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TWO FORMS OF REPETITION

A LONG WORK LIKE A NOVEL is interpreted, by whatever sort of reader, in part through the identification of recurrences and of meanings generated through recurrences. I say "in part" because there are of course many types of literary form which generate meaning in novels. These include, for example, the straightforward sequence of unrepeatable events in the order in which they occurred or are retold. The story as such, event following event, tends to arouse passionate human responses. These responses might in one sense be thought of as the "meaning" of the novel. This book for the most part suspends such other sources of meaning in order to focus on the contribution to meaning of the various forms of recurrence in novels. That these forms are various or even disparate I would agree, but insofar as they all involve one instance which then in one way or another reappears in another instance they are all cases of the same identifiable problem of repetition.

Take, for example, *Tess of the D'Urbervilles*, one of the novels read in detail in a later chapter in this book. The first instance of the color red in the novel may be passed over as trivial or as merely representational. It is not unlikely that Tess would have a red ribbon in her hair. When the reader encounters the third, the fourth, and the fifth red things, red begins to stand out as a salient motif, repeated in sequence, like those words Tess meets on walls or fences painted by the itinerant religious man, each word oddly followed by a comma: "THY, DAMNATION, SLUMBERETH, NOT," or "THOU, SHALT, NOT, COMMIT ——."[1]

A number of different forms of repetition may be identified in *Tess*, as in realistic novels generally. On a small scale, there is repetition of verbal elements: words, figures of speech, shapes

or gestures, or, more subtly, covert repetitions that act like metaphors, as the cigar-smoking Alec d'Urberville is said to be "the blood-red ray in the spectrum of [Tess's] young life" (ch. 5), while the sun's rays coming into her room in a later episode are said to look like that phallic-shaped garden flower called "red-hot poker" (ch. 14). On a larger scale, events or scenes may be duplicated within the text, as Tess's life is made up of re-enactments of the "same" event involving the same cluster of motifs: somnolence, the color red, some act of violence done or received. Motifs from one plot or character may recur in another within the same text, as 'Liza-Lu, Tess's sister, seems at the end of the novel destined to reenact another version of Tess's life. A character may repeat previous generations, or historical or mythological characters, as Tess's violation repeats the violence done to long-dead peasant girls by Tess's male ancestors, or as her death repeats the crucifixion of Christ or the prehistoric sacrifices performed at Stonehenge. Finally, an author may repeat in one novel motifs, themes, characters, or events from his other novels. Hardy published *Tess* in 1891, the first version of *The Well-Beloved* in 1892, *Jude the Obscure* in 1895, and the second version of *The Well-Beloved* in 1897. An earlier title of *Tess of the d'Urbervilles* was *Too Late Beloved* or *Too Late, Beloved.* The similarity in titles indicates the way the two novels echo each other thematically and formally. The three adjacent novels are at least as much bound together as, say, adjacent poems in one of Hardy's collections of lyrics. The second version of *The Well-Beloved* may have been motivated or to some degree influenced by the writing during the intervening years of *Jude the Obscure.* (I discuss *The Well-Beloved* in detail in Chapter 6.)

A novel is interpreted in part through the noticing of such recurrences. This book is an exploration of some of the ways they work to generate meaning or to inhibit the too easy determination of a meaning based on the linear sequence of the story. The reader's identification of recurrences may be deliberate or spontaneous, self-conscious or unreflective. In a novel, what is said two or more times may not be true, but the reader is fairly safe in assuming that it is significant. Any novel is a complex tissue of repetitions and of repetitions within repetitions, or of repetitions

linked in chain fashion to other repetitions. In each case there are repetitions making up the structure of the work within itself, as well as repetitions determining its multiple relations to what is outside it: the author's mind or his life; other works by the same author; psychological, social, or historical reality; other works by other authors; motifs from the mythological or fabulous past; elements from the purported past of the characters or of their ancestors; events which have occurred before the book begins. In all these kinds of recurrence the questions are the following: What controls the meaning these repetitions create? What methodological presuppositions will allow the critic, in the case of a particular novel, to control them in his turn in a valid interpretation?

In each chapter of this book I attempt to answer these questions for one novel, exploring as fully as possible the working of repetition in it. I have listed the ways a novel represents social or psychological reality as a mode of repetition. As such, it comes up as a topic here and there in the chapters of this book, but my primary focus here is not on the problems of "realism." Moreover, this book is not a work of theory as such, but a series of readings of important nineteenth- and twentieth-century English novels. The readings are more concerned with the relation of rhetorical form to meaning than with thematic paraphrase, though of course it is impossible in practice to separate these wholly. The focus of my readings is on the "how" of meaning rather than on its "what," not "what is the meaning?" but "how does meaning arise from the reader's encounter with just these words on the page?" I try to attend to the threads of the tapestry of words in each case rather than simply to the picture the novel makes when viewed from a distance. This necessitates my focus on details of language in each novel. In order to investigate the kind of repetition involved in the relation between two novels by the same author, I consider two novels by Thomas Hardy and two by Virginia Woolf, though each chapter is meant to stand on its own as an interpretation of that particular work from the point of view of my topic. Taken together the chapters indicate something of the range of ways repetitive structures work in the English novel of the Victorian and modern periods. Each novel

