Fra:

Just Being Difficult?

Academic Writing in the Public Arena

Edited by JONATHAN CULLER
and KEVIN LAMB

Stanford University Press
Stanford, California
2003

Bad Writing

> Le Mal—une forme aigüe du Mal—dont elle [la littérature] est l'expression, a pour nous, je crois, la valeur souveraine.
>
> —Georges Bataille, *La Littérature et le Mal*

> The canyons cooled. Indigo darkened,
> Oozing out of the earth like ectoplasm,
> A huge snake heaping out. "This is evil,"
> You said. "This is real evil."
>
> —Ted Hughes, "The Badlands"

IN 1963 ANNE SEXTON composed an elegy for Sylvia Plath called "Sylvia's Death," in which she wrote, "and I know at the news of your death, / a terrible taste for it, like salt."[1] This elegy is unusual in that it expresses not loss but sexual jealousy. Sylvia's death has awakened an overwhelming appetite and envy, a terrible taste.

Critics have often accused Anne Sexton of terrible taste, putting unseemly parts of the female body on display and lusting after death self-indulgently, even to the point of feeling robbed personally when someone else commits suicide. But lyric poetry has always been obsessed with death, and I would argue that in seeing Sexton as all symptom and all body, readers have missed her inventive exploration of more technical questions of lyric voice. For when she calls Sylvia's death "an old belonging," something one's mouth opens onto, she is talking about the way in which death's terrible taste has filled poets' mouths for a long time, like salt.

The fact that the history of lyric poetry is so bound up with the nature of elegy has created the impression that the lyric was invented to overcome death, not desire it. Poetry, in this view, acts as a consolation, a monument, a promise of immortality beyond the grave. Yet even the most traditional elegy contains the guilty secret that desire is not all for life, that poetry offers something other than life as object of desire. From Narcissus, in love with an image, and Apollo or Petrarch, consoling themselves with a laurel branch, to Keats's "half in love with easeful death," Milton's *Lycidas*, or Wordsworth's

"Lucy" poems, the mourned person provides an occasion for poetic performance, not just loss. From there to Sexton's "Wanting to Die" the distance is not as great as some would have it.

But the conflation of the desire for writing with the desire for death does not perfectly flow from the fact that both are desires for something other than biological life. It is true that Narcissus dies from loving an image, but the critical theory of the "Death of the Author" was not about literal death but about interpretation and authorial intention. Indeed, it is precisely in the case of an author who has committed suicide that readers who normally restrict their interest to features internal to a text develop a terrible taste for biography as a tool for understanding poetry. Readers are unable to resist asking the poems to tell us why the poet killed herself. The dead author returns to life with a vengeance as the site of an intention to die.

There are two profound taboos threatened when the poet is a woman. There is something monstrous by definition when a woman chooses death over life because she has so often been the guardian of the life forces, associated with reproduction, comfort, other-directedness, and maternal care. When a woman writes about bodies that matter and yet can be accused in any way of being a "bad mother" or even of being something other than a counterpart to a man, she is violating the very conditions of her visibility and is much more likely to be seen as a "bad writer" than to participate in the culturally valued badness that poetry's job is to hold up to the laws of the marketplace—or of reproduction.

The cultural prestige of "Le Mal" probably reached its height with Baudelaire's 1857 publication of *Les Fleurs du Mal*. "Le Mal" is notoriously hard to translate into English. Is it "evil"? "badness"? "sickness" ["à Théophile Gautier, je dédie ces fleurs maladives"]? "suffering"? "melancholy" [spleen]? "romanticism" [Mal du siècle]? But sardonic delight in thumbing one's nose at bourgeois "virtue" was de rigueur for postrevolutionary French poetry. Rimbaud's mother, for example, forbade her son to read the unseemly writings of "M. Hugot [*sic*],"[2] and parents threatened to withdraw their children from their English class when it was learned that the mild-mannered M. Mallarmé had published poetry.[3] It is perhaps surprising that the Second Empire courts took literally Baudelaire's poetic celebrations of evil and prosecuted him for them. But it is even more surprising how surprised he seemed by this. The rise of the bourgeoisie in France was particularly gender divided: women stood for virtue, men for badness of every sort—so much so that Baudelaire could exemplify his badness through lesbianism but could disqualify women completely as readers of his book.

