was important not to see how Freudian the West might be, but how Western Freud might be; not to see how Lacan had transcended theology, but rather how his own discourse is a laundered theology. So, during the post-structural period, major critical approaches which had considered themselves to be somehow outside of the historical process seemed to me more and more historically and institutionally determined. This was especially the case with deconstruction. There was nothing easier and more natural to me than to see how the claims of modern deconstruction were in fact designating an ongoing cultural crisis which may even to be said to have constituted medieval vernacular literature. And it was very easy for medievalists to see—because medieval texts are ineluctably burdened with a metaphysics of presence—that medieval writers do not fail to grasp, and even to accentuate, the troubled metaphysical dimension of their textuality, in other words, what the deconstructionists were so anxious to ferret out of modern texts. For me, the problem in the seventies was to ask how medieval theories of semiotics, of discourse and of understanding propelled the processes of creation, of propagation and of revision in medieval literary discourse. For this, Augustine has always provided an important matrix in which to work. (I'm getting away from this now, and some people will be glad to know it.) In Augustine, one found not only a provocative theory of the sign and of textuality, but also a useful theory of discourse in his recasting of Ciceronian doctrines of rhetoric. So too, one found in Augustine a rich psycho-theory based on the theory of the Trinity. Augustine also left us the legacy of a teleological historiography which has shaped all narrative representations of culture, including

our notion of "nation," right up to the present war [in Iraq]. It would be a drastic mistake not to see the continuity between the teleology of Augustinian models of culture and the very idea of the European Economic Community, not to mention the recent American crusade in the Middle-East.

LEUPIN: "Païen unt tort e chrestiens unt dreit."⁸

VANCE: *Oui*. At the same time, my own historical concerns were changing. I should mention that my first diploma was in History. It was at Strasbourg and I worked under the great French medieval historian, Bernard Guenée. My second real medievalist teacher was Robert Benson, now at UCLA, but whom I met at Cornell. So historians were my real entry into medieval study, and not the philologists. From the start, I was intrigued by the very complex relationship between literary texts and their contexts, both discursive and social. But this was a difficult time for someone with such interests: there were no methods, no models for dealing with these relationships. (Nor were there automatic professional rewards.) I began to take seriously the medieval rhetorical notion that human society is constituted of multiple speech groups competing with each other to define, and hence, to control, reality. I began to be aware to what extent medieval events not only respond to material circumstances, but engender them: there could have been no crusade without sermons. On this score, I totally agree with Alexandre and Peter on talking about the notion of a *poétique active*: a poetics which is a determinant of a social reality as much as it is a reflection of it. The idea of a mimetic realism in the Middle Ages is simply untenable.

So for me, the literary text—and when I say "literary," I mean it as in the sense of *grammatica*, the cultural space of writing—as soon as it became vernacularized, it began to represent and objectify thought and speech, not as a stable order, but as a zone of interference between discourses constituting the dynamism of the social group. As the rhetoricians knew so well, each discourse has its own lexicon, its own conceptual bundle, and its own repertory of illocutionary acts; and these discourses are constantly disrupting and transforming each other within the zone of the literary text.

Put otherwise, I used to consider the text as a totemizing operation. A text can assert a configuration of social power by assigning strict boundaries and functions to the discourses constituting the

social group. For instance, in the lyric by Guillaume IX that Alexandre mentioned, Guillaume clearly desired to assign specific spaces to certain political and geographical entities and to exclude others. This poetics is perfectly within the agenda of medieval rhetoric. The Dominican preacher Humbert of Romans decided that there were exactly one hundred different speech groups constituting the totality of the human race. This was the Christian people: non-Christians did not figure into the scheme of the totality of human speech. So, to include or exclude a speech group is already to order a world according to one's beliefs, needs and wishes.

By the same token, discourses undergo mutations when structures or modalities of power change. It's interesting that the nobility of Champagne began to write and that the discourse of the Champenois school of poets emerged at a time when feudal relationships were being archivalized. I mean this very specifically: in the mid 1160's, Count Henri le Libéral decided that he would compile written inventories of the feudal relationships that had been in force for generations and to centralize these into *rôles*. As all the names and properties of his vassals were identified and written into an archive, writing itself became a force that altered feudal relationships in a crucial way. It was also a time when the bourgeoisie—I use this in a strict judicial sense: a group constituted by a legal contractual relationship in 12th century society—mastered writing very quickly, because they were also the new practitioners of commerce, for which writing was indispensable. The nobility, therefore, had to acquire its own model of writing, a discursive model of its own, which could not be those of the bourgeoisie or those of the clergy. Such notions about discourse as emblem extended even to language: there was no *a priori* legitimacy to French as a mother language now constituting itself as a literary language in the place of latinity, indeed, as a demonumentalization of *grammatica*. Suddenly, you see a vernacular literature embracing the world of material desires and needs, and as it did so, rethinking the individual, the psychic, the social and even the metaphysical dimensions of human experience, meticulously de-spiritualizing and unpacking the repressive reflexes that had been dictated by the ecclesiastical community.

