The Structure of Allegorical Desire

Mὴν ἄειδε, Θεά, Ἰη

I mean my title to be read backwards and forwards, its “of” taken as objective and subjective genitive. On the one hand, I am concerned with the ways allegories begin and with the ends towards which they tend. In general, this is the problem of allegorical narrative, primarily a temporal issue regarding the way allegories linearly unfold, but also, as has often been pointed out, a symbolic progress that lends itself to spatial projection, as when the Temple translates the Labyrinth, or the music of the spheres sounds the order of the stars. On the other hand, I am concerned with a specifically allegorical desire, a desire for allegory, that is implicit in the idea of structure itself and explicit in criticism that directs itself towards the structurality of literature. This is to say not only that the notion of structure, especially of literary structure, presupposes the same system of multiply articulated levels as does that of allegory, but also that the possibility of such coherently polysemic significance originates out of the same intention—what I call desire—as does allegorical narrative.

I speak of desire in deference to the thematics of allegory and to describe the self-propelling, digressive impulse of allegorical movement: for example, the way the meandering Canterbury Tales begins by setting the scene and establishing the atmosphere in which folk properly “longen” to go on pilgrimages, that longing being motivation for each pilgrim’s journey to Canterbury, but also the way the tales themselves set off towards the equally sacred center of their own allegorical space. I therefore psychoanalytically assume that the movement of allegory, like the dreamwork, enacts a wish that determines its progress—and, of course, the dream-vision is a characteristic framing and opening device of allegory, a way of situating allegory in the mise en abyme opened up by the variety of cognate accusatives that dream a dream, or see a sight, or tell a tale. On the other hand, with this reference to psychoanalysis, I mean also to suggest that analysis itself, the critical response to allegory, rehearses the same wish and therefore embarks upon the same pilgrimage, so that psychoanalysis, especially structural psychoanalysis, by which today we are obliged to mean Lacan, is not simply the analysis of, but the extension and conclusion of, the classic allegorical tradition from which it derives—which is why psychoanalysis so readily assimilates the great archetypes of allegorical imagery into its discourse: the labyrinths, the depths, the navels, the psychomachian hydraulics.

I want to argue that there is, for literary criticism, an historical importance in the fact that psychoanalysis founds its scientifcity on the hermeneutic circle traced by its own desire to know, as in the dream that begins psychoanalysis, Freud’s dream of Irma’s injection, whose wish is that its own interpretation be correct. To the extent that psychoanalysis is the prevailing paradigm for critical inquiry today, it is precisely because The Interpretation of Dreams in this way develops itself as the dream, and therefore as the desire, of interpretation itself. In thus basing itself on its own critical reflection, however, desire becomes in psychoanalysis, as in allegory, both a theme and a structuring principle, and its psychology, its theory of the human, thus becomes, in the words of another and famously ambiguous genitive, the allegory of love, whereas its metapsychology, its theory of itself, becomes the allegory of allegory. I am concerned with the logic, presumably the psycho-logic—etymologically, the logos of the soul—that in our literary tradition links allegory, interpretation, and desire each to each, and with what happens to interpretation when its desire is no longer controllable by a figure.

That there should be formal reciprocity between allegory and its criticism is not surprising. Theoretical discussions of allegory regularly begin by lamenting the breadth of the term and relating its compass to the habit of mind that, as it is irritatedly put, sees allegory everywhere. Thus generalized, allegory rapidly acquires the status of trope of tropes, representative of the figurality of all language, of the distance between signifier and signified, and, correlatively, the response to allegory becomes representative of critical activity per se. As Frye says, “it is not often realized that all commentary is allegorical interpretation, an attaching of ideas to the structure of
poetic imagery"—as, indeed, Frye’s comment demonstrates, in its presumption of global, archetypal structure, which is already allegoricization whatever purely literary claims he may make for it. Often, allegory will internalize this critical mood that it evokes, and this is what gives it its characteristically didactic and sententious tone, as in Spenser’s emblematic stanzas, or the way Chaucer’s pilgrims, however ironic the context, draw the exemplary morals of their own and each other’s tales, or the relation of the second half of the Roman de la Rose to the first, or, even more patently, the way EK’s appendixes to The Shepheardes Calender or Eliot’s pedantic footnotes to The Waste Land seem integral parts of the poems rather than gloss. This tendency on the part of allegory to read itself, for its theme to dominate its narrative, or, as Frye says, to prescribe the direction of its commentary, suggests the formal or phenomenological affinities of the genre with criticism. More historically, we can note that allegory seems regularly to surface in critical or polemical atmospheres, when for political or metaphysical reasons there is something that cannot be said. Plutarch is generally instanced as the first to substitute ἀλληγορία for the more usual προφητεία, and he does so in the double context of defending poetry and demythologizing the gods. In this he picks up the protoallegorical tradition of euhemerism which goes back to the third century B.C., or to Plato, or beyond that to the Pythagoreans, and whose importance for literary theory is not so much its dismantling of the pagan pantheon as, rather, the defensively recuperative intention it displays towards authoritative texts whose literalism has failed. The dignity of Apollo is deflated, but the prestige of Homer preserved, when the licentious intrigues of the gods are interpreted as philosophic, naturalistic, or scientific parables.