Something of Baudelaire's "badness" is lost, I think, when it is translated by Mallarmé into obscurity alone. Baudelaire explained in an unfinished draft of a preface that "[f]amous poets had long divided up the most flowery

realms of poetry. I thought it would be pleasant, and enjoyable precisely to the extent that the task was difficult, to extract *beauty* from *le Mal*."[4] This is a defense of difficulty, too, but not in the same sense as Mallarmé's "I say: a flower! and . . . musically arises . . . that which is absent in all bouquets."[5] Contemporary defenses of difficult writing have gone in the direction of Mallarmé's obscurity rather than Baudelaire's evil. The "death of the author," in fact, is prefigured in Mallarmé's famous statement, "The pure work implies the speaking disappearance of the poet, who yields initiative to words."[6] But this is a death without a corpse, without decay, without worms, without *vers*. Mallarmé makes of death a principle of structure so far-reaching that it took the whole twentieth century to understand it. Nevertheless, while making death infiltrate every aspect of signification, Mallarmé is also in some way repressing it, and repressing the badness that no principle can eliminate.

That badness returns, paradoxically, not in the defenses but in the attacks on "bad writing" that have often accompanied obscurity. A sense of such contests at the end of the nineteenth century can be gleaned from Mallarmé's testy defense in his essay "Mystery in Letters":

> De pures prérogatives seraient, cette fois, à la merci des bas farceurs.
>
> Tout écrit, extérieurement à son trésor, doit, par égard envers ceux dont il emprunte, après tout, pour un objet autre, le langage, présenter, avec les mots, un sens même indifférent: on gagne de détourner l'oisif, charmé que rien ne l'y concerne, à première vue.
>
> Salut, exact, de part et d'autre—
>
> Si, tout de même, n'inquiétait je ne sais quel miroitement, en dessous, peu séparable de la surface concédée à la rétine—il attire le soupçon: les malins, entre le public, réclamant de couper court, opinent, avec sérieux, que, juste, la teneur est inintelligible.
>
> Malheur ridiculement à qui tombe sous le coup, il est enveloppé dans une plaisanterie immense et médiocre: ainsi toujours—pas tant, peut-être, que ne sévit avec ensemble et excès, maintenant, le fléau.
>
> Il doit y avoir quelque chose d'occulte au fond de tous, je crois décidément à quelque chose d'abscons, signifiant fermé et caché, qui habite le commun: car, sitôt cette masse jetée vers quelque trace que c'est une réalité, existant, par exemple, sur une feuille de papier, dans tel écrit—pas en soi—cela qui est obscur: elle s'agite, ouragan jaloux d'attribuer les ténèbres à quoi que ce soit, profusément, flagramment.
>
> Sa crédulité vis-à-vis de plusieurs qui la soulagent, en faisant affaire, bondit à l'excès: et le suppôt d'Ombre, d'eux désigné, ne placera un mot, dorénavant, qu'avec un secouement que ç'ait été elle, l'énigme, elle ne tranche, par un coup d'éventail de ses jupes: "Comprends pas!"—l'innocent annonçât-il se moucher.[7]

I have permitted myself this extensive quotation because I think it touches on most of the things that come up when one tries to defend obscurity: the division between the crowd and the writer, the crowd's refusal to think there could be obscurity inside everyone, the scapegoating of anyone

who suggests otherwise and the paranoid vigilance about it, the accusation that incomprehensible writing is the cause of incomprehension. But the real mystery is why "I don't understand it" should condemn the *author* rather than the *reader* or, at least, as Mallarmé goes on to say, should not amount to a suspension of judgment:

> Je sais, de fait, qu'ils se poussent en scène et assument, à la parade, eux, la posture humiliante; puisque arguer d'obscurité—ou, nul ne saisira s'ils ne saisissent et ils ne saisissent pas—implique un renoncement antérieur à juger.[8]

It has become commonplace to allow difficult or transgressive writing to *authors* but not to *critics*. Poetic badness and critical obscurity seem very different, but the condemnation of any writer for obscurity is itself colored with moral indignation. "Don't understand!" becomes an accusation. When what was initially condemned enters into the canon, we can smile with superiority at Rimbaud's mother or Baudelaire's and be amazed at their blindness to poetic genius. Yet in the very act of inventing obscure poetry Mallarmé invented the "poème critique." In other words, it was when he realized that the writer and the reader could no longer be disentangled that Mallarmé became Mallarmé.