has been chosen because it is of special interest and excellence in itself, both among other novels by the same author and among nineteenth- and twentieth-century English novels generally. Each has also been chosen as the best text I know in nineteenth- and twentieth-century English fiction to explore the mode of repetition in question in that chapter: irony and repetition, for example, in the chapter on *Henry Esmond;* or a certain form of immanent repetition in *Tess of the d'Urbervilles.* All these types of repetition occur elsewhere in other novels, but my choice of these may be justified in the same way the French ethnographer Marcel Mauss justifies his close study of certain primitive societies rather than others. The societies he has chosen to study, says Mauss, "represent truly the maximums, the excessive, which make it possible to see better the facts than where, not less essential, they remain small and involuted."[2] To put this in terms of one of my categories of repetition, all realistic novels in one way or another are ironical texts, but in *Henry Esmond* irony is a major and pervasive characteristic of the narrative style throughout.

I do not claim that my seven readings represent an exhaustive repertoire of the kinds of repetition in nineteenth- and twentieth-century English fiction or in realistic fiction generally. Each novel is to some degree unique, and there are over forty thousand Victorian novels alone. It is my hypothesis that all modes of repetition represent one form or another of the contradictory intertwining of the two kinds of repetition I will identify in this chapter. All the novels I have studied in detail confirm this hypothesis, but that still leaves open the question of how many it would take to prove the case. Would the ways of reading novels exemplified here work for other novels by the same authors, or for other novels by other authors of the same period, or by authors of different periods or countries? Are my readings "exemplary"? That could be determined certainly only by doing more readings, but the diversity of modes of repetition among my seven novels would suggest that it would be well to expect to find as much difference as similarity in further examples, even in further novels by the same authors.

The specificity and strangeness of literature, the capacity of each work to surprise the reader, if he can remain prepared to be surprised, means that literature continually exceeds any formulas or any theory with which the critic is prepared to encompass it. The hypothesis of possible heterogeneity of form in literary works has the heuristic value of preparing the reader to confront the oddnesses of a given novel, the things in it that do not "fit." The seven readings here have attempted to identify the anomalous in each case and to begin to account for it. This means of course attempting in one way or another to make the unlawful lawful, but the law that emerges will necessarily differ from the one presupposed in readings that assume a good novel is necessarily going to be homogeneous or organic in form.

The history of Western ideas of repetition begins, like our culture generally, with the Bible on the one hand and with Homer, the Pre-Socratics, and Plato on the other. The long centuries of Biblical hermeneutics whereby the New Testament was seen in one way or another as repeating the Old are still presupposed in the use of Biblical types in *Henry Esmond* or *Adam Bede.* The modern history of ideas about repetition goes by way of Vico to Hegel and the German Romantics, to Kierkegaard's *Repetition,* to Marx (in *The Eighteenth Brumaire*), to Nietzsche's concept of the eternal return, to Freud's notion of the compulsion to repeat, to the Joyce of *Finnegans Wake,* on down to such diverse present-day theorists of repetition as Jacques Lacan or Gilles Deleuze, Mircea Eliade or Jacques Derrida.[3]

The two alternative theories of repetition are set clearly against each other in a passage in Gilles Deleuze's *Logique du sens.* Deleuze opposes Nietzsche's concept of repetition to Plato's:

> Let us consider two formulations: "only that which resembles itself differs," "only differences resemble one another" ["*seul ce qui se ressemble diffère,*" "*seules les différences se ressemblent*"]. It is a question of two readings of the world in the sense that one asks us to think of difference on the basis of preestablished similitude or identity, while the other invites us on the contrary to think of similitude and even identity as the product of a fundamental disparity [*d'une disparité de fond*]. The first exactly defines the world of copies or of

representations; it establishes the world as icon. The second, against the first, defines the world of simulacra. It presents the world itself as phantasm.[4]

What Deleuze calls "Platonic" repetition is grounded in a solid archetypal model which is untouched by the effects of repetition. All the other examples are copies of this model. The assumption of such a world gives rise to the notion of a metaphoric expression based on genuine participative similarity or even on identity, as when Gerard Manley Hopkins says he becomes Christ, an "afterChrist," through the operation of grace.[5] A similar presupposition, as Deleuze recognizes, underlies concepts of imitation in literature. The validity of the mimetic copy is established by its truth of correspondence to what it copies. This is, so it seems, the reigning presupposition of realistic fiction and of its critics in nineteenth- and even in twentieth-century England. This theory of repetition still has great force. To many it seems the normative one.

