Who's Got the Text? What Text?:

On the 25th of Ramażan in 990 of the Hijra, October 13, 1582, a great storm blew up on the Red Sea and the Ottoman poet/biographer 'Abdullaṭif of Kastamonu, known by the pen-name Laṭifi was drowned in a foundering ship which was to have carried him to Yanbu' on the Arab Peninsula. Laṭifi was about 92 years old at the time and his famous *Tezkîre-i Şu'erâ*, the *Biography of Poets* was only 38. The man was gone after a long life, the "text" still lives and remembers its poets four hundred and twelve years later.

Sometimes the revolutionary and strangely new only seems so from the perspective of a gap or loss in memory. When I first encountered Derrida on the "text" in the form of *Glas*, I was blown away, not by the obvious weirdness of it all but by a blast of recognition, that eerie feeling one gets seeing a very familiar face in the wrong surroundings. And the face I saw in *Glas* was that of Laṭifi's *Tezkere*, which I had come to know well over some stressful graduate student years and which even now stands as the ground of my deep-lying suspicion of all projects that depend on the notion of a stable, unary text.

Glas certainly presents a strange face [Illustrations 1 and 2.]: separate texts in columns, a reading of Hegel on the left, of Genet on the right, with interpolations—"judases," traitors and peepholes— from numerous sources on the margins or interposed in the "text(s)," and even changes in language and typeface. This is a image of the "deconstructed" text, the anti-book, "death-knell" of the book (for *glas* means *death-knell*), a "show and tell" project that appears as a compendium of digressions without a tellable, single "digressed-from." Because each "part" of the text is itself so manifestly a "part" of something else, it escapes the bonds of "the book" and is smeared out over time and location. It is no longer a unit, an organic whole but a fragment in a kaleidoscopic relation to other fragments—the face of the post-modern text.

A major issue addressed by the *form* of *Glas* is Derrida's contention that "writing," as manifested in the text, is not secondary to an act of speech or a "speech-like" act. This is to say that the "text" is not a re-presentation or making present of an original moment of utterance; it is not a (unitary) stand-in for an original moment of inscription as is implied by the limits of the little rectangle that defines the *book* (which Derrida sets in contrast to the *text*).

In this light we we might reconsider an argument that Maria Rosa Menocal makes in *Shards of Love*: that the "shockingly logocentric universe" of Islam is substantively different in the manner of its logocentrism from the universe of the West, whose particular grounding in the Logos Derrida takes such pains to expose. She foregrounds the status of the Christian "Book" as a *representation* of an absent but re-presentable Word. And this she seems to contrast with the Quran of which the "writing" is one with or inseparable from the "Word." The one is infinitely representable; it can, for example, be translated into any language without losing its status. As for the other, even though it is *described* internally as originating from a primordial act of speech (the prophet's response to the angelic command "recite") and is portrayed in historical narrative as preserved, in its infancy, by an oral tradition (of the pre-Othmanic reciters), the Quran is in practice inseparable from its inscription. The writing, the language, the script are primary and non-representable (and hence non-translatable). The speech (and gestures) of the Prophet, the *Ḥadîth*, are subject to all sorts of representation and questions of verification, the Quran is not. Although its *meaning* is the object of a rich variety of institutionalized hermeneutic perspectives, interpreters who treat the Quran as though *the text itself* were a representation of some esoteric (and absent) Other—the *ḥurûfis*, for example—are looked upon with grave and often violent disfavor.

As a result, we might propose that the Quran can be understood as a unique case in which signifier and signified, Book and Word are one and the same (which sets aside, for now, the question of an eternal, neo-platonic, ideal Quran). It can be infinitely reproduced but in every reproduction it is entirely present and is never a sign for a lack or a representation of an absent actuality.

I bring up this point not to focus on the ontology of the Quran, but to suggest a contrast with a modernistic, westernistic view of *the book* which tends to assume that the book in its unity, purity, and reproducibility is a reflection of an originating moment of utterance, which in turn bears an unacknowledged bond to the utterance of the primal Word. This view also, in part, interacts with a privileged technology of the printed book, wherein every reproduction of an original model-of-the-book is unerringly instantiated by

the typeset text—*any* typeset text.

But imagine another kind of text, the text that Derrida discovered when he realized that every *book* both grounds itself in the Logos and subverts that grounding, on the one hand reflects belief in an originary moment of *utterance* and on the other falls apart to reveal the unresolvable multiplicity of *writing*. This is the text he exposes in *Glas*.