The taint of moral unseemliness does not last forever, but literature nevertheless keeps enough of that initial *frisson* to give literary studies a somewhat bad conscience. As Peter Brooks put it: "We teachers of literature have little hard information to impart, we're not even sure what we teach, and we have something of a bad conscience about the whole business."[9] Brooks's remarks come in the context of a defense of studying literature as a specific object. It was written for a fascinating compilation of reports and responses published in 1995 as *Comparative Literature in the Age of Multiculturalism*, in which it is suggested that literature be considered "one discursive practice among many others."[10] Comparative literature, it seems, threatens to dissolve into "cultural studies," seen as the triumph of, as Baudelaire would put it, "bonnes actions" over "beau langage." In fact, none of these slippery slopes are unavoidable, but the best way to make sure that literature doesn't dissolve is precisely to keep that "bad conscience."

Comparative literature as a field seems to need to defend itself against the Scylla of "theory" and the Charybdis of "translation." Although many writers recognize the necessary and irreversible changes each has contributed to the field, they lament the day when comparative literature meant reading several languages and literary traditions in the original. Yet their guilt about "elitism" or "Eurocentrism" leads them to overlook some obvious defenses that no one calls up. They mount, with increasing feebleness, what might be called a "Protestant" defense of multiple languages: it is hard to learn a language; therefore, students who learn more than one have to make more effort and be more talented. Here is how Harry Levin, author of the first report in 1965, put it: "If we profess to cover more ground than our sister departments we should honestly acknowledge that we must work harder, nor should we incur their suspicion by offering short-cuts."[11] This is true only to the extent that languages can only be learned in school. The decline of language teaching therefore makes this way of learning languages even harder. But instead of merely failing to teach languages, the public school system actually *discourages* the use of any language other than English. Education consists, then, of *unlearning* languages, not learning them. Before becoming an elite capable of mastering several languages, children must first pass into the elite of people who speak only English. The number of languages spoken in American homes is everything a dream of multiculturalism could ask for: it is not an idea; it is a reality. If comparative literature could tap into *that* multiculturalism, however, it would tap into the true obscurities and insolubilities of a world that cannot be studied as an object. Every comparatist would already be a part of it.

The "good" object, multiculturalism, would present all the dilemmas of the modern world that its idealization—the "It's a small world after all" refrain—represses. But the "bad" objects, theory and translation, are actually two versions of the same unrepression. It is not just that theory involved a mad impetus to translation but that the theory that transformed literary studies utterly transformed the practice of translation. Translating Derrida or Lacan became an art in itself, and respect for specific effects sometimes became so great that more and more words were left in the original and glossed. Thus, more and more French, Greek, or German words began to have currency in theoretical discourse, which, in turn, increased the anger of beginning readers frustrated at what felt like unnecessary impotence to the point that they felt like slamming down the book, snarling something like, "Take your *Nachträglichkeit* and shove it!"