The other, Nietzschean mode of repetition posits a world based on difference. Each thing, this other theory would assume, is unique, intrinsically different from every other thing. Similarity arises against the background of this "disparité du fond." It is a world not of copies but of what Deleuze calls "simulacra" or "phantasms." These are ungrounded doublings which arise from differential interrelations among elements which are all on the same plane. This lack of ground in some paradigm or archetype means that there is something ghostly about the effects of this second kind of repetition. It seems that X repeats Y, but in fact it does not, or at least not in the firmly anchored way of the first sort of repetition. An example would be the way Henchard, in Hardy's *The Mayor of Casterbridge*, thinks, during his wanderings at the end of his life, that he returns to the spot where he sold his wife in the scene that opens the novel. In fact, as the narrator tells us, with Hardy's characteristic insouciant ironic cruelty, he has not correctly identified the place.

A passage in Walter Benjamin's "The Image of Proust" ("Zum Bilde Prousts") will help to specify further the distinction between the two kinds of repetition. If Penelope unwove by night

what she wove by day, Proust's writing, says Benjamin, was the reverse of this. It wove by night and unwove by day. The distinction is between the rational, willed, intentional remembering of the daytime, and that kind of involuntary memory which Benjamin calls forgetting. The first kind of memory constructs a lucid pattern from which the "life" has disappeared, like a dry historical recital of facts. The second kind of memory constructs an imaginary life, "lived life," as dreams make for us a strangely powerful affective "memory" of things which never happened as such. The originality of Benjamin's insight here is his recognition of the constructive, fictive, falsifying aspect of Proust's involuntary affective memory. This "memory" creates, for the one who experiences it, as Marcel's narration creates for him, a vast intricate network of lies, the memory of a world that never was. This world is posited on the negative work of forgetting. The paragraph in Benjamin's essay is of great concentration and beauty:

> We know that in his work Proust did not describe a life as it actually was, but a life as it was remembered by the one who had lived it. And yet even this statement is imprecise and far too crude. For the important thing for the remembering author is not what he experienced, but the weaving of his memory, the Penelope work of recollection [*Eingedenkens*]. Or should one call it, rather, a Penelope work of forgetting? Is not the involuntary recollection, Proust's *mémoire involuntaire*, much closer to forgetting than what is usually called memory? And is not this work of spontaneous recollection, in which remembrance is the woof and forgetting the warp, a counterpart [*Gegenstück*] to Penelope's work rather than its likeness [*Ebenbild*]? For here the day unravels what the night has woven. When we awake each morning, we hold in our hands, usually weakly and loosely, but a few fringes of the tapestry of lived life, as loomed for us by forgetting. However, with our purposeful activity and, even more, our purposive remembering each day unravels the web and the ornaments of forgetting. This is why Proust finally turned his days into nights, devoting all his hours to undisturbed work in his darkened room with artificial illumination, so that none of those intricate arabesques might escape him.[6]

The relevance of Benjamin's oppositions to an understanding of repetition lies in the fact that a different form of echoing

occurs in each form of memory-work. The tapestry of memory in each case is woven on the basis of the experience of recurrence, but the two forms of recurrence differ. Daylight, willed memory works logically, by way of similarities which are seen as identities, one thing repeating another and grounded in a concept on the basis of which their likeness may be understood. This corresponds to Deleuze's first, Platonic form of repetition. (The reader will note that in saying "corresponds to" I am using the form of relation which I am discussing. Repetition cannot be analyzed without using it, in forms of language which inevitably turn back on themselves and lose their lucid or logical transparency. Benjamin "repeats" Deleuze. In which way? According to which mode of repetition is my own tapestry being woven here?)

The second, involuntary form of memory, which Benjamin calls the "Penelope work of forgetting [*Penelopewerk des Vergessens*]," is woven also out of similarities, but these are called by Benjamin "opaquely similar [*undurchschaubar ähnlich*]." These similarities he associates with dreams, in which one thing is experienced as repeating something which is quite different from it and which it strangely resembles. ("It was a sock, but it was my mother too.") This repetition is not grounded. It arises out of the interplay of the opaquely similar things, opaque in the sense of riddling. How is a mother like a sock? This repetition is the true mode of Proust's novel. It corresponds to Deleuze's second, Nietzschean form of repetition. Benjamin, accordingly, writes of "Proust's frenetically studying resemblances, his impassioned cult of similarity [*Ahnlichkeit*]." "The true signs of [the dream's] hegemony [*Herrschaft*]," he continues, "do not become obvious where [Proust] suddenly and startlingly uncovers similarities in actions, physiognomies, or speech mannerisms. The similarity of one thing to another which we are used to, which occupies us in a wakeful state, reflects only vaguely the deeper resemblance of the dream world in which everything that happens appears not in identical but in similar guise, opaquely similar to one another [*nie identisch, sondern ähnlich: sich selber undurchschaubar ähnlich*]."[7]