This deployment of allegory in the service of established literary tradition, a way of reviving prior literary authorities by making them new through critical revision—for example, Ovid moralisé—forms the basis of Edwin Honig’s theory of allegorical conception, which has itself been forcefully revived and redeveloped in Harold Bloom’s more psychoanalytical (allegorical?) Anxiety of Influence. In this context, and relating more directly to the historical development of our own exegetical tradition, it is significant that Philo, who was the first to employ an extensively allegorical mode of scriptural criticism, was also the first to introduce the terms of negative theology into theological discourse. Here there is a kind of euhemerism in reverse, with a God whose ineffability and incomprehensibility—knowable as existent but not in essence—answers His embarrassingly anthropomorphic involvement in history, just as His essentially mysterious divinity explains the necessity for a revelation expressed through figural extravagance. Again, with Philo we note a self-conscious and sacralizing nostalgia in response to authoritative but in some sense faded origins, whether they be historical (the disturbingly unphilosophical account of the creation of the universe presented in Scripture) or textual (the way Philo’s commentary works at one inspired and translated remove from its original source). It is as though allegory were precisely that mode that makes up for the distance, or heals the gap, between the present and a disappearing past, which, without interpretation, would be otherwise irretrievable and foreclosed, as, for example, the pseudo-hieroglyphology of Horapollo, whose magic, hermetic graphesis is developed just at that moment when the legibility of hieroglyphs is lost.

With the Patristics (leaving aside the exact proportion of Philonic and Stoic influence) these allegorizing perspectives and purposes turn into the dogma that lies at the base of all medieval and renaissance critical theory. Again allegory is directed to critical and polemical ends, and again the motive to allegorize emerges out of recuperative originology. The Old Testament is revived when interpreted as typologically predictive of the New Testament, and the Gospels themselves receive the benefit of spiritualizing exegesis when the apocalypse they prophesy is indefinitely deferred. Here, allegory acquires what will be in our tradition its primarily intermediate position between interpretative extremes: more figural than Montanist literalism, for which the arrival of the Paraclete is already officially announced by Scripture, and less recursively allusive than doceticizing Gnosticism, for which history, Christ, and Truth itself are but discrete moments in an infinite series of suggestively unstable image of images. This is the major strain of allegorizing sensibility in
our tradition: the second and third century legacy on which the four-
or three-fold medieval schemes will depend. Between a literalism pure and simple and what today might be called an exegesis of the free-floating signifier, allegory becomes, for literature as for theology, a vivifying archaeology of occulted origins and a promissory eschatology of postponed ends—all this in the service of an essentially pietistic cosmology devoted to the corroboration of divinely ordered space and time, precisely the two matrices against which, as Auerbach showed, the connotative nuances of “figure,” formal and chron-
ic, develop.12