So, I have been aware of how important it is to see medieval literature as actively engaged in re-articulating social realities within changing modes of power that occurred in the 12th century. To study this process means learning to think in ways which go against

the grain of orthodox intellectual history and of course philology. Sometimes we have to learn to reverse chronology in the way we understand events so as to break the illusions of cause and effect, of source and influence. By this, I mean that the unsaid of a literary text and the generative powers of literary texts often become apparent only after the fact.

Therefore, it is important for us to use all the fine instruments of recent critical movements, including deconstruction, in order to practice a new and historically dense kind of discourse analysis. I find it amusing to see the Shakespearian establishment discovering only now what French medieval scholars influenced by the *Annales* school, by Althusser, and by Foucault, have been doing for ten or fifteen years. The Shakespearians are trying to stake out for themselves a new territory which, in fact, is an old territory for many of us. Though their level of theoretical reflection about history is a bit superficial, the scholarly outcome is in fact interesting and rich.

A historical approach to discourse analysis can also help us to deal with a question that none of the major critical movements, from philology up to our time, has been willing to address—with the possible exception of the Marxists. It involves addressing the ethical burden of literary texts, medieval or otherwise.

We all know that along with physics and logic, ethics was one of the three branches of medieval philosophy and that literary discourse too was often specifically seen as an exercise in ethics. To make such a claim does not mean that we should look to literature for recipes for proper or improper actions, but to see how medieval literary texts both grasp and transform ethical complexities into properly discursive events. By “discursive event,” I mean new assertions of social imperatives of a sort that cause old discourses to say new things, or cause new discourses to say old things. The tension that arises with hybridized discourses may be said to define the cultural moment.

For instance, embedded in the conventional discourse of 12th century courtly eroticism one may find a relatively complex model of economic exchange. Such is the case, as well, with Chrétien’s *Yvain*. Surely this hybridizing amounts to an encoding of new economic priorities of the nobility of Champagne, who vigorously patronized commerce but did not themselves practice it. There can be no study of ethics that is not historical, and the renewed quest for “historicism” among students of medieval literature might well include in its

agenda the study of ethical problems through techniques of discourse analysis that would include, of course, consideration of the rhetorical assumptions of the medievals themselves.

Let me conclude by saying that the purpose of this retrospection is really to ask what we're going to be doing in the next 10 years or more. I believe that we, today, are on an epistemological threshold which is just as profound as the one in the mid-sixties. Our own knowledge and models of understanding are going to be severely tested by the new demands made upon us. Our world is changing irreversibly. I am surprised at how much overlap there is in our positions. We three started from very different bases and our discourses are certainly quite different from each other. Yet, over and over again, our different discourses lead us toward the same questions.

LEUPIN: Il y a des échos extraordinaires.

HAIDU: Echoes is, I think, an excellent expression. It is hardly an identity, but there is an enormous amount of recognition.

II

Discussion

HAIDU: I think that you've led us to a very important remark, which sets our own discourse in the historical context, for to characterize thought itself as historical is the essential part of any form of modern historical thought. You are talking about an epistemological threshold which sounds good, hopeful, at least I hope that it will be positive. However I think that the experience of the past thirty years that you've been talking about, gives us a model of how complex this kind of shift is, and it's not a shift of before, change, and after. It involves all sorts of continuations and invocations of the later period with the earlier period. And the very locution, which is so awkward and so unpleasant, of post-structuralism, gives the indication of complexity. Post-structuralism has never gotten outside of structuralism, even in criticizing it: I'm thinking of Derrida's first major book, the *Grammatology*. The criticism of structuralism, of both Saussure and Lévi-Strauss was done in terms of their own work. It was not that Derrida attacked them with something that came from outside, it was using Saussure against Saussure, Lévi-Strauss against Lévi-Strauss.

VANCE: Absolutely, and you can see how deconstruction has sought to protect itself from within from the ethical charges brought against Heidegger and De Man.

LEUPIN: Ce que dit Peter est juste. La pensée de Derrida est une radicalisation très rigoureuse de Saussure pris à la lettre.

HAIDU: I'm not sure what you were thinking of when you described Peirce as being known primarily as a theologian.

VANCE: in his time.

