

Rereading de Man's Readings

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Reading de Man Reading, edited by Wlad Godzich and Lindsay Waters, contains distinguished essays on the critical theory of Paul de Man; contributors include Geoffrey Hartman, Jacques Derrida, Deborah Esch, Niel Hertz, Carol Jacobs, Peggy Kamuf, Kevin Newmark, J. Hillis Miller, Werner Hamacher, Hans Robert Jauss, Geoffrey Bennington, Bill Readings, Timothy Bahti, and Rodolphe Gasché. All of the pieces except Hartman's were written before the wartime writings of de Man were rediscovered, and therefore the majority of the volume consists of essays that directly and indirectly address de Man's writings from the 1960s on. Unfortunately, there is no introductory essay that serves the purpose of outlining the major phases of de Man's career or his central concepts, and therefore many of the references and allusions made by various contributors will be lost on those who are not already thoroughly familiar with de Man's work. Especially the pieces by Hertz, Jacobs, Miller, Jauss, Bennington, Newmark, and Gasché require that one closely examine entire essays by de Man before attempting to follow the commentary. Most specifically, anyone who engages *Reading de Man Reading* will be required to re-examine de Man's most seminal article, "The Rhetoric of Temporality," since many of the pieces either allude to its structure, refer to its guiding terms, or reinscribe its argument in other contexts. Given that requirement, I want to note a few of that essay's major points before discussing some of the contributions to *Reading de Man Reading*.

We may recall that "The Rhetoric of Temporality" was originally published in 1969 and that it is divided into two parts, "Allegory and Symbol" and "Irony." Both parts correspond very closely and can be seen as analogous to a two part musical invention. In the first part, de Man demonstrates by comparative literary analysis that during the 18th century the shift in rhetorical emphasis from allegorization to symbolization did not occur without resistance. He demonstrates the point in the context of German, English, and, finally, French literature. De Man argues that in Rousseau's *Julie ou la nouvelle Héloïse* the analogy between scene and emotion is tightly joined thanks to the appearance of the symbol which brings signifying elements into a simultaneous relation. In Rousseau, therefore, the text's naturalism and the contingency of temporal moments are rendered symbolically, though in the very garden scenes where such naturalism is constituted, de Man discovers an allegorical register which resists naturalism and, instead, embraces very artificial conjunctions. These break with the sort of human perception that would function as the enabling condition for symbolization and naturalism: "The [allegorical] language is purely figural, not based on perception, less still on an experienced dialectic between nature and consciousness" (*Blindness and Insight*, 203). Whereas the symbol holds a language of natural correspondences together, allegory disrupts sensualistic correspondences even as it sets up a secondary order of references which are not organically related. For de Man the symbol brings entities into a spatial and simultaneous relation, while allegory brings entities into a temporal and disjunctive relation. Moreover, the symbol is assumed to be constative (passively reflecting what is always already given) while allegory is assumed to be performative (actively producing new meanings in a more or less ad hoc manner). But this is not all. Symbols ensure narrative continuity, while allegories ensure disjunctive iteration. Symbols therefore are aligned with identity while allegories are aligned with difference. At the close of "Symbol and Allegory" de Man will emphasize that symbol and allegory are not, in fact, two different rhetorical orders but that they are both aspects of the same rhetoric in whose conflict a rearticulation of literature is brought about. Yet, there is irony in this conflict. The impression of realist authenticity which the symbol conveys is, in fact, known to be a superficial illusion which betrays the enlightenment of an earlier age that privileged allegory. Although allegory is superseded by the symbol in the nineteenth century,

writers ironically are unable to use symbols with "an entirely good poetic conscience" (BI 208).

In part two, de Man alerts us to two manifestations of irony, the one synthetic, the other disjunctive. This division of irony therefore imitates the difference between symbol and allegory, suggesting the musical structure of invention. The synthetic manifestation of irony allows for consciousness to reconcile a number of conflicts and for language to prevail over a subject's self-alienation. The disjunctive manifestation of irony introduces an endless sequence of disjunct moments which are never reconciled but infinitely repeated as the repetition of what de Man calls a self-escalating act of consciousness. Such irony "reveals the existence of a temporality that is definitely not organic, in that it relates to its source only in terms of distance and difference and allows for no end, for no totality" (BI 222). Yet, although the performance of disjunctive irony and of allegory reveal a similar temporal structure, that of iteration and difference, they are dissimilar in that allegory extends or spreads out temporality while irony compresses or condenses it. Still, irony and allegory are considered "two faces of the same fundamental experience of time" (BI 226).