In explaining what he means by "opaque similarity," Benjamin has recourse to an emblem which is an example of what he

is trying to define. The defined enters once more into the definition, disqualifying that definition, as in my own language here, according to a necessity of this second form of repetition. If the similarity is not logical or wakeful, but opaque, dreamlike, it cannot be defined logically, but only exemplified. The example will then only present again the opacity. Another necessity of the second form of repetition, "exemplified" by both Deleuze and Benjamin, is its dependence on the first, grounded, logical form. Each form of repetition calls up the other, by an inevitable compulsion. The second is not the negation or opposite of the first, but its "counterpart," in a strange relation whereby the second is the subversive ghost of the first, always already present within it as a possibility which hollows it out. If logical, daylight resemblances depend on a third thing, on a principle of identity which precedes them, the opaque similarities of dream are baseless, or, if based at all, then based on the difference between the two things. They create in the gap of that difference a third thing, what Benjamin calls the image [*das Bild*]. The image is the meaning generated by the echoing of two dissimilar things in the second form of repetition. It is neither in the first nor in the second nor in some ground which preceded both, but in between, in the empty space which the opaque similarity crosses. Freud's early discovery of the hysterical trauma is an example of this. In such traumas the first experience ultimately generating hysterical symptoms is presexual in that the child does not understand its sexual meaning. A much later trivial event repeats some detail of the first and brings it back into mental life, now reinterpreted as a traumatic sexual assault. The trauma is neither in the first nor in the second but between them, in the relation between two opaquely similar events.[8]

Benjamin invents a brilliant emblem of this relation. It is like a sock which is also an empty sack, but also at the same time a gift inside the sack, filling it, but also a sock again. The emblem turns on the oppositions, or rather counterparts, of inside/outside; full/empty; waking/dream; remembering/forgetting; identity/similarity; container/thing contained. These pairs have structured Benjamin's interpretation of Proust in their strange

function not as polar opposites but as differences which remain differences but can turn into one another, as in the transformations in Benjamin's parable of the sock:

> Children know a symbol [*ein Wahrzeichen*] of this world [of dreams]: the stocking which has the structure of this dream world when, rolled up in the laundry hamper, it is a "bag" and a "present" at the same time. And just as children do not tire of quickly changing the bag and its contents into a third thing—namely a stocking—Proust could not get his fill of emptying the dummy, his self [*die Attrappe, das Ich*], at one stroke in order to keep garnering that third thing, the image [*das Bild*] which satisfied his curiosity—indeed, assuaged his homesickness [*Heimweh*]. He lay on his bed racked with homesickness, homesick for the world distorted in the state of resemblance [*der im Stand der Ähnlichkeit entstellten Welt*], a world in which the true surrealist face of existence [*das wahre surrealistische Gesicht des Daseins]* breaks through.[9]

The ratios established here are peculiar. They are peculiar in not being based on *ratio* in the sense of reason, *logos, Grund.* The oddness lies partly in the fact that the figure of the sock is an example of what it is supposed to clarify. It lies also partly in the difficulty of following out exactly what stands for what when the emblem is applied. Unexpected meanings emerge when the reader articulates the equivalences established by the "symbol" [*Wahrzeichen*]. When the stocking is rolled up inside itself in the laundry hamper it becomes alternately two other things. These seem stark opposites but at the same time are felt to be opaquely similar. Each is clearly another form of the same object. The stocking is both the empty bag, sign of an absence, and at the same time the precious contents of that bag, a present. As a present it is an object of value which is passed from one person to another and establishes the reciprocal interchange of gift-giving and gift-receiving between them. Such an interchange is a fundamental property of signs, for example of all those signs Proust assembles and gives to his readers in *A la recherche du temps perdu.* The obscurity of the similarity between the bag and the present lies in the fact that one cannot see through the similarity to its ground. This is true because the ground, namely the sock, is, literally, the possibility of being two apparently opposite things, both the container and what is contained, both the empty bag and the present. The opacity remains even when the bag and its contents are transformed into the third thing, namely a stocking, by being turned outside in again. From oneness to twoness, from figure to literal ground, the relation is continuously reversible. Each state of the object is both the literal ground of the other and the figure of it.

In Benjamin's application of his parable, Proust himself, surprisingly, is not the third thing, the self recovered through the activity of involuntary memory, as many interpretations of Proust would have it. Proust is the empty bag, hollow, void, a dummy (*eine Attrappe*), out of which he emptied all his memories in order to produce a third thing born of the opaque similarity between empty self and its inert contents, namely the image. The "image" here corresponds to the stocking itself. The stocking/image is both the most literal thing around, what the object "really is," and at the same time something wholly figurative. The word *Bild* in German means both "image," in the sense of picture or representation, and "figure," in the sense of figure of speech, trope. Benjamin's difficult concept of the image is worked out more fully in his theory of allegory in *Ursprung des deutschen trauerspiels.*[10] The image/sock is both the self and the "third thing" which arises from the relation of obscure repetition between the first two things, as the "image" in Proust is not in any single thing but arises out of the relation woven by the "forgetting" of two things, the first madeleine dipped in tea, for example, and its repetition in the second. The self in this process is not a source but a function, and an empty one at that. It is a negative element in a system.