HAIDU: Peirce described himself as a scientist and this did not, and here I would agree with you, exclude a great deal of religious thought. What is very clear is that the semiotic theory of Peirce, what has been presented as a semiotic extraction of Peirce, is in fact a profoundly ambiguous project which wants to claim scientificity in late 19th, early 20th century terms. At the same time, it leaves itself open for a religious insertion. This was a dreadfully difficult challenge for Peirce throughout his life, I think, to be scientific insofar as he could both co-opt and respond to evolutionary theory and at the same time not set up intellectual structures that would exclude the religious. The whole issue of the ultimate interpretant and the final interpretant is for Peirce a possible theological resolution of interpretation. It's perfectly obvious, that the sources, particularly the medieval sources of Peirce, are theological.

As far as Greimas' an-historicization or an-historical self-presentation is concerned, I don't think it is true. It is certainly true that he does not situate his work in the long haul of semiotic theory. I don't know what work he's done in medieval language theory, but in the *Sémantique structurale*, his first book, he tries to specify his own historical insertion in the work that directly leads up to him: Saussure, Lévi-Strauss, Hjelmslev, Souriau and Propp are very carefully acknowledged as the theoreticians from whom he is taking off. There are also indications in his work of his thoughts about history: a citation of Destutt de Tracy on ideology at the beginning of "Le Jeu des contraintes sémiotiques." I don't think that's accidental. I think he sees himself as picking up again the 18th century Enlightenment project of a science of ideas. He also talks directly about history in *Sémiotique et sciences sociales*.

VANCE: Well Peter, taking the case of the semiotic square and its relationship to the *carré logique*, he's been drawn out on this. He denies

that he developed this *carré sémantique* from the *carré logique*. There is a published interview of Greimas' with Alain de Libéra,⁹ in which he says that this came independently out of his own re-workings of Brøndal, and Lévi-Strauss. It's as if his *carré sémantique* wasn't just a restatement of the fundamental model of reflection that had been available in Western culture all through the Middle Ages: his *carré sémantique* is functionally identical to the *carré logique*. There is an historical redundancy here which Greimas plays down by stressing only his recent sources. I would also ask whether the roots of his actantial and actorial models do not lie very deeply in a Greek and Russian Orthodox theology of archetypes.

HAIDU: Greimas never presents it as having been dreamed up out of nothing. On the contrary he's very careful, the whole book of the *Sémantique structurale* is an explanation of each minute, little, incremental step that he takes on the models of Souriau and Propp: he derives his model from theirs. Now the notion that they have cultural roots, I think, is perfectly valid; it's also fairly obvious that he does not present it as a radical invention. So, no, he's not primarily an historical thinker.

VANCE: Would you say that he is anti-historical?

HAIDU: No, absolutely not. In '78, I explained to Greimas the way I was thinking of using his model of the semiotic square for historical purposes and he said that's what he had always thought. He recognizes here some of the middle period work that he's done, that I'm drawing on, which has not been picked up by most of the people around him. So, no, I don't think he is an historical thinker, I think he's developed stuff that can be used for historical purposes, which is as you know what I've been doing for a number of years. The question is: is it productive of knowledge? It seems to me that insofar as one wants to deal with the specificities of texts as totalities of their own, the semiotic models he's produced become extremely useful.

VANCE: Let's be precise and take a concrete example that I'm dealing with in my current work on the problem of icons and iconoclasm. This is semiotics in the most extraordinarily rigorous and socially relevant way, to the extent that the debate about images determines whether churches would be destroyed, wars would break out, and whether people would be punished and excommunicated

because they either refused to, or insisted on, venerating icons. Now the theology of semiotics at work in these debates has many common points with modern semiotics. What does it mean if we take a modern semiotics to study a medieval image or the veneration of that medieval image, unless our semiotics allows an abundant place for the semiotics which first generated the pictures, generated the veneration of these pictures, and generated the debate about them?

HAIDU: It seems to me that there was probably a semiotic conception. This is not Greimas, this is Eco. The decoding process is always different from the encoding process. And this becomes all the more so when you're dealing with encoding processes which are historically and culturally so far removed from us. There is no way in which we can get back into the position of the encoding process. I think that within certain limits one can hope to get some information. To try to look at a historical process from the point of view of a participant is not a value-free operation. It does not guarantee objectivity. On the contrary, it guarantees that you will be a participant in a conflictual process, that is to say, you will choose sides. Now, I have no problem with that. However the criticism I do make of that procedure is that you cannot present that as a mode of historicism which gets you away from present political values.

VANCE: I'll agree with that.

HAIDU: In choosing to view the political process from the perspective of a participant, insofar as that's possible, you are actually accepting the political implication of that position, and making it your own . . .

VANCE: Well I'm not sure about that.

HAIDU: . . . for the purposes of the analysis.

VANCE: I think we're at an impasse right now. We'd have to go into a lot of the theological disputes about images that come out of acts of the Second Council of Nicea in 787 before we could really get beyond this.