Turning at the very end of the essay to Stendhal's *La Chartreuse de Parme*, de Man notes that in Stendhal we have an instance in which disjunctive novelistic moments are symptomatic of irony, though, at the same time, one encounters slow meditative moments in which allegory comes to appear. De Man concludes by citing an allegorical emblem in place of an explanation. Stendhal's novel "tells the story of two lovers who, like Eros and Psyche, are never allowed to come into full contact with each other. When they can see each other they are separated by an unbreachable distance; when they can touch, it has to be in a darkness imposed by a totally arbitrary and irrational decision, an act of the gods" (BI 228). The irony of light and dark or of disjunction and conjunction is very apparent in the allegory; yet, de Man calls this the "allegory of irony," by which he means the way in which irony is temporally extended if not subsumed by allegory. After all, an ironic story is being used allegorically to gloss Stendhal's novel. And yet, characteristic of de Man's thinking, such a position is counterbalanced by the fact that if an ironic story is being subsumed by allegory, this subsuming is itself so ironic that no one can say allegory is entirely dominant.

Finally, there is one more twist to the screw: we should recall that

for some time now nothing has been said about the symbol. Has it just dropped out of sight? De Man for his part says nothing. But if we look once more at the allegory of Psyche and Eros we will see that de Man has played a clever trick on us. For it is the case that Psyche and Eros are themselves figures which transform disjunctive allegorical relations into an expression of unity by means of a symbolic embrace. Hence this symbolic embrace can be said to bring irony and allegory into a relation or correspondence which is naturalized from a purely human perspective. Although de Man does not explicitly point to a sublation of the symbol, "The Rhetoric of Temporality" does end by tacitly confirming the very historical understanding of symbolicity from which it has taken distance—the view that during the pre-Romantic and Romantic periods there is a decisive shift to symbolicity and ironization. In fact, if the symbol silently reasserts its pre-eminence at the end of the essay, it is only because such a reassertion is itself highly ironic, given the fact that the argument of de Man's essay is structured to preclude this very conclusion. Hence by countering the familiar historical account of how symbol and irony supplant allegory, de Man nevertheless reaffirms what has so successfully been destabilized, the subjugation of allegory by symbol and irony.

Some of the contributors to *Reading de Man Reading* who have strongly engaged "The Rhetoric of Temporality" include Timothy Bahti, J. Hillis Miller, Carol Jacobs, Kevin Newmark, Rodolphe Gasché, and Jacques Derrida. Indeed Jacobs, Bahti, and Miller come quite close to broaching an organic theory of de Man's critical development by highlighting the conceptual continuities between "The Rhetoric of Temporality" and de Man's later work, as if de Man's thought were extraordinarily developmental and all part of a very systematized critical plan. Hillis Miller supports a view of such de Manian master planning when he writes that "de Man is almost certain to have been there before we arrive and to have anticipated any 'deconstruction' of his own text we may perform" (168). Judging from this, there is no critical insight we can have about de Man's texts which he has not already seen and prepared us for. Consequently, no move in de Man is merely accidental or random; each critical point is strategically planned so that de Man's writings will carefully interlock and form a highly rigorous interpretive network of correspondences. Miller, Jacobs, and Bahti maintain this view as a means of paying homage to a great thinker. Yet, as the essays in *Reading de Man*

Reading reflect, the connections between de Man's sixties writings and, say, *Allegories of Reading*, may not be quite so rigorous as one might suppose. Gasché's essay on de Manian "indifference" puts into question some of the critical organicism promoted by other contributors, since Gasché is wondering whether de Man's later work wasn't broaching the kind of non-referentiality which would have been totally alien to de Man's essays in *Blindness and Insight*. Derrida's piece, as well, destabilizes a genetic reading which would establish continuity between "The Rhetoric of Temporality" and de Man's later pieces. Derrida is suggesting that de Man's conception of the speech act suggests a radical break with the earlier discriminations made between tropological devices like allegory, irony, and symbol. The "event," production, or invention of de Manian criticism is not reducible to the invention as device. That is, although de Man's pieces have a tendency to contrapuntally superimpose themselves on one another, they resist "invention" (as performance, device, but also in the musical sense). Lastly, Kevin Newmark's focus on the historical and the material makes one wonder whether de Man wasn't ironically breaking with "The Rhetoric of Temporality" by means of reinstating a certain naturalism. Exactly what the correspondences are between de Man's earlier and later collections still needs further clarification. In the individual essay reviews that follow we will notice the extent to which the evaluation of de Man's critical legacy is quite divided and unsettled.

In "Lessons of Remembering and Forgetting," Timothy Bahti specifically focuses on "The Rhetoric of Temporality" in order to make the point that the essay ought to be understood in relationship to Martin Heidegger's thoughts on temporality, death, and forgetting. Bahti's understanding of time in Heidegger is quite restricted; the following gives us a good idea of how Bahti links Heidegger to de Man:

The mutation [by de Man] of Heideggerian temporality as being-toward-death into a construal of understanding's temporality as understanding-toward-death does not yield the "horizon" of a horizon-of-expectations in the sense that such a spatialization of the image [in Wordsworth's Lucy poems] might render it knowable and therefore totalizable. . . . Rather, temporality takes the form of an anticipated horizon against which knowing is partial, and its 'collection' is only the deferred recollection of what has actually been forgotten—death. According to this

understanding, death is the condition for the meaningfulness of temporal understanding of literature and its truth. (246–7)