In Latîfî's world, in 1546, when his *Tezkere* was finished for the first time, one Book and one book alone was the literal Word of God. All other books were mutable, each handwritten copy opened the text up to change, copyists, authors, owners, readers were all potential contributors to the text.

Latîfî was born in Anatolia, in the town of Kastamonu in 1490. We don't know much about his life other than what he tells us—mostly that he was born with the soul of a poet and acquired considerable learning but never really prospered as either a writer or bureaucrat despite his great talents and many virtues. We do know that when he was thirty five years old he wrote a long essay on the city of Istanbul, a prose panegyric that seems to have been moderately well-received and apparently resulted in his appointment to various secretarial positions in the European provinces. His major work, the biography of poets, the *Tezkere* came late in his life in the midst of the glorious reign of Suleyman the Lawgiver (the Magnificent to Europeans). Latîfî was already in his sixties, as the story goes, when his friend, the poet Mehmed Za'îfî, suggested to him that he write a *Tezkere*, which he did with some initial (and traditional) reluctance.

Latîfî's tone in the *Tezkere* can best be described as curmudgeonly. It was an exciting time for littérateurs, in the last half of the sixteenth century. The poet Hayâlî became the wealthy lord of a province; Zâtî received the income from two villages for two years as his reward for a single poem... But the competition was as fierce as the pay-offs were huge and Latîfî never attracted a generous patronage. So Latîfî had little faith in his contemporaries. In his imaginary dialogue with Za'îfî he says,

> If you compose truths and analyses of all sorts combining art and wisdom, and if you include all manner of artifice and artistry, if you create the like of white magic with a thousand fancies in every expression and transport words to the boundaries of miracle, there is still room for objection and denial... Thus, no matter how choice or chosen a person you may be, they will pay you no heed, and in order to make false claims of competence, each of them is capable of pointing out deficiencies in your competencies and talents.

Latîfî knew what he was talking about. His comments on fellow poets are scathing and his friend 'Aşık Çelebî complained that Latîfî stole from him the idea of a biography of poets in alphabetical (rather than numerical, *ebced*) order—a theft that threw 'Aşık into such a tizzy that he abandoned his own *tezkere* project for ten years. When he finally did get around to writing, 'Aşık made a point of referring to Latîfî's work as "the *Kastamonu-name*," "The Book of Kastamonu," which referred archly to the large number of poets it included from Latîfî's home town.

Latîfî completes his text in 953 of the Hijra, 1453 C. E. and the "becoming a book: part two" process begins as the hurley burley of sixteenth century Istanbul begins to inscribe itself onto the *Tezkere*. The text immediately begins gathering its "second column" of comments and additions. For example, one of the earliest manuscripts [Illustration 3] has a long marginal note giving a full entry for a poet named Riyâzî of Uskup and the comment that Latîfî had omitted this poet. At the end of the same copy is a list of forty other poets that the same commentator thought Latîfî should have included. And later Riyâzî does make his way from the margins into the text. This kind of overwriting is common [Illustration 4] and simple comments, corrections, favorite bits of poetry litter the margins of many copies.

And the "center" text too has its *judases*, its traitors to the univocality of the text and peepholes into its secret life. For example, in some copies of the *Tezkere* in the entry for Ishâk we encounter the following:

> However, the author of this *Tezkere*, Mevlana Latîfî, has made a glaring omission and error here. The above four-part chronogram is not İshâk's but rather that of a well-known heterodox and irreligious rascal called Mu'ammâ'î, who is still alive and an old book dealer in the cloth-market of Edirne.

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It is difficult to tell if any of the early additions to the text were done by Laṭîfî, although some—the Riyâżî entry in later copies or an essay in praise of the executed Grand Vizier İbrâhîm Pasha, for example— bear marks of his style. However, more than twenty years after the completion date in the text, two new copies appear, beautifully written by one Derviş Mehmed ibn Murad in identical formats, the first a slightly imperfect version of the second [Illustration 5]. What is striking about these copies is that they represent a major rewriting of the *Tezkere* and a rewriting done in the name of Laṭîfî.

The story appears to be something like this: The *Tezkere* never really paid off for Laṭîfî; approaching eighty he was still working, still a secretary with a position in Egypt. And the criticisms must have stung. Prose style had changed and what he had asserted to be "a new style such as no one in the lands of Rûm had created before" was now out of date, too simple and unadorned. The latest *Tezkere* writer, Ḥasan Çelebî, writing in the new high style, described Laṭîfî thusly:

> He is presently in Istanbul, the shaft of his body now bent like a bow, the tree of his life withered, barren of leaf or fruit, and his curved frame bent to receive the peace of death and the glad tidings of eternal life...