HAIDU: Even before that. One cannot deal with the inheritance of Augustinian sign theory, which you've explored so often and so fruitfully, and ignore its theological implications. You cannot study the production of signs, the interpretation of signs from an Augustinian point of view . . .

VANCE: That's true.

HAIDU: . . . without accepting a theological position.

VANCE: That's not true.

HAIDU: Well, I don't really see the difference, but the alternative I propose is that the Greimassian codification of semiotic models in the Dictionary¹⁰ allows you to announce what you are doing. You can play to the models that you are employing. Now you can never announce all your investments, all the principles that lie behind your moves because there are always more pre-suppositions.

LEUPIN: Gene, ta biographie intellectuelle m'a énormément intéressé. Ce premier meeting de la Société Rencesvals m'a fasciné. Je me demande cependant si c'est la deuxième ou la première guerre mondiale qui compte? Que la première guerre mondiale soit le suicide de l'Europe des nations, c'est tout à fait clair. C'est un problème dont l'origine est médiévale parce que l'Europe des nations est née au Moyen Age avec les Serments de Strasbourg. Il y a donc toutes sortes d'implications qu'il faudrait essayer de dégager. Ce qui s'est passé dans les études médiévales ces derniers vingt ans, ce renouveau extraordinaire, c'est un renouveau qui est parti de l'excentricité. Il n'a pas été fait à Paris, mais sur les bords de l'empire intellectuel, c'est-à-dire en Belgique avec Dragonetti, ensuite à Genève, avec Méla et Cerquiglini qui ne sont pas à la Sorbonne, et en Amérique avec tous nos amis que je ne mentionnerai pas, on les connaît bien. Ça pose un problème extrêmement important. Qu'est-ce qu'on va faire maintenant? Est-ce qu'on va mettre l'accent sur une espèce de colonie intellectuelle internationale construite sur le modèle des nationalités européennes au Moyen Age, avec cette articulation du latin qui permettait naturellement à une toute petite élite d'échanger des idées aux quatre coins du monde? Ou est-ce qu'on va essayer de constituer le prochain pas sur le modèle d'une poétique mondiale à la Glissant? (Voir *La Poétique de la relation* où il essaie d'articuler la relation de toutes les différences.) On assiste ici à une décentralisation de la pensée et, paradoxalement, les USA en sont le laboratoire. Sur un plan plus personnel, je crois pouvoir dire que la figure de l'exil par rapport à la centralité européenne a été essentielle à ma pensée et m'a permis de regarder le Moyen Age d'une façon tout à fait différente.

Pour la question de la théologie lacanienne: je ne suis pas du tout d'accord. Si vous relisez "La Science et la vérité" dans *Les Ecrits* il

y a là un refus radical de la magie et de la religion dans le sens où le religieux se trompe toujours en mettant Dieu à la place de la cause. François Regnault, dans son livre *Dieu est inconscient*, arrive à la conclusion que la pensée de Lacan est le seul athéisme radical possible. Cependant Lacan dirait de l'inconscient exactement la même chose que dit saint Augustin de Dieu dans l'ouverture des *Confessions*, qu'il est impossible à dire, mais qu'il faut quand même le dire, l'étudier, y penser.

VANCE: When I talk about the hidden re-inscribed theological dimensions of psychoanalytical discourse, I go back to Freud's notion of the unconscious and not to Lacan's. If you look at the Freudian topology, which is a tripartite topology of the soul, and you look at the language in which Freud describes the *id*, you will see that this language draws on a heavily theological way of talking about God as eternal, timeless, non-negating. Freud inverts this metaphysical language and locates its concepts in the biological, in a Darwinian model which is evolutionary. Freud therefore gives us the illusion that his discourse about the *id* has eliminated the theological, that is to say the Augustinian discourse about God as *Idipsum* (the "it itself"). Its truth value is enhanced by the very fact that it seems to be anti-theological. To this extent, it is a revision of theology in the name of a new kind of science. It's no doubt pertinent that this occurred at a specific moment in Freud's life, when his father had died and the conditions of his psychic life had changed. The whole relevance of a discourse which has inverted a theological model, is precisely that it allows the theological model to persist under a new set of premises, and still provides many of the functions that a failed religion offered to so many people. So the topological models of Freud, Lacan and Augustine are in dialogue with one another, even if this dialogue is implicit rather than explicit.

HAI DU: That there is a dialogue, that there is a reincorporation and transformation, the point is well made. Now does this mean that we strip away the layer Lacan/Freud moving it back to a point of origin, like the Augustinian, or do we keep the structure of dialogue present in our mind? Does Lacan dialogue with Freud and Augustine? Or does Freud consciously or not, and I am perfectly willing to accept that, partially incorporate Augustinian structures? What is the next stage? Is there a resemblance, an inheritance?