That allegory should organize itself with reference to these spatial and temporal axes, that, as it were, it should embody figura, follows directly from the linguistic structure attributed to the figure by classic rhetorical theory. The standard formulation, of course, is Quintilian’s, which characterizes allegory as what happens when a single metaphor is introduced in continuous series.13 For grave Quintilian this is more often than not a defect, an excess of metaphor likely to lead to enigma, but whether avoided as a vice of style or assiduously “invented” for the sake of decorous amplification, allegory will be defined up through the Renaissance as the temporal extension of trope (Thomas Wilson: “An Allegorie is none other thing, but a Metaphore used throughout a whole sentence or oration”).14 As such, the procedure of allegory, and the relations that obtain between its spatial and temporal projections, are strictly circumscribed. Metaphor is the initial equivocating insight into the system of doubly articulated correspondences and proportions upon which depends the analogizing logic of any troping proposition. As the shepherd to his flock, so the pilot to his boat, the king to his realm, the priest to his congregation, the husband to his wife, the stomach to the body—metaphor will select from such a system of hierarchically arranged ratios (logoi) the particular similarity that, as Aristotle puts it, it chooses to see in differences.15 Developed at length, in narrative succession, the continued metaphor will maintain the rigor of the original conceit by appealing to the overall structure that governs each term in the series, with the result that narrative logic directs itself towards introducing the fox, the tempest, the cuckold, or the canker as specifically structural, predetermined con-
sequences of the first metaphorization (Abraham Fraunce: “The excellency of tropes is then most apparent, when either manie be fitifie included in one word, or one so continued in manie, as that with what thing it begin, with the same it also end: and then it is called an Allegorie or Inversion”).16

Thus there are allegories that are primarily perpendicular, concerned more with structure than with temporal extension, as, say, illustrations of Fortune’s wheel, or Fludd’s famous diagram of the great chain of being, or the emblem as a general literary genre, or pastorals like The Shepheardes Calender, which make only the slightest gestures towards full-scale narrative progress. And, on the other hand, there is allegory that is primarily horizontal, such as picaresque or quest narrative, where figurative structure is only casually and allusively appended to the circuit of adventures through time. Finally, of course, there are allegories that blend both axes together in relatively equal proportions, as in The Canterbury Tales, where each figurative tale advances the story of the pilgrimage as a whole. Whatever the prevailing orientation of any particular allegory, however, up and down through the declensions of structure, or laterally developed through narrative time, the allegory will be successful as allegory only to the extent that it can suggest the authenticity with which the two coordinating poles bespeak each other, with structure plausibly unfolded in time, and narrative persuasively upholding the distinctions and equivalences described by structure. In Roman Jakobson’s linguistic formula, which here simply picks up classic rhetorical theory (along with the awkward metaphoricity of the definition of metaphor itself), allegory would be the poetical projection of the metaphoric axis onto the metonymic, where metaphor is understood as the synchronic system of differences which constitutes the order of language (langue), and metonymy as the diachronic principle of combination and connection by means of which structure is actualized in time in speech (parole; cf. Taleus: “continued metonymia is also allegory”).17 And while Jakobson goes on to associate metaphor with verse and romanticism, as opposed to metonymy, which he identifies with realism and prose, allegory would cut across
and subtend all such stylistic categorizations, being equally possible
in either verse or prose, and quite capable of transforming the most
objective naturalism into the most subjective expressionism, or the
most determined realism into the most surrealistically ornamental
baroque.18

Thus defined, allegory fully deserves the generalization that ren­
ders it representative of language employed for literary ends, and at
the same time we can see why, for contemporary structuralism,
allegory would be the figure of speech par excellence. No other fig­
ure so readily lays itself out on the grid constructed out of the
hypothesised intersection of paradigmatic synchrony and syntag­
matic diachrony, which is to say that no other figure so immediately
instances the definition of linguistic structure which was developed
by Jakobson out of Saussure and the Russian Formalists, and that
has since been applied to all the so-called “sciences of man,” from
anthropology (Lévi-Strauss) to semiotics (Barthes) to psychoanalysis
(Lacan).

Several paradoxes, however, or apparent paradoxes, follow from
this curiously pure structurality possessed by allegory, though taken
singly none is at odds with our basic literary intuitions. On the one
hand, as does structuralism itself, allegory begins with structure,
thinks itself through it, regardless of whether its literary realizations
orient themselves perpendicularly or horizontally, that is, as primar­
ily metaphoric or primarily metonymic. At each point of its progress,
allegory will select its signifying elements from the system of binary
oppositions that is provided by what Jakobson would call the meta­
phoric code, that is, the structure, and, as a result, allegory will in­
everitably reenforce the structurality of that structure regardless of
how it manipulates the elements themselves. For Jakobson and for
allegory, “The poetic function projects the principle of equivalence
from the axis of selection into the axis of combination,”19 and so it
is always the structure of metaphor that is projected onto the se­
quence of metonymy, not the other way around, which is why alle­
gory is always a hierarchicizing mode, indicative of timeless order,
however subversively intended its contents might be. This is why
allegory is “the courtly figure,” as Puttenham called it, an inherently
political and therefore religious trope, not because it flatters tact­
fully, but because in deferring to structure it insinuates the power of
structure, giving off what we can call the structural effect.20 So too,
this is what leads a theoretician such as Angus Fletcher to analogize
the rhythm of allegory to that of obsessional neurosis: it is a formal
rather than a thematic aspect of the figure, deriving directly from the
structure that in-forms its movement.21