Bahti's point is that in "The Rhetoric of Temporality" time is not manifested in a symbol but rather in allegory which defers a complete or totalized recovery of what has been forgotten, namely, death. Allegory refuses coincidence, identification, or reification: "Allegory at once reminds of what it is *not*—coincidence in time, with an origin—and remembers this only in order to forget it . . ." (248). As such, allegory "institutes [in its relation to irony] a sheer series of recurrences that figures the forgetting or denial of these modes of knowledge [nostalgia, desire, etc.] in their conversion into either a prefigured retrospective (allegorical) misunderstanding of irony or a projective (ironic) transcendental misunderstanding of allegory" (249). The notion of misunderstanding is quite crucial, because it suggests that forgetting involves error. That is, in the repetition of "a sheer series of recurrences" there is a "conversion" in which "forgetting" is characterized by "misunderstanding." Bahti's interpretation, of course, is guided by a Derridean resistance to a rhetoric which privileges presence, and "The Rhetoric of Temporality" is analyzed in such a way that de Man appears as someone who was chiefly interested in "an unfull present" and who, like Derrida, was a step ahead of Heidegger whose thinking was supposedly still caught in the grip of metaphysics. According to Bahti, neither presence (life) nor absence (death) can be constituted in a rhetoric of de Manian temporality, except as displaced—momentarily situated in a tropology of remembering and forgetting.

Compared to what de Man actually writes in "The Rhetoric of Temporality," Bahti's reading is revisionary, since de Man's point about allegory and symbol was that they manifested different tropological formations which were mimetically in conflict. The sentence by de Man which Bahti has in mind above reads as follows: "Whereas the symbol postulates the possibility of an identity or identification, allegory designates primarily a distance in relation to its own origin, and, renouncing the nostalgia and the desire to coincide, it establishes its language in the void of this temporal difference" (*BI* 207). Nothing is being said about remembrance, forgetting, or death. Rather, de Man is interested in how allegory "prevents the self from an illusory identification with the non-self" (*BI* 207). Notice that de Man's rhetoric hasn't even deconstructed the notion of the self. This is

underscored by his remark in the next sentence that "It is this painful knowledge [of the illusory identification] that we perceive at the moments when early romantic literature finds its *true voice*" (BI 207. *Italics mine*). Although the conceptual conditions are right for the kind of rhetorical deconstruction which Bahti identifies, "The Rhetoric of Temporality" does not really activate them in the way Bahti suggests. At best, de Man's essay counterpoints symbol, allegory, and irony in order to show that tropological formations are not entirely complementary and that when brought into relation or correspondence they harass our hermeneutical expectation that texts disclose themselves as unified, homogeneous systems. What de Man's essay demonstrates is that such a resistance to formalist consistency is historically determined by the erroneous way in which the romantics themselves understood the relation between symbol and allegory. To turn this into an implicit critique of Heidegger can always be done, of course, though it should be said that this is alien if not irrelevant to the aims of de Man's essay. The case for turning de Man into a philosopher who has successfully critiqued the shortcomings of Heidegger remains unconvincing.

J. Hillis Miller's "'Reading' Part of a Paragraph" also bears closely on a reading of "The Rhetoric of Temporality," though Miller is mainly interested in considering one of these moments in *Allegories of Reading* where a critical condensation of thought takes place. Since it is the tutor text of Miller's piece, I quote in full.

The paradigm for all texts consists of a figure (or a system of figures) and its deconstruction. But since this model cannot be closed off in a final reading, it engenders, in its turn, a supplementary figural superposition which narrates the unreadability of the prior narration. As distinguished from primary deconstructive narratives centered on figures and ultimately always on metaphor, we can call such narratives to the second (or the third) degree *allegories*. Allegorical narratives tell the story of the failure to read whereas tropological narratives, such as the *Second Discourse*, tell the story of the failure to denominate. The difference is only a difference of degree and the allegory does not erase the figure. Allegories are always allegories of metaphor and, as such, they are always allegories of the impossibility of reading—a sentence in which the genitive 'of' has itself to be 'read' as a metaphor. (Quoted in Miller, 156)

According to Miller, de Man is insisting that we do not deconstruct texts, but that figurally texts deconstruct themselves because of the way in which—to take one example—metaphors are sedimented or superimposed on one another. We are considering something like a Freudian condensation in which disjunctions, contradictions, and outright incompatibilities bring “aberrancy into the open” (158). As de Man puts it, “A narrative endlessly tells the story of its own denominational aberration and it can only repeat this aberration on various levels of rhetorical complexity” (158). Miller points out that for de Man the text’s auto-deconstruction generates auxiliary readings, each of which is aberrant. Miller’s inference is that this auto-deconstruction can already be seen in essays like “The Rhetoric of Temporality” in so far as symbol, allegory, and irony tell the story of their own denominational aberrations which they are compelled to repeat. The way in which these tropological levels overlap would, for the later de Man, make up allegorical registers. Hence one could speak of second and third order narratives which “tell the story of the failure to read” (161), the failure to generate homogeneous meaning systems. The complexity of such contrapuntal superimpositions is well reflected in Miller’s astute observation:

The term ‘degree’ here is slightly odd, as is the addition in parentheses of ‘or the third.’ By ‘or the third’ I suppose de Man means that the deconstruction of the initially asserted figure or system of figures could already be thought of as a second narrative superimposed on the first, so that the allegory of the failure to read can be thought of as already a third narrative posited over the first two, while if the positing of the figure and its deconstruction are thought of as a single story, then the allegory is only the second narrative. (161)

But why does de Man use the word “allegory”? This is a question Miller wants to address, and not surprisingly it will lead him to reconsider “The Rhetoric of Temporality.” Miller points out that for de Man allegory is always narrative and, as such, always temporalized. Allegories are in a sign-sign relation, Miller says, while symbols are in a sign-thing relation, and, as we noted above, allegory is characteristic of distance and difference, while symbols are characterized by nearness and identification. In bringing these positions in relation to the comments above from de Man’s *Allegories of Reading*,

Miller notes that when an allegorical sign repeats an earlier sign, it also repeats "the error inscribed in that earlier sign, which was always a figure or system of figures and its deconstruction" (162). Here allegory is the carrier of the symbol, something already manifested in de Man's emblem of Eros and Psyche at the end of "The Rhetoric of Temporality."

Most interesting is Miller's following remark in which he links the ending of "The Rhetoric of Temporality" to de Man's later understanding of a text's inability to read itself:

The error inscribed in the earlier sign is, however, repeated in the allegorical sign in a blind form, that is, in the form of an unrecognizable difference, or in the form of a difference that can be recognized only by those who have the key to the allegory. In that blindness, difference, and discrepancy between one part of the text and another, along the temporal and narrative line, lies the text's inability to read itself. (162-3)

Miller points out that in "The Rhetoric of Temporality" de Man said the relation between an allegorical sign and its meaning was not "decreed by dogma." The relation is not determined by any inherent similarity between one sign and another, since "In allegory anything can stand for anything" (163). And this raises the point (also made by Gasché in his contribution to this volume) that de Man is concerned with the indifference of signification which, in Miller's context, allows for the reinscription and repetition of error in which "lies the text's inability to read itself" (163). Miller, then, suggests that error or blindness is a necessary consequence of 1) an allegorical temporality which is fated to suggest faulty (because indifferent) correspondences and of 2) symbolic constructions which literalize or naturalize aberrant connections. Allegory narrates the story of a text's inability to read itself, while symbols manifest the impossibility of correct denomination. As in "The Rhetoric of Temporality," allegory is performative, symbol constative. And again, as in "The Rhetoric of Temporality," reading is necessarily viewed as an open ended process in which no final determination of what a text means can be achieved, since meaning is constituted in registers of signification which are so closely aligned and subtly differentiated that meanings are held in a curious proximity which like Eros and Psyche touch only under the cover of blinding night.

Miller's expert reading of de Man suggests that whereas "The Rhetoric of Temporality" considered the necessary relations of incompatible figural and narrative structures which writers and critics had naively dichotomized, *Allegories of Reading* took this approach further by demonstrating that in such necessary relations the text is destined to a transference of erroneous identifications and differentiations. Such transference, then, impedes the text from reading itself at levels of figuration and narration. The interpreter, therefore, must not be too optimistic about achieving an altogether satisfying reading, since textual reconstructions will point to figural and narrative relationships which, strictly speaking, preclude textual readability. Although "The Rhetoric of Temporality" is itself not so explicitly pessimistic about how a text tells the story of its own unreadability, or about the question of error or aberrance, one can see from Miller's explanation how "The Rhetoric of Temporality" implicitly led de Man to his later positions. In the correspondence between symbol and allegory, for example, meanings are brought into erroneous conjunctions and a uniform reading or understanding of literature is obstructed. Far from reinforcing each other's meanings, the tropological formations of the work conspire against synthesis.

In "Allegories of Reading Paul de Man," Carol Jacobs takes up another approach to bringing the later and earlier de Man into relation. Jacobs suggests that de Man intended *Allegories of Reading* to be superimposed on the structure of "The Rhetoric of Temporality" and that de Man's major oeuvre was written as a series of complex rhetorical reinscriptions that make up a kind of grand fugue. Jacobs' focus is de Man's own narrative style, and she begins her analysis by invoking what de Man had, in *Allegories of Reading*, once considered to be characteristic of symbolicity: the continuity of de Man's own critical narrative as the "provisional syntheses that take place along the way" (105). Given that "The Rhetoric of Temporality" is a significant clue to de Man's narrative style, we should not be surprised that allegory is not far behind: "Side by side with these various modes of suggesting linear progress through time one finds, equally prevalent, a disconcerting insistence on the text as 'a series of repetitive reversals' [. . .] as a repetition of a pattern that ruptures dialectical progress" (106). But how can we account for the temporal contradictions between symbolicity and allegory in de Man's writings? Specifically, "how does time play its role in the performance of de Man's narrative" (106-7)? Jacobs argues, "time is that which marks

the realization of the impossibility of self-definition" (107). In other words, the rhetoric of temporality resists a linguistic essentialism and broaches possibilities of uninterpretability. This point is crucial to "The Rhetoric of Temporality" and in the context of Jacobs' essay suggests that the writings of de Man are all based on his temporal model.