Little wonder that the same writer finds Laṭîfî's simpler prose "free from sweetness of expression or pleasantness of metaphor, denuded of charm and grace."

But Laṭîfî was not waiting around passively for death to call. In fact, he seems to have been ready to start over. His *Essay Describing Istanbul* is re-dedicated to the new sultan and the famous *Tezkere* is completely rewritten. The prose style is jazzed up [Illustration 6], the scathing critique of contemporary literature in the concluding section is greatly expanded, there is now an autobiography of the author and several entirely new entries.

The new entries are themselves traitors to the notion that this all about recording facts and history and scholarly things. What makes popular reading and a salable text is not too different for the elites of sixteenth century Istanbul and the readers of today's popular press. Here are just a few: Esîrî, a comically short and blue-eyed Russian slave who was finally executed for seducing both the male and female members of his master's household; Bedrî, a weird fellow from Miḥâliç who was constantly drunk and bankrupt; Cemâlî, a great beauty; Ferâḥî, who fell in love with the son of a tanner (the most despised of occupations) and became a tanner himself just to be near his beloved; Nâlişî, another lover who was constantly being thrashed by the friends of his latest heart-throb.

None of this, however, made a noticeable difference. The "new" *Tezkere* remained in its two beautiful copies and does not seem to have had many (if any) immediate descendants. Laṭîfî drowned in the sea-storm, on an arduous journey at the age of 92, and the copying, re-copying, and overwriting of his text continued over the years. As early as the late 15th century, Jewish exiles from Spain had received permission to set up printing presses in Istanbul, permission to print in Latin and Hebrew characters but *never* in the Arabic script, the characters of the One Immutable Book. Only in the 18th century (1726) was highly restricted permission given to print in Arabic characters and it was almost a century and a half later when a printed version of Laṭîfî's *Tezkere* appeared.

Actually, the 1869 edition by Ahmet Cevdet was not the first printed version. The Swiss orientalist, Thomas Chabert had done a German translation published in Zurich in 1800 [Illustration 7]. This is a strange text; compiled from two unidentified Berlin manuscripts, it lacks a number of entries and omits the extensive comments made by Laṭîfî in his concluding chapter. (Chabert was after *information* and the critical grumblings of a disappointed poet apparently did not count.)

The Cevdet printing *is* Latifi's *Tezkere* to most scholars. But it too is a "strange" text. It corresponds to no particular manuscript and is clearly compiled from a number of manuscript sources, none of which are mentioned. Most of the text seems represent the "old *Tezkere*," although there are indications that Cevdet must have discovered a manuscript of the "new *Tezkere*" late in the publishing process. In the entries for Şeyḥî and Fażlî there are sections called "Addition to Şeyḥî, to Fażlî," which were taken from the "new" text and "tipped" into already printed folios during the binding process [Illustration 8]. Not only this, but there are some entries in Cevdet that as far as we know exist only in the "new text" manuscripts, and yet the Cevdet entries are different. Was there another manuscript, is there a "missing link?"

In 1950, there appeared another German translation by Otto Rescher, himself an exile to Istanbul, where he was to become Osman Reşat—Otto, Ottomanist, Osman [Illustration 9]. Rescher's text began with Cevdet's and all its oddities, to which he added his own "Verbesserung," which meant taking from the manuscripts entries that were not included in Cevdet. In his introductory remarks Rescher mentions one of the "new *Tezkere*" manuscripts and says that it certainly should be taken into account in any future "critical edition."

With the notion of "critical edition" we come back to the text and the question, "What text?" The critical edition is what we, as scholars, make of the text so that we can do what we do with texts, so that the text can be "reliable," so that we can "get back to the text" and ground arguments of a certain kind on the text that we have created precisely for that purpose. What gets lost, of course, is the heterogeneous, historical text.

Kurt Vonnegut's Trafalmadorians differ from earthlings in that they see history whole—past, present, future are all equally and inseparably accessible to their gaze. So to ask, "How is Bill?" is bewildering to a Trafalmadorian who at the same glance sees Bill being born, dying, well and ailing, young and old. What Derrida and Latîfî, *Glas* and the *Tezkere* do for me is to model the Trafalmadorian character of the text. Clearly the *Tezkere* is in some way Latîfî's; it belongs to Latîfî in his sixties and in his eighties and perhaps in times between, but it also belongs to Ahmed Cevdet, and Chabert, and Rescher, and the many writers-in-the-margins and copyists. And, although I haven't seen the result yet, it now also belongs to the latest producer of an "edition," a "reading" in the new latin letters.