On the other hand, if allegorical themes are in a sense emptied of
their content by the structure that governs them, if the particular
signifiers of allegory become vehicles of a larger structural story
that they carry but in which they play no part, they are at the same
time, ostentatiously foregrounded by the very structurality that be­
comes immanent in them. There is no clearer example of this than
that of rhyme, which is precisely the poetic feature with which
Jakobson illustrated his definition of the poetical as the superimposi­
tion of structural similarity on syntagmatic continuity. With rhyme
we do indeed have “equivalence in sound, projected into the se­
quency,” such that the principle of equivalent selection does indeed
 govern syntax;22 and the resulting literary effect is exactly that we
hear the sound of the sound rather than the meaning of the meaning.
The same holds for the other metrical and intonational means of
marking poetic periods as isochronic, all of which render “the time
of the speech flow experienced.”23 Thus, if before we saw signifiers
lose their content when they were subsumed in a metaphoric struc­
ture to which they only obliquely referred, we here see them lose
that content once again when they staggily embody that structure in
sequential movement. We hear the sounds but not the sense when the
signifiers, graded as similarity superinduced on continuity, point to
themselves as signifiers rather than to what they signify: poetic sense
is exchanged for poetic sensuousness when the palpability and tex­
ture of the signans takes precedence over, and even, as in doggerel,
occludes the signatum altogether. With regard to Jakobson’s famous
typology of the six communicative functions—the referential, which
stresses the context; the emotive, which stresses the addresser; the
conative, which stresses the addressee; the phatic, which stresses the
contact between addresser and addressee; the metalinguistic, which
stresses the code in which the message is couched—allegory would be exemplary of Jakobson's purely poetic function, namely, the message that, charged with reflexive poeticality, stresses itself as merely message. This leaves us, however, with the paradox that allegory, which we normally think of as the most didactic and abstractly moral-mongering of poetic figures, is at the same time the most empty and concrete: on the one hand, a structure of differential oppositions abstracted from its constituent units; on the other, a clamor of signifiers signifying nothing but themselves. Remembering the sententiousness of allegory, we are entitled to ask whether with such a structuralist description the thematic has not been "structured" out of court.

The paradox is, of course, only an apparent one, but I draw it out in this way so as to point to a real difficulty in structuralist poetics: namely, that in order to maintain any thematic meaning at all, structuralism, like allegory, must assume a meaningful connection between metaphoric and metonymic poles. That meaning is either what permits the two to join or it is the consequence of their juncture. What this means in practice is that Jakobson will pick up the tradition of Pope and of Hopkins, or, for that matter, of Wimsatt, and argue that sound is echo to sense. Of course, Jakobson does not intend the naïve claim that there are different phonemes for different qualities—the notorious murmuring of innumerable bees—though he does accept studies that support Mallarme's discriminations of dark and light vowels. Rather, Jakobson wants to say that the structure of poetic sounds functions in relation to the structure of its poetic signifieds as a kind of Peircean index, a little like that to which it points, or, in negatively contrapuntal fashion, conspicuously, equally indicatively, unlike.

In pointing to themselves, therefore, as in rhyme, the sounds thus also point beyond themselves to the structure of their signifieds, and the same goes for the signifieds themselves, which at a semantic and thematic level are again a structure of signifiers pointing both to themselves and to a structure of signifiers beyond themselves, all of them, alone or together, eventually pointing to the structure of language itself. This is the essentially Hegelian assumption that lies behind Jakobson's claim that "The history of a system is in turn also a system," that is, that historical diachrony, the evolution of a language, reacts structurally upon the synchronic linguistic code. Once the signifier's relation to the signified, that is, the sign as a whole, is in this way understood to be relatively motivated, rather than utterly arbitrary as in Saussure, it is possible to make the sign itself into an index pointing to the structure it embodies and supports, and thus all the levels of allegory, up through and including the thematic, will display themselves and each other with resoundingly poetic and emphatically structural effect.