Such a reading (or more precisely, meta-reading) assumes that de Man's writings achieve an aesthetic or formal status akin to high art; hence, de Man's criticism is being read as if it had the status of literature. This suggestion crops up in Jacobs' remark that in de Man's work "time is, coincidentally, an act of transgressive freedom, a rupture, that marks the impossibility of textual definition and self-definition. . . . It acts out, then, both the promise of progress and its failure, making promises it cannot fulfill in the present, making excuses rather than confessions for that which it might rather expose than hide, narrating endless fictions" (108). Is the temporality of de Man's criticism itself the narration of an endless fiction about the unreadability of literature? The suggestion is reinforced when Jacobs acknowledges that de Man's commentary on Rousseau "forms something of a commentary on de Man's own style" (113), as if the difference between criticism and literature were under erasure in de Man's work.

Jacobs' essay is quite illuminating in its demonstration of the extent to which de Man's critical writings go out of their way to be self-reflexive. For example, she demonstrates that de Man's reading of *Narcisse et Pygmalion*, which occurs in *Allegories of Reading*, closely resembles the analysis of Stendhal in "The Rhetoric of Temporality," since in *Allegories* the privileged scene turns on an embrace strangely reminiscent of the Psyche and Eros myth. In *Allegories*, however, the embrace is cited in Rousseau. Once again, aporias of disjunction and conjunction come to the surface. So too do the rhetorical features of irony, allegory, and symbol (though Jacobs doesn't note them). Not surprisingly, this is followed by a commentary on "The Rhetoric of Temporality" in which we focus on de Man's construction and deconstruction of the historical schemes which legitimize his arguments. De Man's voice becomes so ironic, Jacobs says, that "it demonstrates the impossibility of being historical" (117). This means that the rhetorical self "rejects its own temporal movement of correcting error to produce (illusory) wisdom and recognizes it or rather performs it as a problem that exists within the

rhetoric of temporality. In speaking of other critics and other theories of language, de Man necessarily spreads out along the axis of imaginary time what is, in fact, simultaneous within his text" (117). Jacobs call this the ironization of allegory, a term which complements the allegorization of irony at the end of "The Rhetoric of Temporality." Literary history, Jacobs argues, is the temporality of a rhetoric that vertiginously vacillates between irony and allegory. Maybe she could have said that literary history is the symbol of this vacillation. "Irony and allegory endlessly replace one another: this trajectory can be read as a text engendering other, critical texts or as a text reading itself, as a gain in critical knowledge or as an irresolvable split and endless vacillation" (118). And time turns out to be an illusion created out of a "series of repetitive reversals" (118). This would be hardly a satisfactory conclusion for anyone acquainted with theories of temporality, for it rests on Jacobs' production of an ahistorical *mise en abyme* which has swallowed time up. Whereas de Man himself has been careful to counterpoint structures in ways that both encourage reflexive crossings as well as dampen assumed correspondences, Jacobs' analysis eventually collapses into a whirlpool of dizzying relationships which finally reduces temporality to *mise en abyme* or mere vacillation.

Kevin Newmark, in "Paul de Man's History," considers the rhetoric of temporality more squarely in historical materialist terms:

In the kind of move that has become habitual with de Man, historical terms, then, turn out not to be really historical after all, but rather are metaphors, and crude ones at that, for *figural* relationships. But if historical terms refuse to tell us about history and end up being disguised as metaphors, then perhaps reading metaphors will turn out to be our only reliable means of learning something about history. (123)

In considering how de Man reads the tropes of Baudelaire's "Correspondances," Newmark explores how metaphors and similes delimit moments of conjunction and disjunction. Newmark seizes on de Man's handling of the concept of figural transportation in Baudelaire and recalls that two distinct realms are being suggested, the aesthetic and the urban. "A reading that could disclose the urban subway system lurking beneath the lyrical transports of symbolist poetry would clearly be a first and important step in such a direction"