Perhaps we need a text, as I said, to do what we do with texts; just as we need an author, a single voice, a moment of utterance for the same reasons. Even *Glas* could not escape translation and interpretation. Latîfî's *Tezkere*, like all texts from the age of manuscripts and as every editor really knows, will never be captured. The "old" and the "new" *Tezkeres* can never actually be reconciled—a change in style is not a "variant!" If Latîfî indeed authored "additions" in a number of manuscripts then there is not even an "original, author's text"; in fact, almost every manuscript is unique.

For some years I have been involved in a project devoted to the editing of texts—a project that I do and do not believe in. Except for the tragic death of a dear friend, I might never have gotten so caught up in the editing business at all. When Mehmed Çavuşoğlu died we were—or so I imagine—in the middle of rethinking what an edition of an Ottoman text might be. On the surface the editing process seems straightforward: find a "best text," the "author's" text, the most "complete" text, the oldest text; reconstruct, as best as possible, the original utterance; add any later utterances by the author; record "variant readings." At every point the editor makes his or her own choices based on an informed reading of the text and its history and what we end up with is in large part an editor's creation. And Çavuşoğlu was among the very best editors of Ottoman texts.

Two things got us to thinking: one was a rascally old poet of the sixteenth century and the other was the computer.

Revânî was a poet in and out of the court of Sultan Selim, the father of Suleyman. At one point he submitted to the sultan a rather lovely *kaside* on winter with the word *berf* or "snow" repeated after every rhyme. It began like this:

> Since the snow has set itself
>   on the throne of earth
> Snow is become sovereign
>   over all the winter-lands
>
> Snow built a palace of glass
>   for winter's lord
> No wonder it made the walls
>   into crystal

> A bright sword slipping from
> a silver scabbard
> So snow makes the stream flow
> through the world

There are two stories about this poem both about its rejection by the sultan. In one the sultan complains that snow is hardly a praiseworthy thing and speculates darkly on what it might mean to present him with a *kaside* so full of cold words. A poet named Sücûdî took this occasion to poke some fun at poor Revânî with a punning couplet something like this:

> With cold words he has
> frozen up the world
> Hail to Revânî...or let it fall
> on his head

Revânî replied with his own couplet based on the name Sücûdî, which means "he who prostrates himself in prayer," and referencing the poet's youthful flirtations with drunkenness:

> You've been flat on your face
> everywhere on earth
> And this is why they call you
> "the Prostrate"

The second story is set during the Egyptian campaign. Selim is camped in the desert, surrounded by local Arab dignitaries, and Revânî presents a re-written version of his *Snow Kaside*. The sultan is not amused: what could these people, here in the hot country, possibly know of snow?

And it so turned out that in working on editing Revânî's *divan*, two very different versions of the *Snow kaside* actually turned up—just as one would expect from the story. Like Latîfî's "new and old *Tezkere*" the two *kasides* were difficult to reduce to a single text. After all, their "two-ness" is very much a part of the story. The fact that this was a problem at all, that it troubled Çavuşoğlu so, seems to say much about what the editing, the making into a book, does to the "text." When we move from the multiplicities and heterogeneities of the "manuscripts" and work to conceal the participation of multiple writers in multiple "writings," we are also engaged in an act of violent suppression, the forced reduction of many disparate stories into a single controllable narrative revolving about the "book."

Here is where the computer comes into the tale. In order to compete for a grant, Çavuşoğlu and I had made up a story about using computers to edit texts and particularly the *divan* of Revânî. He knew nothing about computers and I knew only a bit more. But we both believed, I think, that the computer might be a valuable tool in our imperialistic project to wrest a book from out of a morass of manuscripts. What I actually learned was something entirely different.