Readers of Benjamin's essay on Goethe's *Elective Affinities* will remember his firm rejection there of biographical interpretations of literature. The real experiences of an author are "empty or ungraspable," and "the only rational correlation [*Zusammenhang*] between author and work lies in the evidence that the latter has discarded the former."[11] The self of the author is not the explanatory origin of the work. That origin, or rather the apparent origin, metaleptically reversing cause and effect, is another, more

genuine self. This self is made by the work. The self exists only in the work and in the work's detachment from the "real life" of the author. Proust did not, in Benjamin's interpretation of him, seek to recuperate his selfhood through his writing. He sought rather to escape from that self through the image into a world for which he was homesick, the world "distorted in the state of resemblance." The home from which he was exiled could be reached only through the kind of image born of the clashing of two dissimilars which characterizes the second form of repetition. If Proust's remembering was a form of forgetting, his homesickness too was the counterpart and not the likeness of ordinary longing for home. To it apply exactly those phrases used by Walter Pater to describe "aesthetic poetry": "The secret of the enjoyment of it is that inversion of home-sickness known to some, that incurable thirst for the sense of escape, which no actual form of life satisfies, no poetry even, if it be merely simple and spontaneous."[12] Such a homesickness can only be assuaged by the image born of ungrounded recurrences, like Benjamin's figure of the sock.

Thomas Hardy will provide final example of the interaction of the two forms of repetition. A passage from *The Well-Beloved* describes the hero's habit of seeing Rome as a repetition of his native peninsula, Portland Bill, "the Isle of Slingers" as it is called in the novel:

> The unconscious habit, common to so many people, of tracing likes in unlikes had often led him to discern, or to fancy he discerned, in the Roman atmosphere, in its lights and shades, and particularly in its reflected or secondary lights, something resembling the atmosphere of his native promontory. Perhaps it was that in each case the eye was mostly resting on stone—that the quarries of ruins in the Eternal City reminded him of the quarries of maiden rock at home.[13]

"To discern, or to fancy he discerned"—the alternation between the two forms of repetition I am distinguishing is neatly stated in these phrases. For Hardy each rock, tree, person, event, or story is different from all the others. For him, nothing repeats in nature; nothing happens more than once for an individual

person; nor is there repetition from person to person, nor from generation to generation. Nevertheless, there is a strong inclination for people in Hardy's world to trace likes in unlikes. This is as true for the narrators of his novels as for the characters. Such tracing follows in the lines of the new the lines of the old, seeing the old again in the new. This habit is "unconscious," spontaneous and unrationalized. It seems to be a primary aspect of perception, not something projected, but something there in the act of seeing itself.

The result of this habit is double. On the one hand, Hardy's narrators see things in figure. They call attention to repetitions which are likenesses in the unlike. The narrator of *The Well-Beloved*, for example, sees the sequence of Jocelyn Pierston's loves as duplications of one another. Such a vision sees things in their metaphors, or rather, it sees things as metaphors, as the transportation of the same pattern from one episode or event in the narrative to another. At the same time, Hardy's characters, Jocelyn, for example, are also driven by unconscious habit to make the linguistic mistake of seeing one person or situation in their lives as repeating an earlier person or situation. The mistake is linguistic because it sees things and persons not in their substantial uniqueness but as signs pointing back to earlier things or persons, "standing for" them. Such a character makes the fundamental error of taking figures of speech literally. He lives his life as metaphor, that is, as mistake. He imposes an interpretation on what he encounters which makes his life take, or seem to take, the form of a series of repetitions. The "unconscious" human state of illusion is the cause of repetition. It is the cause which drives the characters to live as they do and to understand their lives as they do. At the same time it is the cause which leads the narrator to interpret the story he tells as a sequence of repetitions when in fact nothing repeats, and each person, event, or thing remains stubbornly closed in on itself, as itself.

The knowledge that this double operation is an error is not, in Hardy's novels, brought in from the outside by the reader. It is provided by the narrator. It is even presented explicitly by the protagonist when he or she, often shortly before death, finally understands the errors in interpretation which have made him or

her suffer so. The narrator demystifies his own reading of life as well as that of the characters. He gives the reader the information necessary not only to understand the way the characters dwell in illusions, but also to know why his reading of the story he tells has taken the form it has taken. This insight does not constitute total understanding or total liberation, for reasons I shall try to define in my chapters on Hardy.

In the passage from *The Well-Beloved*, the reader can see both the affirmation of the human habit of seeing likes in unlikes and the demystification of this habit. This exposing of illusion is as much performed by the narrator's dry ironic tone of detachment as by what he explicitly says. "Likes in unlikes"—this already tells the reader that Rome and the Isle of Slingers are not in fact alike. Moreover, the beguiling appearance of resemblance lies not so much in what is visible, the primary object of sight, as in "reflected or secondary lights," that is, in something already deflected or transported away from its source, carried over to another place, like a metaphor. This displacement produces "something resembling" a figurative similarity, not an identity. The final sentence figures this identity in difference in the fact that both Rome and the Isle of Slingers are mostly stone, though it is ruins in one case, the latest of the late, and "maiden rock" in the other, stone virgin, uncut, not yet marked or shaped, the earliest of the early. The irony lies in the fact that as a civilization modern England, where the maiden rock is quarried, is far later than ancient Rome. On the other hand, readers of the novel will know what further irony there is in calling Portland stone "maiden rock," since it is made of oolite, "egg-stone." It is the bones of millions of sea-creatures dead for eons and eons, immeasurably older in its grain than any Roman ruin, maiden only in that it has not been touched by human hands, just as the Slingers were living on Portland and the nearby mainland long before the Romans came. Late and early reverse and then reverse again, and this makes problematic the order of primary and secondary which is at stake in this or any other repetitive series. Of Rome and the Isle of Slingers it can be said that each precedes and yet also follows the other.