(127), that direction being the understanding of how literature and history interrelate. These two realms are brought into proximity through the surprise that a literalization of figure or of "transports" enables. What fascinates Newmark is how symbolic relations set up the possibility of a literalization or concretization in which the historical is situated more like an effect of signification rather than its cause: "History is a linguistic event, the arrangement of verbal buildings, a syntax of inscriptions that exists to be memorized and then read" (133). One senses, again, that we are perhaps not so far from the arguments of "The Rhetoric of Temporality." The figural or verbal interplay ("correspondance") in Baudelaire would correspond fairly well to allegory while the liberalization of the figure would relate to de Man's notion of the symbol which brings elements into a simultaneous and concrete relation. For Newmark, the way in which symbol and allegory are held in proximity by a trope which elicits both literal and figural readings delimits the coming to appearance of history in poetic language. Yet, "these figures are merely the incomplete narratives, or allegories, of a purely nonfigurative occurrence that remains beyond them and their pseudomovement, and when they are read, such figures always and again tell the story of their impossibility to occur historically" (134). In spite of this Newmark is willing to talk about actual history: the repeated manifestation of linguistic aporias. Newmark is not so far from recognizing that at best one can bring signifying relations into correspondence which, as in "The Rhetoric of Temporality," outline the trajectory of concrete historical moments while, at the same time, demonstrating why history is mimetically inaccessible. Because Newmark is pushing de Man's tutor text, "Anthropomorphism and Trope in Lyric," further than it actually wants to go, he ends up making the dubious claim that terms like history, economics, and ideology are being rehabilitated by de Man. Newmark's conclusion suggests that such notions are always already under erasure and that they become significant only in relation to "incomplete narratives," "allegories," or a "nonfigurative occurrence." Exactly what that means is not made clear, though Newmark's footnotes suggest that we may find clues in the writings of Walter Benjamin. That Newmark has not provided a detailed account of how de Man read Benjamin and how that reading affects de Man's understanding of history is disappointing. Certainly, Newmark's piece touches on a very suggestive conjunction with Benjamin which most commentators on de Man often miss.

Rodolphe Gasché's "In-Difference to Philosophy" once more draws on the "symbol" / "allegory" distinction from "The Rhetoric of Temporality" by counterpointing "rhetoric" to "philosophy." Philosophy is the "discourse of difference" and rhetoric is the discourse of "self-affirmation." But just as philosophy reaches the pinnacle of a discourse of difference in the work of Hegel, one finds a "retrogression toward rhetoric" in figures like Friedrich Schlegel. De Man is to some extent participating in this romantic retrogression:

Despite some major differences to be emphasized hereafter, Paul de Man's linguistic or rhetorical reading of literature and philosophy continues, in a certain manner, that romantic project of dissolving the difference constitutive of both philosophy and literature, philosophy and rhetoric. In the following analysis devoted to de Man's reading of the philosophical texts of Nietzsche, Kant, and Hegel, we will attempt to make this point. (262)

More specifically, Gasché's insight will be that,

"A rhetorical reading, for de Man, is, indeed, a reading that seeks the transgression of philosophical difference in an indifference that is so radical as to become entirely indifferent—devoid of *all* relation—to the philosophical." (262)

Although Gasché's intriguing essay is far too complex to summarize, the following sentences from the close of his piece will give the reader a good idea of how Gasché situates his thesis:

In short, the literary and the philosophical discourse are, for de Man, meaningful enterprises involved in forgetting or recuperating the nonphenomenal properties of the material and formal act of figuration, properties that come into view, as he insists, through figuration itself, precisely to the extent in which figuration is itself a repetition of the originary violence of positing. All there can be, consequently, is an endless series of acts of imposition that, because they lack all continuity with what precedes them, repeat, without ever lending themselves to any real discrimination, the 'original' arbitrary act of linguistic positing. Ultimately, there is no difference between that act and the authority of meaning. (289)

Gasché is developing a point which has also been brought up in Hillis Miller's essay, namely, that in de Man no ground supports the relation of one sign to another. For de Man linguistic relationships "just happen," Miller says (163). Gasché discusses this, of course, in terms of an indifference, of acts of linguistic imposition that lack any inherent continuity. According to Gasché, de Man's project was never to write on philosophy but to write in a way that was indifferent to it, that refused to engage philosophy as a discourse of difference and in so doing dismantled its fondest assumptions. That de Man's critical writings did not occur in relation to philosophy is justified by his statement that "nothing . . . ever happens in relation, positive or negative, to anything that precedes, follows, or exists elsewhere, but only as a random event . . ." (293).

In its baldest sense such quotations give credence to those who have dismissed deconstruction as a relativistic and ad hoc critical approach. Moreover, one wonders why, if theory is reducible to some kind of random event, de Man placed so much emphasis on critical rigor. Indeed, one must wonder whether de Man fell into some kind of very naive position or whether Gasché's decontextualization of de Man's remarks is misleading. It ought to be noted, of course, that in "The Rhetoric of Temporality" de Man did not champion a radical view of the non-relationality of one sign to another; only much later do we hear that "nothing . . . ever happens in relation . . . to anything." But why and how did de Man arrive at such a position? If one bothers to read de Man's "Shelley Disfigured"—it is quoted by Gasché at the end of his piece—, one will notice that it is in relation to Shelley's *The Triumph of Life* that de Man sights an aporia between the performative and the constative which comes to appearance as an iteration of something that has no connection to what comes either before or after. In Shelley, "the sun does not appear in conjunction with or in reaction to the night and the stars, but of its own unrelated power" (*The Rhetoric of Romanticism*, 116). How does Shelley simply posit the sun? By what act of speech does the sun enter into the poem? "It can only be because we impose, in our turn, on the senseless power of positional language the authority of sense and of meaning" (RR, 117). However, de Man says this is inconsistent, because if language can posit (performatively) and mean (constatively), it "cannot posit meaning" (RR, 117). The act of positing the sun and the act of making it mean something belong to two different orders of expression which are not inherently bound. It is here that the arbitrary