But this harmonious, now Leibnitzian structure, depending as it does on an utter idealization of the structure of the sign, occurs at a significant cost. Out of the romantic and organizing formalism of its axiological assumptions, the affinity of structuralism with the old New Criticism comes as naturally as leaves to either Keats's or Yeats's tree, and so too does the same fetishization of irony as a poetic feature. "The supremacy of poetic function over referential function does not obliterate the reference but makes it ambiguous." What this typically unbending aphorism means is that, in a structuralist poem, every signifier will be simultaneously metaphor and metonymy. Jakobson's example is the girl in the Russian folk tale who comes to be symbolized by the willow under which she walks: ever after in the poem, girl and tree are metaphors, each of the other, by virtue of their metonymic intersection, just as the sequential movement of the poem is conditioned by their metaphoric equivalence. In classical rhetoric, we would call this a synecdoche: the girl is represented by the tree or it by she, in that one daemonically possesses the other. In Jakobson's terms, however, what we have is a metaphoric metonymy and a metonymic metaphor, and the result, not surprisingly, is allegory:

Similarity superimposed on contiguity imparts to poetry its thoroughgoing symbolic, multiple, polysemantic essence which is beautifully suggested by Goethe's "Alles Vergangliche ist nur ein Gleichnis" (Anything transient is but a likeness). Said more technically, anything sequent is a simile. In poetry where similarity is superinduced upon contiguity, any metonymy is slightly metaphorical and any metaphor has a metonymic tint.

Undoubtedly, poems, and allegories in particular, work this way:
think of Spenser's forests that metaphorize his heroes while they wander through them, or the play of light imagery in The Faerie Queene. The question is, How can structuralism work this way? What does it mean for a metonymy to be slightly metaphorical, and what is this "tint" that makes a metaphor a little metonymic? If structuralism is the diacritical science because it begins with the difference around which binary oppositions assemble, what happens to its scientific status when its own most fundamental opposites, metaphor and metonymy, are from the very beginning already implicated one in the other, the difference between them collapsed for the sake of hierarchicized, structured,"symbolic, multiplex," allegorical meaning? If these seem merely abstract and theoretical issues, we can reformulate them again in terms of our original literary problem: How does time get into structure and structure into time, how does allegory begin and why does it continue?

For reasons that will become clearer later, I want to illustrate the problem with the opening of The Canterbury Tales, which is an instance of the poetical whose structurality has never yet been questioned, and where the allegorical relationship of space and time is a straightforwardly thematic as well as a formal issue. This is the case in several ways, but, for our purposes, most importantly so with regard to the opening description of the months and seasons, which is the stylized convention by means of which the Prologue places itself squarely in a tradition of allegorical beginning. In part, of course, such a description is a convention of courtly romance, one that Chaucer employs several times elsewhere (The Legend of Good Women, The Book of the Duchess, Troilus and Criseyde), and whose force he would know from the Roman de la Rose, which he had already translated, and where the description of May is preface to the allegorical dream-vision itself. But so too, and equally allegorical, the description of months and seasons is a long established convention immediately evocative of; and convenient to, cosmological and metaphysical invention, a way of alluding through allegorical structure to the mysterious order of the cosmos and the position of God as unmoved mover within it; here the Prologue can rely on a tradition that goes back to Lucretius, Ovid, and Vergilian eclogue, and that is thoroughly alive and popular throughout the Middle Ages, whether in manuscript decoration, cathedral ornament, or various scientifically and philosophically inclined compendia. The details and history of this convention, which have been magisterially summarized for us by Rosemond Tuve, need not concern us now, save to the extent that they allow us to refer with some certainty to the explicitly allegorical intentions of The Canterbury Tales and to remark that here, as with any deployment of a convention within a literary tradition, we have precisely the joining of paradigm and syntagm by means of which a literary text will position itself within the structurality of literature as a whole (with the text presenting itself as either like or unlike others in the conventional paradigm—for Jakobson this would be the literary code, a structure of generic oppositions—at the same time as it actualizes the paradigm in the temporality of literary history, though whether Chaucer’s parole is here intended ironically remains an open question).