In Hardy's work a form of what I am calling the first kind of

repetition is embodied in the characters and in one side of the narrator's discourse. This form is the personification, concretely presented in the lives and minds of the characters, of the basic metaphysical beliefs which have been instinctive to mankind for millennia: belief in origin, end, and underlying ground making similarities identities, belief in the literal truth of the trope of personification or prosopopeia. The latter projects character and makes it seem real, as the ancient Greeks saw persons in every tree, river, or spring. The novel as a genre might in fact be defined as the preservation, in a skeptical age, of these primitive beliefs.

Just such a definition of the novel is given by Nietzsche in a curiously comic passage in *The Birth of Tragedy*, in which Plato is named as the creator of a new genre, the novel:

> If tragedy had absorbed into itself all the earlier types of art, the same might also be said in an eccentric sense [*in einem exzentrischen Sinne*] of the Platonic dialogue which, a mixture of all extant styles and forms, hovers midway between narrative, lyric, and drama, between prose and poetry, and so has also broken the strict old law of the unity of linguistic form . . . The Platonic dialogue was, as it were, the barge on which the shipwrecked ancient poetry saved herself with all her children: crowded into a narrow space and timidly submitting to the single pilot, Socrates, they now sailed into a new world, which never tired of looking at the fantastic spectacle of this procession. Indeed, Plato has given to all posterity the model [*das Vorbild*] of a new art form, the model of the *novel*—which may be described as an infinitely enhanced Aesopian fable.[14]

If the Platonic dialogue and its many children, that multitude of novels it fathered, preserved the primitive beliefs present in earlier forms of literature, both the Platonic dialogues and the novels they begot also at the same time deconstructed these beliefs. In that sense they were eccentric, outside the spiritual center of the old art and destructive of it. Socrates, with his eternal questions and his corrosive irony, earned the hemlock as a man putting in danger the illusions sustaining political order. He is the model, then, for the other, demystifying side of novels, as

well as for the beliefs they preserve. Socrates is the precursor of such a narrator as the storyteller in Hardy's *The Well-Beloved.* That narrator preserves and lovingly records Jocelyn's illusions, while at the same time he shows them to be illusions. He replaces belief in the first form of repetition with an affirmation of the second, ungrounded kind, the kind arising from unlikeness. Or perhaps it might be better to say that Hardy's narrator demonstrates the necessary inherence, one in the other, of the two forms.

This intertwining of the two kinds of repetition is in one way or another exemplified by the seven novels I interpret here. This does not mean that there are not some novels or other texts entirely ordered according to one or the other of the forms of repetition. Whether or not this is the case could only be determined, as I have said, by more analyses of more novels, but my examples would suggest that each form of repetition inevitably calls up the other as its shadow companion. You cannot have one without the other, though each subverts the other. The difference between one text and another from this point of view is in the varying modes of the intertwining. Anti-Platonism is present in Plato; the metaphysical antagonist is by no means expelled from Nietzsche's language; and both Benjamin's Marxism and his Jewish Messianism in other writings work against the grain of his brilliant expression of the "second" form of repetition in the passage I have discussed. Even Gerard Manley Hopkins, cited above as a believer in the "first" mode of repetition, which surely he is, develops in his concept of the "underthought" in Greek tragedy a brilliant model for that kind of heterogeneous form I find in one way or another in my seven English novels. As I have elsewhere tried to demonstrate, his theory of language in "The Wreck of the Deutschland" and in other writings is not compatible with his theological overthought.[15] His overthought is an example of the first theory of repetition, his underthought of the second. Underthought is still underthought, and it would be a mistake to make too much of its presence in Hopkins, but the fact that it is indubitably there, along with his Christian affirmations, is a striking example of the way it seems to be impossible to have one form of repetition without the other, even though

one form or the other may no doubt be dominant in a given writer. The passages discussed in this preliminary chapter are not solutions to the problem of the way repetition works in fiction but miniature exemplifications of it. The discussions are also exemplifications of the mode of interpretation to be used on a larger scale in the essays which follow.

The relationship between the two forms of repetition defies the elementary principle of logic, the law of noncontradiction which says: "Either A or not-A." In all the novels read here both forms of repetition are in one way or another affirmed as true, though they appear logically to contradict each other. It would appear that a repetitive chain must be either grounded or ungrounded. In my novels, however, as I shall try to show, the repetitive series is presented as both grounded and ungrounded at once. This book is an attempt to explore the consequences of this for the reading of the novels in question. The heterogeneity of these texts lies in the fact that both forms of repetition are present, though the two forms can be shown to be incompatible. The hypothesis of such a heterogeneity in literary and philosophical texts is a working principle of that form of criticism called "deconstruction." "Instead of a simple 'either/or' structure," writes Barbara Johnson, "deconstruction attempts to elaborate a discourse that says *neither* 'either/or' *nor* 'both/and' nor even 'neither/nor,' while at the same time not totally abandoning these logics either. The very word 'deconstruction' is meant to undermine the either/or logic of the opposition 'construction/destruction.' "[16] The relation between the two forms of repetition in my seven novels is an example of this alogic or of this other logic. Insofar as the existence in works of literature of structures of language which contradict the law of noncontradiction is a major point of controversy in current discussions of this form of criticism, my focus on an important mode of such "alogical" structures may contribute to elucidation of the issues involved.