positing of the sun takes place even as the authority of sense and meaning bears it away. But in this case, the arbitrary never serves as ground; it is not privileged. Gasché seems to think otherwise: "His [de Man's] radical empiricism—his stress on the arbitrariness, extreme singularity, and impenetrable materiality of the linguistic acts and signifier—appears to have gained such momentum here that its own generality and universality turn into a radical challenge to the generality of philosophical difference" (292). It would seem much more appropriate to say that for de Man theory established and broke correspondences in ways that disarticulate the limits of difference and identity and that the logic of such a disarticulation is, far from absolutely random, brought into a necessary relational proximity with texts in which the very notion of relationality is itself put into question though not utterly annihilated.

Lastly, we should take into consideration Jacques Derrida's "Psyche: Inventions of the Other," an essay which implicitly asks to be allegorically superimposed on previous works by Derrida—for example, "The Double Session," "Signéponge," "Limited Inc abc . . .," "Of An Apocalyptic Tone Recently Adopted in Philosophy," and *Memoires for Paul de Man*. Of major importance to Derrida's essay is a reconsideration of the performative/constative distinction which de Man invoked in *Allegories of Reading*. In the chapter, "Rhetoric of Persuasion (Nietzsche)," de Man focused on language as an event or speech act and demonstrates how the constative and the performative are brought into a chiasmic relation which breaks with the principle of contradiction: "The first passage [in Nietzsche] on identity showed that constative language is in fact performative, but the second passage [in Nietzsche] asserts that the possibility for language to perform is just as fictional as the possibility for language to assert" (*Allegories of Reading*, p. 129). De Man concludes, "the differentiation between performative and constative language (which Nietzsche anticipates) is undecidable; the deconstruction leading from the one model to the other is irreversible but it always remains suspended, regardless of how often it is repeated" (*AR*, p. 130). One of de Man's final points, then, is that "Rhetoric is a *text* in that it allows for two incompatible, mutually self-destructive points of view, and therefore puts an insurmountable obstacle in the way of any reading or understanding" (*AR*, p. 131).

It is noteworthy that in "Psyche: Inventions of the Other" Derrida does not subscribe to the idea that deconstruction delimits the

unreadability of a literary text. Rather for Derrida deconstruction facilitates readability, a point he makes quite prominently at the end of a section on Francis Ponge's "Fable":

Deconstruction is inventive or it is nothing at all; it does not settle for methodical procedures, it opens up a passageway, it marches ahead and marks a trail; its writing is not only performative, it produces rules—other conventions—for new performativities and never installs itself in the theoretical assurance of a simple opposition between performative and constative. Its *process* involves an affirmation, this latter being linked to the coming—the *venire*—in event, advent, invention. But it can only make it by deconstructing a conceptual and institutional structure of invention that would neutralize by putting the stamp of reason on some aspect of invention, of inventive power: as if it were necessary, over and beyond a certain traditional status of invention, to reinvent the future. (42)

Here one can see the extent to which Derrida strongly breaks with Paul de Man in *Allegories of Reading*. In place of a characterization of deconstruction that stresses impasse, fatality, aporia, grid-lock, impossibility, obstruction, aberrance, and uninterpretability, Derrida views deconstruction as an act of invention, precipitation, broaching, and unblocking. For Derrida deconstruction does not stall in the double binds of the performative and the constative, but "involves an affirmation," invokes a "coming," an "event," or "advent" that is only neutralized by "the stamp of reason." Derrida's notion of invention is not that of de Man's mutually self-destructive points of view which are allegorically fated to achieve a certain grid-lock or the freezing up of the textual machinery; rather, Derrida wants to pursue invention as a founding event or beginning which is always already differed or deferred from what we might call the origin. Invention, for Derrida, is a structure of conceptual relationships which have been traditionally overstabilized by privileging the notion of device (invention as machine or method) and the priority of agency (the inventor). The term "invention" binds a "technical order" to "metaphysical humanism" (44). Inventions require patents, Derrida recalls, and for an invention to be legitimized it must be stabilized or defined within a certain institutional standing.

Although Derrida does not explicitly say so, the invention under

discussion throughout this essay is “deconstruction” and Derrida is implicitly interrogating how “deconstruction” can come to appearance as an institutionalized invention, method, or device or how he himself can come to appearance as its inventor if the founding event that is deconstruction radically breaks with institutionalized concepts or statutes without which an invention cannot be recognized. How is the performance of deconstruction as invention to be squared with its institutionalized constative description as method or device?