Maria Rosa Menocal constantly reminds us of the uncanny similarities between the pre- and the post-moderns, the coming 'round again of long repressed heterogenies and ways of "remembering" them. And in much the same vein I have begun to see the computer and the "electronic text" as a potential agent of the re-birth of a "text-consciousness" that far more resembles the consciousness of the long age of manuscripts when the unary "text" was always only a theoretical point of convergence in a haze of "copies." The multi-dimensional layering of texts, marginalia, commentary, additions, variations without hierarchy or hegemony is all quite conceivable with the computer, in the form of what is called hypertext, where it fails with the book. In a sense, *Glas* is a necessarily failed but heroic attempt to create a hypertext within the limits imposed by the technology of the book. But failed or not, the question that Derrida makes us ask is a crucial one: what will the *text* be when it is freed from the *book*? And the answer seems to be, in some manner: it will be much more like the text was for Latîfî, when there was one true book, the Mother of Books, and many many texts.

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What the bloody-minded find most distressing about the term "post-modern" is the way it has avoided capture in a definition, a manifesto, a system. This makes of the term a point in relation to the modern from which an unbounded host of trajectories can be taken. To me an important part of being "post-modern" is much more than simply rejecting excesses or errors of modernity or modernity's co-defendants. Any number of reactionary and tyrannical positions could (and often do) lay claim to "post-modernity" on such flimsy grounds. I would argue that post-modernity, more positively, is the possibility—*a possibility created by modernity itself*—that modernity's own limits can be transcended by a new and less bounded consciousness. Whether that consciousness can be sought in al-Andalus, or Istanbul, or in the virtual universe of cyberspace, I cannot tell for sure. What does seem sure to me is that things we are used to—the text, the poem—are not going to be the same as they have been, that writing and working in a scholarly universe will have a future that I can neither see nor predict with the easy confidence with which my teachers seemed to imagine my future.

It somehow seems fitting that we end with a haunting and evocative image...the *shards of love*. We are workers, and readers, and writers among the shards of love. When the poet inscribes the poem:

> If my heart were a wild bird, it would nest in
> your twisted curl
> Wherever I am, oh *djinn* my love is by
> your side

what is whole—and holy—is the experience of love. The poem, the words, the readings of the poem, the *text* are the shattered shards of experiences that we piece together in the form of our own loves. Like the editor's loving assembly of "the book," so do we construct and reconstruct lives and selves and meanings out of the heterogeneous fragments that define the layered archeology of desire.

Introduction: Stances, Trajectories, Intersections

The most difficult thing for many or most scholars to face—and by scholars I mean experts as well as students—is the proposition that all acts of doing scholarship by virtue of the very grounding of scholarly *practices* involve problematic premises that are subject to critique. The second most difficult issue for scholars is the notion that the *ways* in which they work—as distinct from the "subject matter" of their work or the interpretations and representations they espouse—have consequences in the world that with great regularity are unsought and unexpected and serve the ends, not of the scholar, or "scholarship," but of other forces which the scholar may consciously and passionately oppose.

I intend to argue over a period of weeks for the plausibility of these assertions and to enlist the work of a number of other persons in the task. And I intend to do so despite the fact that as I work to convince you I will also be trying to undermine the mechanisms of thought with which convincing is traditionally done by persons in positions bearing labels such as *scholar* and *expert* and *teacher*. Beware, for this is not a comforting process. It runs against the grain of all the *processes* of knowledge acquisition you have been learning to master since pre-school. Unless you are unshakably immune, it will infect you with doubt where you long to find certitude, impel you to find only chaos where you wished to find order, reveal contingency where you hoped to find TRUTH. So, if you feel you absolutely cannot *survive* without a stable world or at least a stable scholarly world, drop the course, don't listen to the lectures, don't read a single thing I suggest.

I am going to tell you stories. This is what scholarship is—scientific scholarship, humanities scholarship, all scholarship—the telling of stories, mostly about the relations between things. What makes scholarship different from ordinary discourse is the rules about telling stories and about *what* stories can be told. I am going to tell you some scholarly stories, some stories that are not usually told and also tell some meta-stories about the rules for scholarly story-telling.

One of the comforting aspects of scholarship is that in practice it allows the illusion of dealing with "reality" without ever engaging it, the illusion that scholars can "interpret" and "analyze" and "discuss" life and the world without, at the same time, interacting with either. This is a comfort difficult to renounce— especially for scholars, a number of whom tend to be attracted to scholarship for the very reason of its disengagement. When Edward Said's *Orientalism* was published it shook the foundations not only of Middle Eastern Studies but of humanistic discipline in general—precisely *because* it demanded a self-critique by scholars of the grounds of their own scholarly practice. And it demanded the critique not on "scholarly" grounds but by showing how the most "scholarly" and "detached" of scholarship was rooted in political agendas and bore fruit of pain and suffering for real people living in the real world. Moreover, and perhaps more significant, it suggested that the scholarly practices critiqued were not merely stunted or twisted versions of a benign or harmless ideal—a mistaken or correctable *application* of scholarship—but an ineradicable characteristic of scholarship itself—or at least scholarship as it is often understood. For these reasons I believe that *Orientalism* and its even more cogently argued successor *Culture and Imperialism* should be required reading for any responsible scholar or student of culture.