In any event, it is with reference to this complex tradition of allegorical literature and to the burden of cosmological, theological, and scientific speculation that it carries, that we enter the poem. And it is also within this context that we discover in the Prologue’s first two lines, with the piercing of March by April, the metaphoric metonymy that for Jakobson constitutes the specifically poetic effect. That is, when April with its sweet showers pierces the drought of March, we have the code of the months, or, more precisely, the system of oppositions which makes up the code, translated directly into consecutive sequence, such that the binary oppositions between the months—rainy April versus dry March, but, of course, within the tradition there are other oppositions at stake besides the merely meteorological—are projected systematically onto the continuous progress of the months through the year—after March, then April—in a progression that completes and corroborates itself only when the entirety of the monthly paradigm unfolds itself through the temporal totality, or what properly we should here call the syntagm, of the year. Inevitably—and for the author of a treatise on the astrolabe, tautologically—this is picked up by the surrounding or encapsulating astrological references, which tell us again that we are in the first
month, April, because the Ram has run through half his course and therefore, as with April and March, that the paradigmatic zodiacal opposition of Aries and Taurus is directly translatable onto or as the sequence of metonymy unrolled by celestial rotation.

All this is a rather complicated way of saying what for a competent reader should presumably go without saying, but, for the sake of argument, let us assume that the initial structural disposition of these first few images is then repeated with utter systematicity in the pattern of images which the poem develops throughout its opening few lines, so that the series of oppositions, which we might summarize as wet and dry, up and down, sky and earth, male and female, fecundity and sterility, pagan as opposed to Christian divinities, inside and outside, near and far, health and illness—all function structurally in relation to each other and to themselves as kinds of mirror images, indexes, of the first metaphorico-metonymic structuration introduced by the intersection of March and April, each of them graded as structure on sequence. Let us even assume that the same thing happens metrically, so that the ictus on the unstressed position that we get in April is structurally related to the stress on the stressed position that we get with March, and that this in turn sets up a stress structure of rhythmical and intonational patterning which the poem will reserve for specifically metaphorico-metonymic emphasis; for example, "... with his | shōurēs soote | Thē | drōughte, ..." Let us also assume, again only for the sake of argument and in pursuit of the ideal structural analysis, that the themes introduced by our now hypothetically structuralized Prologue imagery are in turn developed in the tales themselves, and that this enlargement proceeds with the same structural determinations that are sketched out in the first few lines, so that the implicit hierarchy presumed in the order of months is what finally lies behind the social hierarchy into which the pilgrims fit, from the Knight on down to the Miller (as well as the dictional hierarchy that governs the manner in which each tale is decorously related), and that the primacy of male April to female March is the structural source not only of the patriarchal orientation of the marriage tales, but also of presumptively analogous arrangements of cosmological and literary order which the tales regularly, allegorically
lines which we have now assumed manage to generate this longing, or to justify it, or to explain it? How does such structurality entice a reader further into the poem, leading him on through and into its sequentiality? How is structure extended, "longed," into time?

We might conceivably answer by referring ourselves directly to the immediate referents of the text. Here it would be a simple positivist matter of fact that when spring comes, and the Ram runs through half his course, and small birds begin to sing, then, by nature, people desire to go on pilgrimages, with professional pilgrims rushing off to foreign shrines, while ordinary folk who happen to live in England instead typically wend their way to Canterbury. This would be an unsatisfying solution, I take it, not only because we can assume other urges to be commonly operative in the spring but also because such a realist's account ignores the spectrum of allegorical reference which we respond to in the text, at the same time as it fails to recognize the specifically literary, conventional dimension of the opening. Alternatively, then, we might forgo the natural referents of the text entirely and answer the question formally rather than realistically by saying instead that the text presents us with a self-contained structure of relations, in which elements are manipulated as in a game, and that therefore there is neither need nor reason to adduce any extraliterary explanation or justification at all for the particular arrangements that the structurality of the text allows us to observe. The most that we might hazard as explanation for the pleasure that we take in such a text as we continue through it would be the kind of vibratory sympathy between its organization and the structure of our thought which Lévi-Strauss suggests in the overture to The Raw and the Cooked, where he takes up the issue of the anthropologist's response to the phenomena with which he is engaged. 32 I take it that this too is also unsatisfying, not only because it rather sentimentalizes the reading experience, but, again, more importantly, because it too ignores the manifestly allegorical intention of a text that explicitly directs its structure, such as it is or as we have idealized it, to correspond to other structures of experience—psychological, physical, metaphysical, and literary—from which the text derives its own authority and indeed much of its literary interest. How then, if neither philistine realism nor naïve structuralism—what we have been taught sternly to call "mere formalism"—is adequate, might we account for the "longing" of The Canterbury Tales? If the piercing of March by April is the primal structural scene to which the text repeatedly recurs, how does that first image, with its astrological, calendric eroticism, control the structural unfolding of so massive and perfected an allegory as The Canterbury Tales is generally pleasurably and meaningfully taken to be. In the terms of my title, how does the structure of the poem yield its allegorical desire?