VANCE: No, I don't think so. I think we have to go farther than that, Peter. It seems to me that many aspects of modern psychology originated in a theological discourse that emerged in the 4th century. The real laboratory for this is Augustine's *De trinitate*. It is not an accident that the greatest psychological treatise of early Western culture developed as an investigation of the Holy Trinity. The tripartiteness of the soul is an image of the Holy Trinity. The three functions: memory, intellect and will overlap to a certain extent with the tripartiteness of the *id* which is recovered through memory.

Alexandre insists quite correctly on the importance of the Incarnation. However the dogma of the Incarnation was something which was not accepted for many centuries by the different cults, and there are still Christian sects which have never acknowledged the Incarnation. Thoughts about the Incarnation also summoned a reflection about the *Saint Esprit* which de-incarnalizes human knowledge of God, universalizes and makes infinitely repeatable the event of the sacrifice of Christ's body, through the operation of the Eucharist. Now it seems to me that if you are going to talk about the *coupure* of the Incarnation, you have to see this developing within a much larger problematic of the Holy Spirit. So yes, Peter, the dialogue must go on, but it must include an awareness of how certain major discursive permutations occurred in early Western culture and whether we can accept, as a model in psychoanalytical exchange, a certain functioning which will orient us towards ourselves, towards those that we love, hate and so forth. Will this model remain static? Of course not. Will psychoanalysis be around in fifty years? It is not at all clear. And psychoanalysts, if you ask them this question, they blanch.

LEUPIN: J'ai écarté de mon modèle le dogme trinitaire et la résurrection: la résurrection est une tentative d'effacement de la révolution promue par l'Incarnation. C'est très patent chez saint Paul quand il dit que Dieu s'est anéanti lui-même: il parle bien de la mort de Dieu. Donc si je suis théologien, je suis un théologien de la mort de Dieu. La résurrection ne fait pas partie de mon schéma explicatif. Quant à la Trinité, je trouve ton analyse très fine dans le sens où tu montres bien que c'est quelque chose qui n'est pas spécifique au christianisme. En inversant ta lecture, je crois que Freud peut reprendre le dogme trinitaire dans un tout autre contexte. Je ne pense pas que ce dogme désigne d'une façon précise la spécificité du christianisme et c'est pour

cela aussi que je l'ai écarté du modèle pour ne retenir que l'Incarnation.

HAI DU: There is something that strikes me Gene. You pointed to a change in your thinking during your autobiographical remarks. But it seems to me that it is not a "repressed," that the old does return into the new and I wonder about this return. You have had this discourse of the economic and the historical, concerns that both you and I share, for quite some time. At the same time, there is this return of a theological discourse, not only in terms of your own intellectual evolution, but in terms of a cultural one as well.

The dominant discourse about the Middle Ages has been theological? Not always. I believe that during the period of Classicism and during the Enlightenment it was not, but at some point during the 19th century the dominant historiographic discourse about the Middle Ages turned religious and has remained the dominant discourse.

LEUPIN: Quand tu parles de la théologie au 19^e siècle, j'irais même plus loin. Je dirais que le scientisme positiviste du 19^e siècle dans lequel s'est constituée notre discipline, c'est l'autre face de la même monnaie qu'est la foi. Cela suppose un acte de foi, ça, c'est sûr.

HAI DU: And I see this theological discourse returning with you, Gene, even after you have, at least at some point in your thinking, adopted a completely different discourse *qui ne cadre pas*, with the theological. If you are talking about the creation of banking systems, nation states, new kinds of judicial arrangements within society, which are, I believe, what the 12th century was primarily concerned with, it is a discourse which does not obviously fit into the theological. The only way it can, as far as I can see, is by accepting exactly the kind of identification of the semiotic with the theological that I pointed to in Augustine, which is an identification that you accepted up to a point.

VANCE: I do not look on the return of theology as the return of certain permanent, eternal conditions of Western culture and of our own thought. It is very important to see the specific social conditions under which this theology emerged in the first place, and also what was lost when this theology was installed. There were many alternatives in the model of the Trinity, each one carrying different ethical values. Early Christianity was the time when the dominant family models were set in our culture; it was also the time when gender

models were established in Western discourse. These resulted from choices that were historically open and subject to alternatives which have been excluded. When they changed radically, the premises of theology changed in very radical ways. For instance, most people agree that Jacques Le Goff has overstated the novelty of the idea of Purgatory in the 12th century. But I think he is absolutely right in suggesting that a major theological inflection occurred in the 12th century. Why did it occur? It occurred because the new ethical values of commerce, the quantification of service, the crimes people committed, the idea of a just price were generating a new space, a new use of that theological concept of Purgatory as an area of exchange.