I have elsewhere attempted to discuss the kind of criticism necessary to take account of the heterogeneity of works of literature and to identify my relationship to it.[17] One characteristic of my own criticism is a desire to account for the totality of a given work, a desire which, insofar as it is not simply constitutional, is

probably an inheritance from the New Criticism. Certainly it is possible to be satisfied with a partial or approximate reading of a given work. Many good critical essays stop short of claiming to account for the whole, though most indicate at least implicitly what such an accounting would be like. My training has led me to presuppose that the best critical essays are those which more or less overtly confront the question of what a total reading of the work at hand would be. The readings in this book assume that the demand for a total accounting is implicit in the effort of interpretation, even when it is evaded or minimized.

I came to literature from science and mathematics, and have come to the kind of criticism practiced here by way of the New Criticism and the sort of "criticism of consciousness" written by Georges Poulet, Marcel Raymond, Albert Béguin, and others. This means that my relation to "deconstruction" is necessarily different from that of the large group of young critics who have received their primary training in the new mode and to whom it seems to be almost as natural as a mother tongue, or at any rate as a first second language. For me it is a third or fourth second language. I would not have tried to learn it if it had not seemed necessary to account for important features of literary form which slip through the nets of those other languages of criticism. It seemed to me when I began the study of literature, as it still seems to me now, that one of the most obvious characteristics of works of literature is their manifest strangeness as integuments of words. Poets, novelists, and playwrights say things which are exceedingly odd by most everyday standards of normality. Any way of interpreting literature would need to account for that oddness. Henry James, in his well-known advice to the aspiring novelist, told him to try to be one of those people on whom nothing is lost. James was speaking of "life," but the one thing most needed for the literary critic too is to be one of those on whom nothing is lost, though in the critic's case it is the anomalous in literature rather than in life which must not be missed. A critical hypothesis, it may be, has more or less value as it facilitates or inhibits this noticing.

Twentieth-century thought—in linguistics, in psychology, in biology, in ethnology and sociology, in atomic physics, and in astrophysics—has been characterized by this recognition that the realms of man and nature are stranger than we had thought, along with the unceasing attempt to find out the laws of this strangeness and so make the unfamiliar familiar. Language, the human psyche, genetics, the workings of "primitive" societies, the interior of the atom, the nature of the stars, have shown unexpected anomalies. To understand them has in one way or another required ways of thinking and of formulating interpretations which defy or seem to defy elementary principles of logic and geometry. Among those things which are turning out to share this peculiarity is literature. Much in many works of literature seems unaccountable by traditional standards of coherence and unity. This book attempts to identify and to account for one form of this unaccountability.

The New Criticism has great value in its assumption that every detail counts, but the accompanying presupposition that every detail is going to count by working harmoniously to confirm the "organic unity" of the poem or the novel may become a temptation to leave out what does not fit, to see it as insignificant or as a flaw. So-called criticism of consciousness has great power as a mode of criticism. In the hands of a master critic like Georges Poulet, it can facilitate recognition of the diversity of an author's work by way of the presupposition that the "consciousness" of an author moves dialectically through a series of adventures. Even so, the intimate grain of an author's language tends to disappear in the thematic or paraphrastic use of citations to construct a model of those adventures. Insofar as such criticism presupposes a unified consciousness as the *point de départ* of those adventures and as their persisting ground and end, the anomalous within the work of an author, those features which do not fit the presupposed unified consciousness, may be passed over. The assumption that a work may be heterogeneous seems to me of great value in preparing the critic to take note of elements in a work which are manifestly "important" but cannot easily be accommodated within either of the theories of unity I have mentioned. The shift back from "consciousness" to "language" as the category to be investigated allows in principle a closer look at what is actually there on the page and at the transaction between

reader and word from which meaning emerges. It will be evident from the readings here that I think more is gained by talking about the words of the work, its rhetorical texture, than by talking about the reader as such and his responses. The thing all readers share is those words on the page. Civilized dialogue or even controversy about the meanings of a literary work is most aided by sticking to the words as the things to be accounted for.