For an answer, I turn to another famous essay by Jakobson in which he applies the procedures of structural analysis to phonemic patterning, and where he develops the theory of distinctive phonetic features which remains the greatest achievement of structural linguistics, recognized as such even by linguists with entirely different theoretical perspectives. 33 I should say in advance that it is because of Jakobson's theoretical success with the conceptualization of phonemes, which reduces the infinity of humanly producible sounds to a few significant phonological oppositions, that structural linguistics has become the prestigious model for disciplines that are only marginally, or at least not obviously, related to language per se. All of them readily pay the price of analogizing their subject matter to language in exchange for the rigorous structurality that Jakobson's method provides.

In principle, then—and my account will be perfunctory paraphrase—Jakobson begins with Saussurean diacriticality, the thesis that we perceive positivities as systems of differences rather than as simple existents whose being immediately imposes itself upon our senses. We hear the structured differences between phonemes rather than the phonemes themselves, as we know from the fact that what is a significant sound to a speaker of one language may not even be heard by the speaker of another. For each language, then, Jakobson proposes that a system of binary phonological oppositions may be constructed whose systematicity can account for all the potentially significant sounds producible within the language. This will be the phonological code of the *langue* which is actualized in metonymic *parole*. These systems naturally vary from language to language,
depending on the phonological structure of each, but what concerns us now are features that, because of the structure of the human mouth, are universal phonological facts. Here, then, like a Ramist proposing his initial dichotomization, Jakobson applies structuralist methodology and searches out what would be the maximum binary opposition of which the mouth is capable, which he discovers in the first syllable, contrast of consonant and vowel, transcribed as /pa/.

The constituents of this utterance, vocalic /a/ and the voiceless labial stop /p/, represent absolute phonological difference in the mouth: namely, with /p/ the buccal tract is closed at the front, whereas in /a/ the tract is opened at the end as wide as possible. As a labial stop, /p/ exists for but a moment and requires a minimum of energy for its articulation; in contrast, /a/ is a continual voicing of sound and requires maximum energy. Whereas /p/ is the stopping of sound, /a/ is pure vocality. For all these diacritical reasons, /pa/ is plausibly identified as the largest binary opposition the mouth can articulate and, as such, from a structuralist perspective, is conceptually the first syllable. This theoretical claim is, in turn, supported by studies in language acquisition and aphasia which report that /pa/ is both the first utterance children learn and the last that aphasics lose, striking empirical corroboration of Jakobson's structuralist claim that language begins and ends with the combination of vocalic /a/ with voiceless labial stop /p/ in the primal utterance, /pa/.

The hypothesis is clearly ingenious, and if we assimilate voiceless /p/ to its twin labial stop, voiced /b/, sound and sense begin in Jakobson's sense structurally to cohere, as, for example, when we call the infant incapable of speech a baby, or when the Greeks call foreigners whose speech is strange barbaroi because they babble, as at the Tower of Babel, or when we begin our alpha-bets by joining A to B. But /pa/ is only the beginning of a system. In order to build a structure, at least two sets of oppositions are required so as to construct a series of proportions and logoi that can be actualized in speech. Thus Jakobson and the infant must identify a second binary opposition, structurally opposable to the first, so as to specify a paradigmatic code, and this they do by introducing the nasal consonant /m/. With the acquisition of /m/, the pure differentiality that was first presented by /pa/ is, as it were, plugged up, recuperated. As a nasal consonant, a continuant sound, /m/ combines the vocality of /a/ with the positionality of /p/ at the front of the mouth. As a little of one and a little of the other, /m/ is a kind of average or collapse or juncture of the original opposition, just as metaphor and metonymy seemed to collapse in Jakobson's theory. At this point, once /m/ is articulated as a distinctive feature in its own right, we have the diacritical material with which to establish a structure of phonological sound: /p/ and /m/ being both opposed to /a/, whereas /p/ and /m/ are also opposed to each other. As Jakobson puts it: “Before there appeared the consonantal opposition nasal/oral, consonant was distinguished from vowel as closed tract from open tract. Once the nasal consonant has been opposed to the oral as presence to absence of the open tract, the contrast consonant/vowel is revalued as presence vs. absence of a closed tract.”