In every major intellectual and cultural revolution theology has undergone inflections. So I don't look on theology as a kind of permanent parameter of our thought, but as a dynamic process which also includes the mutations that I would identify as those of psychoanalysis.

Haidu: I would go to the point of saying that in so far as any discourse asserts itself to be grounded, and to rest upon ultimate values, it's going to be theological in some profound sense.

But the Middle Ages are much more varied than is generally credited. There are very strong and important counter-Augustinian currents which start in the 11th century, and which become major in the 12th, which have not been sufficiently taken into account; this applies both to the variety of theologies and to applied theologies. For instance, there is an applied theology to the issue of the just price, to the issue of social relations among the men of the Church, as in John Baldwin's huge two-volume work on the circle of Peter the Cantor. Applied theology becomes practical theology as it is adapted to the historical development of a new economic class. There one has to ask: at the point of application, doesn't the theological reading of history transform the theology itself? The boundary between the theological and the non-theological is unclear. There are many modern discourses—you've picked up on Freud, and I have no problem with that—which are implicitly theological in a structural sense, not in a sense of content, not in addressing God as a specific entity, but insofar as the structure of the system of thought reproduces that which we traditionally think of as theological.

Let me switch the discourse back to Alexandre. I have never reproached you with a-historicism.

VANCE: Neither have I.

HAI DU: I have been conscious of your work's modernity. I was very aware in the book on the Grail, of the way in which you were, in the most delicate way imaginable, responding to historical issues even when they went unacknowledged. So I don't think of it as a-historical at all. But I do see the recurrence of transcendent categories as if we were talking about eternities. It came out this morning with the notion of *l'esprit comme l'Autre de l'histoire*. Evidemment il faudrait pouvoir définir les rapports d'altérité. Proposer l'Incarnation comme l'événement qui serait la chose médiévale est historiquement une possibilité théorique. Le choix semble ramener le discours théologique dans des activités dont la convenance n'est pas évidente.

LEUPIN: On a été, tous les trois, dans l'harmonie d'une écholalie extraordinaire mais je crois bon de cerner ici une différence. Je peux concevoir la Renaissance comme une coupure dans un sous-système de pensée, voir même une régression. Quelle est cette régression? C'est le retour humaniste, après la coupure chrétienne, aux textes que j'appellerais païens. Il s'agit de rétablir la fiction d'une continuité de la tradition occidentale. Ce n'est pas une fiction du tout innocente, la fiction de la tradition occidentale: nous en connaissons tous les effets dévastateurs. Elle repose évidemment sur l'idée d'une continuité entre les Grecs et nous, qui saute le Moyen Age. C'est un des phantasmes les plus ravageurs de l'histoire. Mais je ne peux souscrire à ta formulation de la Renaissance comme lieu coupant le Moyen Age. J'affirmerais que le Moyen Age est essentiellement moderne étant donné que la coupure se situe non pas entre moderne et ancien, mais d'après Kojève, entre chrétien et païen. Dans ce sens, je ne pense pas que le Moyen Age, historiquement parlant, soit notre Autre.

HAI DU: On n'a pas entièrement abandonné le Moyen Age après la Renaissance. Pendant la Renaissance même, il y avait certains textes qu'on continuait à lire, non pas *La Chanson de Roland*, non pas Chrétien de Troyes, mais Villon et *Le Roman de la rose*. Il y a deux thèses, de Nathan Edelman, de Lionel Gossman, qui tracent les contacts—minimes, fréquemment de seconde main—qu'on a gardés, aux 17^e et 18^e siècles, avec quelque chose de vaguement médiéval. Il me semble qu'il y a donc tout de même eu une rupture de contact avec les textes du Moyen Age, et ça ne peut reprendre qu'au 19^e siècle avec le romantisme, avec évidemment d'autres lentilles déformantes.

LEUPIN: Là, je suis tout à fait d'accord, mais je crois qu'on parle à deux niveaux différents.

HAIÏDU: D'accord, mais pour moi, c'est le niveau où doit travailler la sémiotique à la place de l'herméneutique. Cette question est entièrement liée au conflit entre sémiotique et herméneutique. Il est impossible, me semble-t-il, de travailler à l'intérieur de l'herméneutique sur les textes médiévaux à cause de cette coupure. Ce n'est pas le cas, d'ailleurs, ni en Allemagne ni en Angleterre, *because the English and the Germans have kept a continuous tradition of contact with medieval texts*. They haven't had the kind of patricidal warfare that the French have had, which has extended in fact over two or three centuries, of cutting themselves off from the medieval paternity.