I had read *Orientalism* long before I understood it as I do now. One cannot be an *Ottomanist* without developing a sense of the politically motivated misreading of the Middle East that permeates scholarship and comes to us compellingly clad in the garb of truth. That reading is enacted in every department around the country (and , for that matter, in the Middle East itself), in the distributions of faculty, in curricula, in distributions of funds, in literary canons, in governmental support, in student choices, in works published, in who gets hired and tenured to do what, in what teachers and students see as musts and shoulds. The story of that deeply compromised reading is certainly part of what we need to know in order better to appreciate the more fundamental story, the story of whatever it is that *generates* our readings and *makes* them into the true. Nonetheless, the misreading (with the implication that there is a "correct" reading) is not what it's about...

I re-understood *Orientalism*, the book, and orientalism, the practice, during the Gulf War. I re-

The second rule stipulates that a "true" referent cannot serve as the basis for multiple and contradictory assertions. The universe must be consistent, and non-deceptive. (The contrary of such a universe would be that of some naive creationists who in the course of arguing for an earth less than 5000 years old assert that God planted evidence of great age—fossils, sediments, etc.—in order to deceive the unbelieving.)

The game of positivistic, "scientific" statement is inextricably connected to the supporting games of research and teaching—not surprisingly, two of the "three pillars" of academic tenure. (The third pillar is "service," a problematic concept in its own right.) Research involves two processes: a creative process, the creation of new material that can serve as proof for assertive statements, and a memorializing process that strives to "remember" the history of assertions and proofs—a history inscribed in and by footnotes and bibliography. It is important to note here that the creative process is often characterized (or mis-characterized for strategic reasons) as a "discovery" process. This presumes, with the naivete peculiar to unquestioned premises, that proofs or evidence or "data" exist out there in the world independent of either assertive statements or the system of problems that generate such assertions. This also presumes that problems and assertive statements about the world are generated out of the "discovery" of proofs rather than the reverse. However, the game being what it is, proofs or evidence are themselves isomorphic with the assertive statements of science—they *are* assertive statements themselves—and so cannot exist outside the game of scientific statement. They are created within and for the game. The notion of "discovery" can then be seen as a strategic attempt by certain speakers (or experts) to beat the game by elevating the status of their assertive statements, claiming that they follow naturally and inevitably from a pristinely collected array of evidence pointing to the actuality of the universe and do not involve the prejudices or tastes or volition of the speaker at all.

The game of teaching is also essential to the game of scientific statement. The speaker or expert must have addressees who confirm his or her assertive statements, addressees who share the same knowledge and the same memory of the history of proofs. The affirmation of a speaker's assertions and ultimately of the speaker's competence as an expert is dependent on the consensus of a community of equally competent addressees. Teaching presumes a student who knows less than the teacher. It presumes that the student can learn what the teacher knows and hence become the equal of the teacher (a potential addressee and speaker). It also presumes that there are statements about the world that are "true" having been processed according to the rules of statement described above, and that such statements can passed on through teaching.

Quite clearly this is what we do in the university; these are the rules we operate under. The whole structure of scholarly values at the university induces us to believe without question that this is what *must* be done. And the structure of what is done gives shape and direction and momentum and, ultimately, meaning to objects of our activity—and creates us as the subjects of a certain ordering of the universe. It is not usual for us to look at and talk about what we are doing or even to make explicit choices about how we are going to do what, or to conceive of those choices as *ethical* choices. This is because such activities are not in the least trivial and reach all the way down to who and what we are and how we interact with other human beings in practical and political ways.

I had a memorable exchange with a bright undergraduate during a lecture recently. She objected to my subversions of the truth project and said essentially that she wanted to be a teacher, that she wanted to learn true things and teach true things and did *not* want to mess around wondering whether or not things *could possibly* be true. The exact parallel of this was an interchange about "truth" with a mature and respected colleague (a certified speaker/addressee) who somewhat sadly and wearily said that if truth itself were up for question then he, as a scholar and teacher, had nothing worthwhile to do.