If I say, "The novel is a representation of human reality in words," that definition contains the possibility of three different kinds of discourse about fiction, each of which has its validity or necessity, none of which can be kept wholly separate from the others. If I emphasize "human reality" in the definition, then I shall be likely to ignore the fact that I know the fiction is only a fiction, willingly suspend my disbelief, speak of the characters as if they were "real people," and work out the "meaning" of their story in terms of ethical values, judgments of good and bad, happy and unhappy, and so on. If I emphasize "representation" in the definition, I shall focus on the conventions of storytelling in a given case as vehicles of meaning. From this focus there may be developed a full-fledged "phenomenological" criticism of fiction. This will concern itself with the assumptions the novelist makes about the kind of consciousness of himself and of others the narrator has or the characters have, or with the temporal structures of consciousness the novel expresses, or with the elaborated emotional responses the story as a sequence of represented events arouses in the reader. Finally, if I remember that a novel is a representation of human reality "in words," I may focus on local features of style, the "rhetoric of fiction," taking "rhetoric" not as modes of persuasion but in its other meaning as the discipline of the workings of tropes in the most inclusive sense of that word: all the turnings of language away from straightforward referential meaning. Though, as I have said, no one of these forms of discourse about fiction can be practiced in full isolation from the others, the kind of "rhetorical" criticism of fiction attempted in this book explores the ways in which the third feature of novels, the fact that they are made of words, inhibits the coherent or noncontradictory working of the other two dimensions of fiction. The result of this is that the critic can validate neither a wholly

consistent thematic paraphrase of a given novel nor a wholly univocal phenomenological description of it as a system of assumptions about consciousnesses in their interrelation.

The primary motivation of the readings in this book is the one with which I began the study of literature: to devise a way to remain aware of the strangeness of the language of literature and to try to account for it. I began by saying that this book is not a work of "theory" as such. It is an attempt to interpret as best I can the texts of my seven novels. This means that there is no attempt to develop a tightly woven technical terminology to deal with repetition in fiction. In each chapter I use such language of interpretation as seems necessary for that particular novel, as much as possible language emerging from the novel in question or especially appropriate for it. In recent controversies about criticism there has been, so it seems to me, too much attention paid to this theory or that, to its terminology, and to its presumed or "theoretical" consequences, and not enough to the readings made possible by the theories in question. A theory is all too easy to refute or deny, but a reading can be controverted only by going through the difficult task of rereading the work in question and proposing an alternative reading. A recent skirmisher in the rarified atmosphere of pure theory argues that criticism went wrong when it became close reading.[18] This, if I may say so, is a major treason against our profession. That profession is nothing if it is not philology, the love of words, the teaching of reading, and the attempt in written criticism to facilitate the act of reading. What counts for most in literary criticism is the citations made and what the critic says about those citations. If this book sends readers back to the seven novels with minds more open to their complexities of repetitive form, more prepared to be startled by what they find there, even startled by aspects my accounts have left out or unwittingly distorted, the chapters will have done all that I could hope for them.

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Hillis Miller is Professor of English at Yale University.

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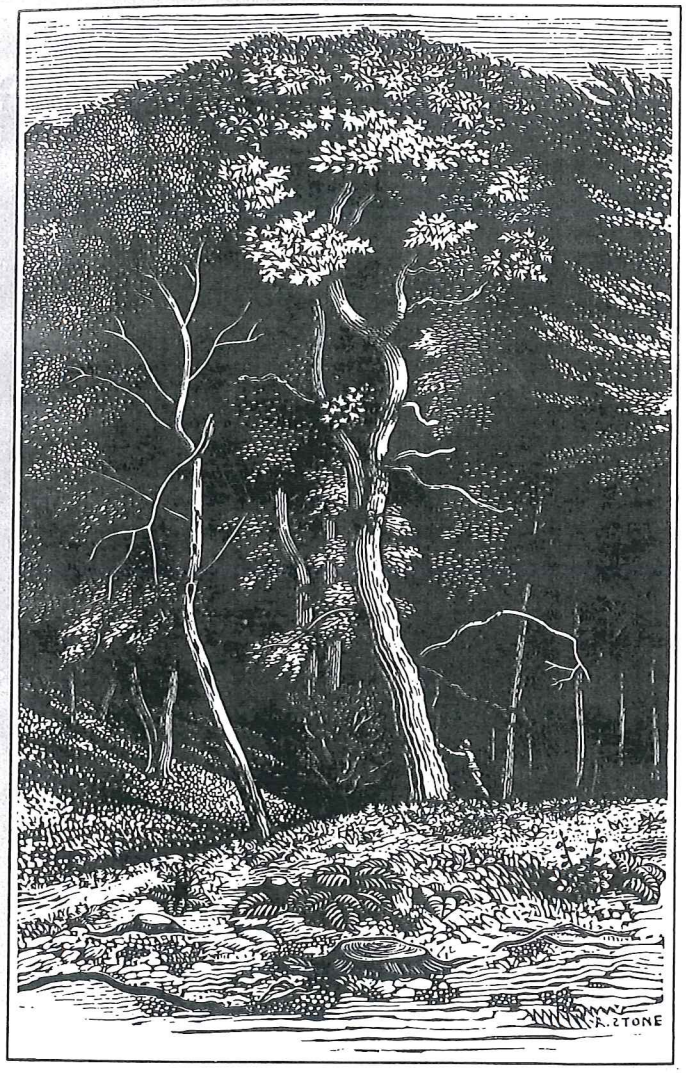

Fiction and Repetition

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