What is very peculiar is that there is no country in Europe where the political system is such a direct heritage of the Middle Ages as in France, and the Marxist viewpoint that the Middle Ages continue through feudalism and the monarchy of the *ancien régime* up to the French Revolution is perfectly justified politically. Yet there's an enormous discrepancy between the political heritage and the intellectual tradition, where the *coupure* of the humanists and the Pléiade was extremely effective at the level of culture. For me, the problem is one of running up against texts where we cannot be certain of our ability to decode them. If I read a modern text, from Mallarmé on, which I don't understand, I know that my non-understanding is an appropriate reaction. But that's not necessarily the case for the Middle Ages.

LEUPIN: Là encore, on n'est pas d'accord, parce que Proust est obscur, aussi bien que Marie de France, et sur le même plan: on a chez Proust l'illusion d'une compréhension dont on découvre après qu'elle est insuffisante. Par ailleurs, j'espère, Peter, que tu ne me ranges pas parmi les herméneuticiens, parce que ma position est complètement différente. L'herméneutique suppose toujours qu'il y a du sens avant, et pour moi, évidemment le sens vient quand il est construit par un signifiant.

Pour revenir à ta question, Peter, tu ne m'accuses pas d'anti-historicisme, mais d'essentialisme. C'est tout à fait clair, et comment se tirer de ce guépier-là, parce qu'il est évident que mon geste ne vise pas du tout à faire, ou à refaire, une théologie de la littérature? C'est là justement où tu m'ennuies. Je suis pris dans une double impasse: je ne suis pas essentialiste, mais ma vision de la littérature n'est pas

non plus, primordialement historique. Je reprends l'exemple de Guillaume IX et le poème du droit néant. Faire un poème du droit néant, c'est affirmer le néant. C'est un geste essentiellement satanique qui détermine son texte historiquement dans le sens où il répondrait parfaitement aux paramètres d'une hérésie datable.

Pour me tirer d'affaire, je propose de lire le néant, le je-ne-sais-quoi, c'est-à-dire aussi la figure de la réflexivité dans le texte médiéval, non pas comme une réponse hérétique ou déterminée par un moment historique de la théologie, mais comme l'évocation réelle d'une autre langue qui n'est pas prescriptible par des représentations, et qui donc, place l'altérité de la littérature en dehors de l'histoire. Et si c'est un geste essentialiste, au fond tant pis, parce que je pense que c'est un geste qui permet de lire mieux ces textes. Tout ceci est un peu confus, parce que cette question me tourmente depuis de longues années, et je n'ai pas réussi à la résoudre entièrement.

HAIDU: Pour moi le pire, c'est qu'avec tes suppositions essentialistes —s'il faut les nommer telles—tu arrives à produire des lectures de textes médiévaux qui me semblent extrêmement valables, importantes, et parfaitement historiques parfois.

LEUPIN: L'épisode du château de Pesme Aventure, que vous avez travaillé tous les deux et dont il a été question plus haut, m'intéresse. J'ai une hypothèse de travail toute simple qui est l'équivalence du tissu/texte. Et la question se pose si c'est la fabrique du texte toute entière ou s'il n'y a pas d'autres moments où cette fabrique est contredite par le texte lui-même. Ce qui me frappe, c'est qu'il y a un satanisme à l'oeuvre qui fonctionne comme précondition de toute la fabrique textuelle.

VANCE: If you'll permit me to argue historically, this is a moment of extraordinary transformation of these social imperatives into a quasi-theological argument, and some of them have very important implications. There were indeed factories weaving and exploiting labor, not in Troyes, but in Flanders. The problem of the exploitation of workers in weaving *ateliers* could be perceived outside of Flanders as a grave and potentially menacing problem for the whole nobility which is patronizing commerce. But what is important for us, is that Chrétien articulates these problems much more subtly at other levels, as when he draws on the etymological trope textile/text. As you remember, at the center of this space is the family sitting on silk

rugs—silk being NOT wool—and they are listening to their daughter reading aloud some romance “ne sai de cui.”¹¹

HAI DU: Which is obviously Chrétien’s play, and it has its own function of producing the romance. He is implicating both his romance and himself as its producer by the phrase “ne sai de cui.”

VANCE: The sixteen-year-old maiden, Chrétien says, is so beautiful that even if he were God, he would allow himself to be incarnated to enjoy her. In other words, the appeal, the attraction of the girl is to force, once again, the model of incarnation as some great transgression. Why would a God ever want to assume a mortal condition? The whole erotic process is tied up with the act of reading. Don’t forget also that Yvain had first fallen in love with Laudine while she was reading her psalter and about to bury her husband Esclados. So the process of reading is seen as the quintessential mode of production and exploitation that becomes theological, involving even the notion of incarnation.

LEUPIN: Théologiquement perverse.