In 1959 it was still possible to write, as did a translator of Hegel's *Encyclopedia*:

> To translate the world's worst stylist literally, sentence by sentence, is possible—it has been done—but it is perfectly pointless; the translation, then, is every bit as unintelligible as the original. But the world's worst stylist is, alas, also one of the world's greatest thinkers, certainly the most important for us in this twentieth century. In the whole history of philosophy there is no other single work that can hold a candle to his *Logic*; a work incomparable in its range, depth, clarity of thought, and beauty of composition—but it must be decoded.
>
> The attempt must be risked, therefore, to rescue its grandeur from its abstruse linguistic chaos. . . . This is like detective work: what Hegel means, but hides under a dead heap of abstractions, must be guessed at and ferreted out. I have dared to translate—not the ponderous Hegelian jargon, which is as little German as it would be

English—but the thought. My "translation," then, is a critical presentation or rendition; it is not a book about Hegel because it faithfully follows the order and sequence of his paragraphs.[12]

After the theory revolution it is no longer possible so serenely to separate style from thinking, idea from language, thought from jargon. The understanding that thought is not separable from its expression—and in that way sometimes escapes the control of the author himself—is what deconstruction found within the structuralism that claimed a panoptic view of meaning making. "As little German as it would be English" indicates that the original is worth translating precisely because it is foreign to its *own* language. When Mallarmé contributed a series of his "poèmes critiques" without translation to W. H. Henley's journal the *National Observer*, a letter from a reader protested that he was ready to accept the anomaly in order to brush up on his French but that Mallarmé was writing in a language that was "as little French as it would have been English."[13] Poetry, for Mallarmé, was that which "de plusieurs vocables refait un mot total, neuf, *étranger à la langue*."[14] For Walter Benjamin, too, translation was "only a somewhat provisional way of coming to grips with the foreignness of languages."[15] Only through translation does the work's foreignness to *its own* language become apparent.

If deconstruction is what is often meant by "theory," whether for good or ill, no one could insist more on going back to the original language than Jacques Derrida. His essay on Plato discovers in the word *pharmakon* an undecidability that all translators—and therefore all Platonisms—have assumed was a decidability. The divide between *poison* and *remedy* happens *in translation*. It is not, however, that such inadequate translations could be avoided if one stayed with the original. It is that an actual history, shaped by a decision that the translators could not choose not to make, makes the original perceptible as resisting it. As Derrida tells his Japanese translator, "The question of deconstruction is also through and through *the* question of translation."[16]

The worry about translation is, of course, always a worry about *bad* translation ("the inaccurate transmission of an inessential content," as Benjamin puts it).[17] But the suspicion is that what is essential about a literary work is precisely what is *always* lost in translation, which is why so many poets have been so intent on *finding* it. That is perhaps why both Baudelaire and Mallarmé wanted to translate the quintessential bad poet of American literature, Edgar Allan Poe. And this takes us back to the badness of literature.

Sometime ago, when I came across a reference to one of my colleagues in the *Boston Globe* as a professor of "comparable literature" (Oct. 20, 2000, B4), I realized that the field itself is oddly named. Why *isn't* it called "comparable literature" in fact? Doesn't the classic version of the field assume that you can take, say, romanticism, and compare its French, German, and English versions, which are presumed to be comparable? What does "comparative literature" really mean? That what is studied is comparatively (but not absolutely) literary? Perhaps—but could this have been the original intent? The field that depends on comparison for its very definition somehow at the same time opposes some sort of resistance to comparability. Just enough to echo the irony in the story of Elena Levin explaining to someone why her husband, Harry, author of the 1965 report, was busy working: "The Professors are here to compare the literatures." It is as if the field defined by comparison unconsciously upholds the adage, "*Comparaison n'est pas raison*," or agrees with William Blake when, in his poem *Jerusalem*, he has his hero, Los, howl: "I must Create a System, or be enslav'd by another Mans; / I will not Reason & Compare: my business is to Create."[18]

In order to explore this odd resistance to comparison, I turn to three more texts that each embody some form of "bad writing": popular culture, philosophy, and teaching manuals. My three texts are the 1995 film *Clueless*, H. Vaihinger's book *The Philosophy of "As If"* (first published in German in 1911), and Andrew Boyd's *Life's Little Deconstruction Book* (billed by the publisher as "Po-Mo to Go").