It is a serious business to talk about truth. It is unsettling to even entertain the notion that the mechanisms for producing truth and, therefore, the truths themselves are irredeemably contaminated by the historical, the personal, the political. It does seem, when we begin thinking about it, that we will indeed have nothing to do, no way to do or write "scholarship" if the *idea* of truth is subject to questioning. We find it difficult to see how a student's desire to be a "teacher" brings her into a relation with a set of rules and body of persons which (and who) decide who can become a teacher and who cannot, and how just the wish to teach implies being dominated by the rules of teaching and implicates one in a general project to dominate the arena of what can be taught, what can count as knowledge, what questions can be asked. The student was quite understandably taking me to task for failing to fulfill my role as "teacher" within the rules

supposedly refer but supported by the implication or (less often) the assertion that its binary logic might be the product of a universal characteristic of the human brain.

On the one hand, this theory of meaning-creation or "signification" (in the literal sense of "sign making") whose body of knowledge is now commonly called "semiotics" provides a point of "difference," an alterity, an "other" to the linear, syntactical meaning production of traditional linguistics. The linear ordering of grammatical subjects and objects is defined as "syntagmatic;" the contrastive, binary, "structural" order is "paradigmatic". Thus, an utterance or group of utterances (syntagms, sentences, phrases, etc.) or an ordered sequence of behaviors (a ritual, for example) might contain a "deep structure" of paradigmatic relations that "signify" what is implicit but "unspoken" in the linear narrative of the actually spoken or done.

On the other hand, the aspiration of linguistics to speak with the authority of "science," meant that it needed a stable object that was not subject to alteration at every moment. Thus Saussure and his successors posited an abstract, theoretical linguistic entity which he called *langue* (or "language"), existing "synchronically" or as a fixed slice across the "diachronic" or constantly changing temporal trajectory of actual instances of speech called the *parole*. The practical manifestation of language (*parole*) is intensely "historical;" it responds to and is constantly altered by its involvement in the activities of real people operating with vast variety of motives in particular social and cultural environments. Language as the object of theoretical or scientific knowledge (*langue*)—the kind of thing that can be written about in a book because it can be expected to be "true" or "true enough" next year and the year after—is "a-historical" in that it presumes the ability of thought to take a position or find a center above or outside the present and all its messy relations to ever-shifting forces and personalities. For example, logical relations, relations that can be expressed by abstract functions—plus-minus, hot-cold/not-hot, raw-cooked/not raw—do not *seem* to change their truth values over time or for socio-political reasons and hence can be seen as the grounding for authoritative scientific statements, even about such an apparently "historical" object as language and even about uses of language that are separated from us by time and/or cultural difference.

Even though such noted theoreticians as Levy-Strauss insisted that structure was essentially "heuristic," a tool for discovering meaning rather than a property of meaningful things, the direction of structuralist thought (and the drive "to speak with authority") elevated structure to the level of an actual property implicated in the production of meaning at all levels and thence to a status that enabled it to ground a "method" for extracting meaning from many sets of formal relations. It is significant, therefore, that the most profound challenge to this tendency in structuralist thought grew out of this very inquiry about the nature of language and meaning production. Speculation on the nature of sign-creation (semiotics) and the activity of sign-creation (semiosis) here and there began to focus on the arbitrariness of the relation between the sound or visual signal (the signifier) and the concept (or signified). Several things became apparent as a result: most obviously, that the process of meaning production involved an alienation of language from "real" objects. This notion affirms that the relation between signifier and signified is social, contractual and historical—"fish," the sound, relates to *fish* the concept of an aquatic animal because we all agree here and now that this is what it does. The relation is not essential—there is no "natural," a-historical connection between the sound "fish" (or "balık" or "samak" or "mâhî") and our concept of the animal. Moreover, Saussure posits another ontological category (or category of "being"), the "real" object *fish*, which is never fully "present" to us either because it must always come to us by means of the contractual relationship (signifier plus signified) that produces the sign; it is always distanced, in a sense, by the signifying process required to make it available for thinking and talking about. The word "fish" and the thought "fish" are not fishes; the sign itself signals the *absence* of the thing it signifies.