HAI DU: Reading as the quintessential moment of production/exploitation? I think Alexandre was suggesting the equivalence between the first two parts of the episode of the *Aventure*, with the *tissu* being both the text and the stuff that’s being produced for sale, which is the basis of the nobles’ wealth and power. Now, to make the suggestion of a kind of reflexivity between the notion of the literary text, and the production of another kind of *tissu*, that makes perfect sense to me. This is a part of the non-exclusive reflexive structure that I see in Chrétien all the time. What does not make sense to me, is to collapse the two, to say there is nothing but reading.

VANCE: No, it is like an onion. We go through many, many formulations of desire, need and reproduction, and at the center of this onion, if you want to look at the castle of Pesme *Aventure* as an onion, there is this nucleus of the reader reading a text that has destroyed its author.

HAI DU: I don’t know if it has destroyed the author. He has certainly implicated himself, which is, I think, exactly what I was trying to say at the beginning.

Notes

1. Useful introductory surveys are those of Hayden White, "On History and Historicism" in Carlo Antoni, *From History to Sociology*, Detroit, 1959; and "Historicism, History, and the Figurative Imagination" in *Tropics of Discourse* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 1978) 101-20; and Maurice Mandelbaum, "Historicism" in *The Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, ed. Paul Edwards (New York & London: Macmillan, 1967/72) v IV, 22-5. Other major texts in the discussion of historicism are: Claude Lévi-Strauss, "Histoire et dialectique" in *La pensée sauvage* (Paris: Plon, 1962) 324-57; A.J. Greimas, "Structure et histoire" in *Du sens* (Paris: Seuil, 1970) 103-16; Louis Althusser, "Le marxisme n'est pas un historicisme" in *Lire le Capital*, 2 vols. (Paris: Maspero, 1975) v I, 150-84; Fredric Jameson, "Marxism and Historicism" in *The Ideologies of Theory*, 2 vols. (Minneapolis: Minnesota, 1988) v II, 148-77; and Michel Foucault, *Les mots et les choses* (Paris: Gallimard, 1966) especially 378-85, as well as "Nietzsche, Genealogy, History" in *Language, Counter-Memory, Practice* ed. Donald F. Bouchard (Ithaca: Cornell, 1977) 139-64. The great example of historicism in literary history, of course, is Erich Auerbach's *Mimesis: The Representation of Reality in Western Literature* trans. William Trask (New York: Doubleday Anchor, 1957). Important additions to Auerbach's historicist dossier are two essays in *Scenes from the Drama of European Literature* (New York: Meridian, 1959): "'Figura'" and "Vico and Aesthetic Historicism."

2. Gabrielle M. Spiegel, "History, Historicism, and the Social Logic of the Text in the Middle Ages" in *Speculum* 65 (1990) 59-86.

3. Peter Haidu, "The Semiotics of Alterity: A Comparison with Hermeneutics" in *New Literary History* 21 (1989-90) 671-91.

4. Spiegel, 62.

5. Spiegel, 76.

6. Hayden White, "Historicism, History, and the Imagination" in *Tropics of Discourse*, 106.

7. Peter Haidu, "The Hermit's Pottage: Deconstruction and History in Yvain" in *Romanic Review* 74 (1983) 1-15.

8. *La Chanson de Roland* ed. Joseph Bédier (Alfortville, 1974) v. 1015.

9. *Structures élémentaires de la signification*, ed. Frédéric Nef (Brussels, 1976).

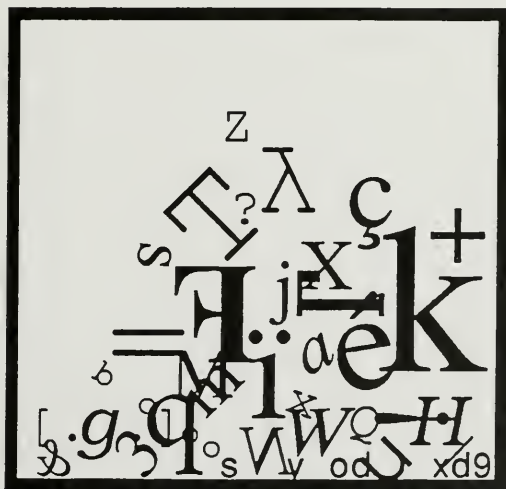
10. A.J. Greimas and J. Courtés, *Sémiotique. Dictionnaire raisonné de la théorie du langage* (Paris: Hachette, 1979).


11. Chrétien de Troyes, *Yvain ou Le Chevalier au lion*, publié par M. Roques (Paris: Librairie Champion, 1971) v. 5360.

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Ce serait le moment de philosopher et de
rechercher si, par hasard, se trouverait
ici l'endroit où de telles paroles dégèlent.

Rabelais, *Le Quart Livre*

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