In the film *Clueless*[19] the exclamation "As if!" is used by the protagonist, fifteen-year-old Beverly Hills high school student Cher Horowitz, to project the frame of reference of other persons into pure fantasy—theirs—and to expel it from herself. For example, when an unprepossessing high school boy approaches Cher in an interested manner, she says, "Ew! Get away from me! *As if!*" In other words, "*As if* I would go out with you!" "In your dreams!" "You wish!" When another boy, Elton, reveals that he is interested in *her*, not in the new girl, Tai, with whom she has been trying to fix him up (this is one of the few places where Jane Austen's *Emma* is recognizable as a source), Cher exclaims "Me? *As if!* Don't you mean Tai?" In other words, "*As if* I had been flirting with you for myself!" "*As if* I had been the object rather than the subject!" Another example: when Cher reports that her teacher has said that her arguments are unresearched, unstructured, and unconvincing, she exclaims, "*As if!*"—which I guess means, "Who is *he* to say such a thing?"

The Beverly Hills high school dialect in the film thus makes use of the expression *as if* in an interpersonal sense. It is always an exclamation and always casts desire or doubt away from the speaker and onto the addressee. I don't have time to do a reading of the film as a rhetorical treatise, but as a study of substitution, transformation (the makeover), and the narcissism of small differences, it would lend itself very well to such treatment.

For Hans Vaihinger *as if* is an essential mental function enabling people to use fictions "as if" they were true: religions, philosophies, even mathematical constructs. As he writes in the preface to the English edition, "An idea

whose theoretical untruth or incorrectness, and therewith its falsity, is admitted, is not for that reason practically valueless and useless; for such an idea, in spite of its theoretical nullity, may have great practical importance."[20] Kant's *Ding an sich*, for example, which can't be proven, is a necessary part of his philosophical system, just as imaginary numbers operate as a necessary part of a system of calculations, even though, in the end, they don't exist.

Life's Little Deconstruction Book is organized as a series of maxims.[21] There are 365 of them—one for every day of the year (I'm not sure what the reader is supposed to do during Leap Year). Maxim 33 reads: "Be as if." I guess that must mean something like, "Ontology is performance" or "Whatever you seem to have in your mind *is* your mind." Or, as Pascal might have put it, "Act *as if* you believe, and belief will follow, or at least, you will have gained everything that you would have gained by believing."

Teaching theory I come up again and again unexpectedly against the problem of belief. In literature I can suspend disbelief, but in theory I feel as if my location with respect to other writers and thinkers is somehow the stuff of the course. Because the writers I am teaching have designs on the most fundamental assumptions I make while I read, I cannot teach them as if they were a subject matter. At the same time, my own relation to the writers has changed over time, and it has changed with respect to that of my students. What is different about teaching theory for me now is the sense of my own historicity. Yet if I look at the theory I teach exclusively from the outside, I am not teaching theory but history. There would certainly be usefulness in teaching the history of theory, but it would not give access to the "Aha!" that ignites an interest in theory in the first place. When Frantz Fanon says about his reaction to Sartre's reading of Aimé Césaire's poetics of Negritude, "I needed *not* to think I was just a minor term in a dialectic," he is saying, in effect, I needed to read *as if* I believed in the Negritude I now take a distance from, in order to get to the next stage in my thinking. *As if* is something that cannot happen right if it happens in the mode of *as if*.

I have found that the way in which students dismiss or take distance from the texts we read in a theory course follows patterns that are quite different from critiques. And that perhaps was true of my own dismissals of their predecessors. But my task is to make sure the students actually *read* whatever is on the syllabus—which may now include some of those predecessors I am reading for the first time. "Bracketing the referent" or "preferring *langue* to *parole*" are important ways of seeing the limitations of Saussure, but they help only in understanding what Saussure *didn't* do, not what he *did* do—not what those limits *enabled* but only what they prevented. Understanding the conceptual breakthrough involved in saying, "In language there are only differences," depends on pausing there long enough (recall Cher's reaction to

stop signs—"I totally paused") to see *what Saussure was critiquing himself*. Thought as a *break* is different from thought as a *chain*.