In addition, there is another and more sensitive issue. Who has invented deconstruction? Derrida or de Man? Or, is deconstruction not an invention which can be set up in such an anthropomorphic way? Is it not rather, like a musical invention, something which is constituted in the interweaving of various intellectual lines of thought? When Derrida speaks of signatures and countersignatures and of fathers and sons, he is, in fact, pointing out that inventions are always signed for or appropriated by others. That is, deconstruction as a linguistic event cannot be anything else but an “invention of the other,” of something countersigned by someone else. De Man has appropriated Derrida, just as Derrida is now appropriating de Man. And in this appropriative performance something gets invented, something comes about, an event happens. This event, however, is always already allegorical in that it is always in relation to an “other” that an “invention” (in the sense of device, musical structure, founding event) is made, institutionalized, passed on, used, etc. In its metaphysical sense, Psyche would stand for the mentality of this invention, something akin to what one corporation calls “the mind of Minolta,” though for Derrida, of course, the notion of such a “mind” is what is being critiqued.

Psyche, however, also refers us to the Eros and Psyche story which de Man cites in “The Rhetoric of Temporality” and Derrida complements that citation with a reading of “Fable” by Francis Ponge in which the figure of Psyche is allegorically suggested as contemplating herself in a double sided mirror or “psyche.” “But in French a psyche, a homonym and common noun, is also a large double mirror installed on a rotating stand. The woman, let us say Psyche, her beauty or her truth, can be reflected there, can admire or adorn herself from head to foot” (38–39). Derrida maintains that “Fable” “puts *into action* the question of reference, of the specularity of language *or* of literature, and of the possibility of stating the other or speaking *to* the other” (31). “Fable” takes place as an event

which conflates both the performative (the productive, the transformative) and the constative (the saying what is, the unveiling) and as such bears on an "invention"—the double mirror, the allegory of Psyche, the event that is the poem—which is radically unstable: "An infinitely rapid circulation—such are the *irony* and the temporality of this text—all at once shunts the performative into the constative, and vice versa" (34). Noting the constative and performative valences of the opening line to "Fable"—"Par le mot *par* commence donc ce texte"—, Derrida concludes that

The infinitely rapid oscillation between the performative and the constative, between language and metalanguage, fiction and nonfiction, autoreference and heteroreference, etc., does not just produce an essential instability. This instability constitutes that very event—let us say, the work—whose invention disturbs normally, as it were, the norms, the statutes, and the rules. . . .

The fabulatory economy of a very simple little sentence, perfectly normal in its grammar, spontaneously *deconstructs* the oppositional logic that relies on an untouchable distinction between the performative and the constative and so many other related distinctions; it deconstructs that logic without disabling it totally, to be sure, since it also needs it in order to detonate the speech event. (34–35)

We recall that in "The Rhetoric of Temporality" allegory is performative, differentiating, and diachronic, while the symbol was constative, identifying, and synchronic. "Fable" could be said to make these tropological conditions of language bear on the "invention" of language as an event that does not impede reading or obstruct interpretation, but that deconstructs without disabling, that deconstructs in order to detonate the speech event. The mirror and the woman are but the tropological effects of such a detonation though, at the same time, they are the "double séance" which serves as the triggering mechanism of "Fable," as the invention of the poem. Whereas in de Man temporality manifests itself in the repetition and aberrance of difference, in Derrida's account temporality is situated in terms of that which is coming, of the "event" which is being triggered in the redoubling of the psyche. Hence, just as the symbol is fractured or broken—"Fable" itself refers to the shattering of the mirror—the temporality of allegory is similarly wiped out by an anticipatory or

apocalyptic moment of speech as event. Initiating, rupturing, triggering, breaking open, the invention of a "Fable" broaches a dissemination or efflorescence which can no longer be identified with the impotent reading theory championed by de Man. In this division the psyche of deconstruction is itself ruptured or fissured, its double mirror triggering the device of a theory which cannot be reduced to a patent, trademark, or corporate body. This, then, would be the "mind of deconstruction."

Reading de Man Reading is certainly a very important collection of articles on the work of de Man, and it is unfortunate that space does not permit commentary on the other very interesting essays. Although not user friendly, the book will be very important for specialists in contemporary theory with an interest in de Man. Most interesting to me are the ways in which each writer countersigns for de Man's theories and, in particular, the extent to which there is a wider range of evaluations and interpretations than I would have otherwise assumed. Indeed, the collection implicitly demonstrates that even expert readers, all of them very sympathetic or at least receptive to de Man, are still at an exploratory stage of interpretation; no rigid "party line" has been established within this "school." Certainly, the wide discrepancy between Hillis Miller's excellent close reading of de Man and Derrida's powerful and multi-faceted meditation on "invention" strikes me as symptomatic of the wide latitude of possibilities for interpreting de Man's later work. In addition, the entire volume reminds us that de Man's contributions to language and literary study have been of such a high order of critical reflection that, in fact, the recent revelations about de Man's wartime writings seem, for the moment, quite overshadowed. At times one may even be seduced into agreeing with Geoffrey Hartman that "de Man's critique of every tendency to totalize literature or language, to see unity where there is no unity, could be a belated, but still powerful, act of conscience" (23).