As the historicalness of the relation between signifier and signified is foregrounded, the function of "difference" is problematized as well. When we move from the formal logical proposition, *p in a binary relation to not p*, to historical actualities, *not p* loses its specificity; *not fish* can be any number of things, the relevant ones determined in the end by historical circumstances rather than logical necessity. As a result of this inability of the sign to fully represent its referent, the logical coherences, the unities built up by thought and language inevitably conceal the keys to their own dissolution into pluralities and contradictions. Nonetheless, it is most common for us, in even our most sophisticated intellectual enterprises, to act as though the relations between sign and referent, between signifier and signified are unvexed by such questions and that we have available to us ways of talking about things that can encompass their full truth and make

Likewise for Julia Kristeva and other semiotic psychologists, the arena of *difference* and the law of society and the law of experience that lies between self-as-signifier and self-as-signified is the crucial area of focus. This is the teeming locale of the historical web of words and statements—what is called the "intertext"—that makes understanding possible in general and also enables the particular kind of meaning that we call "identity" or the illusion that we (in our self-knowledge) are one with or "present to" ourselves (corresponding to the illusion that "real" objects are made present to us through language or thought). Traditional psychology—as read through Lacan and Kristeva's "talking cure"—attempts to bring the tools of language and knowledge about language to bear on "writing" the self-creative narrative of a healthy relation between the parts of the human psyche inevitably dissociated, at times destructive, by the (signifying) process of coming to know itself—a process symbolized by the Freudian "family drama." Thus, analysis is not, as it is naively assumed, a process of revealing the "real" self through interpretation, but of liberation from anxiety about the "real" self through an interaction between analyst and analysand that deconstructs all interpretations and frees the analysand to reconstruct a livable self.

The most radical challenge to psychological thought in general comes from the work of a Nietzchean philosopher, Gilles Deleuze and a Nietzchean psychologist, Félix Guattari. The psyche, they argue, has no history of fragmentation prior to signification and engagement with the social rules governing relations between signifier and signified. Prior to signification is only desire produced mechanically by the gap between wish and fulfillment. All else including the oedipal "family drama" is a process of "capturing" desire in socially and politically determined formulations. Thus their work is "anti-oedipal," in that it rejects the general (Freudian/Lacanian) notion of a "natural history" of the psyche that can ground a scientific body of knowledge and also rejects the a-historical status of the "family drama" which they see as an artifact and tool of late capitalism. Restoration of a "healthy" psychic balance is, more properly, recapture by a dominant and political rule of meaning to the service of ends that can only be resisted by a "schizophrenic," "un-sane" escape into an uncaptured wandering on the trajectories of unbound and unconscious desire. As a result their practice shuns reduction into a theory or method or system, all of which are no more than signs of capture. Their investigations range—wander without "totalizing"—through widely divergent fields (or "folds") of "knowledge," from psychology to music to physics, challenging what seem to be the most obvious correspondences and finding correspondences where none seem possible.

So like it or not, this is a glimpse at one polyglot continent in the world of though in which learning about, writing about, producing knowledge about the Middle East takes place here and now. It is obviously still possible to cultivate "centered" perspectives, even a positivist imagination, to conceive of oneself as a "scientific" producer of authoritative, "true" statements and act accordingly. This is so because, as a matter of course, we live our lives-in-practice *acting as though* we were unary, self-present beings interacting with an equally present reality. And yet it is extremely difficult to imagine, as one once could, that this is "the only way to fly" and not a highly problematic choice within a hotly contested arena of choosing.

In the aftershocks of the above-described quake, the discourse involving "knowledge" of the Middle East is being shaken apart, crumbling to reveal or enable a new history, which includes the history of the Middle East as a signifier in the semiotics of Western self-knowledge. This is a history of language, of literature, of writing and writing about, of how we in the West know who we are and how that self-knowledge is implicated in our relations with the non-western. This is the kind of history that Edward Said writes in *Orientalism*, this is Thierry Hentsch's history, and Marshall Hodgeson's. It is a kind of history that has its counterpart in a history of the West as a signifier in the semiotics of a Middle Eastern self as well. It is a history of how we know what we know and what of what we know we must repress in order to tell the kinds of history that we *think* the institutions of telling demand. These are what we will be looking at in the following weeks.

In time, I will be coming back directly and tangentially to many of the themes and ideas mentioned in this all-too brief introduction but I will be doing so in the context of my own thinking about particular issues in the literatures I am most familiar with. However, this is not a seminar intended only for Ottomanists or Middle East specialists; it is intended ultimately to induce literary scholars, and students, and readers in general to question how "-ists" of every kind interact with alterity, with "otherness," and in so doing I will use the Middle East as an ever-shifting signifier in a metaphoric relation to the objects of any kind of comparative or cross-cultural study.

As I said in the beginning, this will not be a comfortable process. It is not comfortable for me because

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