The same is true for elements of a theory—say, female sexuality in Freud—from which one knows one has taken a critical distance, or elements in a theory—say, ethnocentrism in Lévi-Strauss—where one may be critical of a framework of which one is nevertheless still a part. What has been called "political correctness" is something I would prefer to call "double consciousness"—the knowledge that one is viewed, not just viewing. W. E. B Du Bois defined double consciousness, famously, as "the sense of always looking at one's self through the eyes of others, of measuring one's soul by the tape of a world."[22] The strength of those "others" produces double consciousness. But how can white double consciousness or male double consciousness or Eurocentric double consciousness be anything but reactive and defensive, if the power of those "others" is itself what consciousness was defined against? Double consciousness would feel a lot like paranoia. No wonder people might attempt to eradicate it. But in this case, as they say, even paranoids have real enemies. Or perhaps we should say, denying paranoia doesn't make those "real others" go away. What does the necessity of double consciousness have to do with the question of teaching *as if* one believed?

The dangers of representativeness and tokenism are precisely the dangers of losing the "foreignness" of texts to their *own* languages. But to fear such a danger is to forget that what should happen in literature courses is *reading*. Yes, the changes might reflect an unquestioned notion of individualism. And yes, the students will not see that from which a syllabus is departing. But surely the students have imbibed cultural assumptions that will be defamiliarized by some of the texts. Perhaps the use of tokens or of islands of knowledge in a sea of ignorance can homogenize all differences into various versions of the same. But even when something like colonialism attempted to reproduce itself in, say, the Caribbean, it became something quite different from what it started out to be. At the same time, how could a syllabus mark radical change within a culture—and an educational system—that changes much more slowly? If the remedy mirrors the system being questioned rather than the questioning, at least the cognitive dissonance that these contradictory energies embody may correspond to a real conflict in the world rather than the wishful thinking that would seek a more effective critique.

Actually taking seriously the works being read has to become transformative eventually because what is secondary revision for one generation may become primary process for the next. The very transferential process that tends to absolutize the authority of a text (as if it had always been on the syllabus) will deabsolutize the assumptions that are still operative in the teachers who have put those books on the syllabus. On the one hand, if the

map isn't being changed in the primary process of thinking, changing it in a secondary revision is not really *thought*. But on the other hand, acting *as if* the map were changing might actually make it so, in the long run.

How does the structure of the *as if* function, then, to allow for a heuristic transference and for a transformative double consciousness at once, even though these two processes draw on the contradictory energies of belief, critique, and defense? Let me end with a quotation from Joan Copjec's book *Read My Desire*, in which a structure she actually designates as "as if" is understood through, and clarifies, the Lacanian notion of *suture*:

> Suture, in brief, supplies the logic of a paradoxical function whereby a supplementary element is *added* to the series of signifiers in order to mark the *lack* of a signifier that could close the set. The endless slide of signifiers (hence deferral of sense) is brought to a halt and allowed to function "as if" it were a closed set through the inclusion of an element that acknowledges the impossibility of closure. The very designation of the limit is constitutive of the group, the reality the signifiers come to represent, though the group, or the reality, can no longer be thought to be entirely representable.[23]

What I want to claim here is that the role of academic literary criticism—which is academic precisely because it acknowledges the existence of multiple languages—is always to risk a certain "badness" and to be this suture. It is the field whose only definition is to be the acknowledgment of the impossibility of the field, to be the "as if" of literary closure. Criticism, in other words, is what is *added* to the series of literary signifiers in order to mark the *lack* of a signifier that could close the set. It marks not the *future* of literary studies but the *suture* of literary studies. That is the best way we have of relying on the badness of strangers.

Notes

My first epigraph and much of the framework for this part of my essay are taken from the brilliant article by Deborah Jenson, "Gender and the Aesthetic of 'le Mal': Louise Ackermann's Poésies philosophiques, 1871," in *Nineteenth-Century French Studies* 23 (1994–95): 175–93. ["Evil—an acute form of Evil—of which literature is the expression, has I think supreme value for us."]

1. Anne Sexton, *The Complete Poems* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1981), 126.
2. Arthur Rimbaud, *Oeuvres* (Paris: Garnier, 1960), 357.
3. Gordon Millan, *Mallarmé: A Throw of the Dice* (London: Secker and Warburg, 1994), 144.
4. Charles Baudelaire, *Oeuvres completes*, ed. Claude Pichois, vol. 1 (Paris: Gallimard, 1975), 181.
5. Stéphane Mallarmé, *Oeuvres complètes* (Paris: Gallimard, 1945), 368.
6. Ibid., 366.

7. Ibid., 382–83.

[Pure prerogatives would be, this time, at the mercy of low jokers.

Every piece of writing, outside of its treasure, must, toward those from whom it borrows, after all, for a different object, language, present, with words, a sense even indifferent: one gains by not attracting the idler, charmed that nothing there concerns him, at first sight.

Each side gets exactly what it wants—

If, nevertheless, anxiety is stirred by I don't know what shadowy reflection hardly separable from the surface available to the retina—it attracts suspicion: the pundits among the public, averring that this has to be stopped, opine, with due *gravitas*, that, truly, the tenor is unintelligible.

Ridiculously cursed is he who is caught up in this, enveloped by an immense and mediocre joke: it was ever thus—but perhaps not with the intensity with which the plague now extends its ravages.

There must be something occult deep inside everyone, decidedly I believe in something opaque, a signifier sealed and hidden, that inhabits common man: for, as soon as the masses throw themselves toward some trace that has its reality, for example, on a piece of paper, it's in the writing—not in oneself—that there is something obscure: they stir crazily like a hurricane, jealous to attribute darkness to anything, profusely, flagrantly.

Their credulity, fostered by those who reassure it and market it, is suddenly startled: and the agent of darkness, singled out by them, can't say a single word thenceforth, without, a shrug indicating that it's just that enigma again, being cut off, with a flourish of skirts: "Don't understand!"—the poor author innocently announcing, perhaps, that he needed to blow his nose.]

8. Mallarmé, *Oeuvres complètes*, 383. [I know, in fact, that they crowd the stage and expose themselves, actually, in a humiliating posture; since to argue that something is obscure—or, no one will get it if they don't, and they don't—implies a prior suspension of judgment.]
9. Peter Brooks, "Must We Apologize?" in *Comparative Literature in the Age of Multiculturalism*, ed. Charles Bernheimer (Baltimore, Md.: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1995), 105.
10. The Bernheimer Report, 1993; reprinted in Bernheimer, *Comparative Literature*, 42.
11. The Levin Report, 1965; reprinted in Bernheimer, *Comparative Literature*, 25.
12. *Hegel's Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, trans. and annot. by Gustav Emil Mueller (New York: Philosophical Library, 1959), 1.
13. One letter to the editor read as follows: "SIR,—I will not, like your 'Constant Subscriber' of last week, protest against all foreign languages. I can read some of them myself, and have relations who can read others. But I shall take it very kindly if the next time M. Stéphane Mallarmé occupies your columns, you kindly append a French translation of his article, or what in Decadish might be called 'une française traduction.' I am, yours resignedly, ONE WHO USED TO THINK HE COULD READ FRENCH" (*National Observer*, April 9, 1892, 540).
14. Mallarmé, "Crise de vers," in *Oeuvres complètes*, 368 (my emphasis).

15. Walter Benjamin, *Selected Writings*, ed. Marcus Bullock and Michael W. Jennings, vol. 1 (Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap Press, 1996), 257.
16. "Letter to a Japanese Friend," in *A Derrida Reader: Between the Blinds*, ed. Peggy Kamuf (New York: Columbia University Press, 1991), 270.
17. Benjamin, *Selected Writings*, 253.
18. William Blake, *The Poetry and Prose of William Blake*, ed. David V. Erdman (New York: Doubleday, 1965), 151.
19. Writ. and dir. by Amy Heckerling, prod. and dist. by Paramount Pictures, starring Alicia Silverstone as Cher Horowitz.
20. Hans Vaihinger, *The Philosophy of "As If,"* trans. C. K. Cohen (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1924), viii.
21. Andrew Boyd, *Life's Little Deconstruction Book* (New York: Norton, 1999).
22. W. E. B. Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk* (New York: Penguin, 1989), 5.
23. Joan Copjec, *Read My Desire* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1994), 174–75.