Again, there is striking cross-cultural empirical support for Jakobson's claim. In nearly every natural language that has been observed, some variation of “Papa” and “Mama,” or their reversal, as in “Abba” and “Ema,” are the familiar terms for father and mother. What I am concerned with right now, however, quite apart from whatever empirical power Jakobson's insight might possess, is how the first two terms of this series, /pa/ and /ma/, develop themselves as a structure. We remember that it is only with the introduction of the second opposition adduced by /ma/ that we can say we have a system. At that point, each term in the series can be seen as diacritically significant with respect to its opposition to another term in the structure. Until then, however, /pa/, insofar as it signifies anything, signifies only the sheer diacriticality through which the system as a whole is thought. But this original differential determination is thereupon lost, retroactively effaced, when the introduction of /ma/ "revalues" the first valueless contrast consonant/vowel, or silence/sound, that is, /pa/, as "presence vs. absence of a closed tract." In other words, /pa/ loses its original status as mark of pure diacriticality when it is promoted to the level of significant signifier within the system as a whole. This new significant /pa/ is utterly unrelated to the first simply diacritical /pa/ that it replaces, or, as Derrida would
say, that it places under erasure. And it is precisely this occultation of the original /pa/, now structurally unspeakable because revalued as something else entirely, which allows the system to function as a structure in the first place. In short, the structure of significant sounds must erase the original marking of diacriticality upon which it depends, and from which it emerges, in order to signify anything at all. In a formulation whose resonance with contemporary literary criticism will be embarrassingly obvious, there is buried in the structurality of any structure the ghostly origin of that structure, because the origin will be structurally determined as a ghost, a palpably absent origin, by virtue of the very structurality it fathers. Every structure must begin with such an effacing, retroactive revaluation of its beginning, with such a murder of its diacritical source, just as Freud said when he identified the origin of human culture in the murder of the father, the primal /pa/, who lives on only in and as the guilty memory responsible for the structure of society. 

Turning back to the opening of The Canterbury Tales—which it will now be clear was selected precisely because there in the intersection of April and March we have also the juncture of /pa/ and /ma/—we can answer the question of how an allegory begins and why it continues. What we can say is that with its poeticality defined as structure superinduced upon metonymy, allegory initiates and continually revivifies its own desire, a desire born of its own structurality. Every metaphor is always a little metonymic because in order to have a metaphor there must be a structure, and where there is a structure there is already piety and nostalgia for the lost origin through which the structure is thought. Every metaphor is a metonymy of its own origin, its structure thrust into time by its very structurality. With the piercing of March by April, then, the allegorical structure thus enunciated has already lost its center and thereby discovered a project: to re-cover the loss dis-covered by the structure of language and of literature. In thematic terms, this journey back to a foreclosed origin writes itself out as a pilgrimage to the sacred founding shrine, made such by murder, that is the motive of its movement. In terms of literary response, the structurality of the text holds out the promise of a meaning that it will also perpetually defer, an image of hermeneutic totality martyred and sacralized by and as the poetical. This is the formal destiny of every allegory insofar as allegory is definable as continued metaphor. Distanced at the beginning from its source, allegory will set out on an increasingly futile search for a signifier with which to recuperate the fracture of and at its source, and with each successive signifier the fracture and the search begin again: a structure of continual yearning, the insatiable desire of allegory. 

Perhaps this is one reason why, as Angus Fletcher has remarked, allegory seems by its nature to be incompletable, never quite fulfilling its grand design. So too, this explains the formal affinity of allegory with obsessional neurosis, which, as Freud develops it in the case of the Wolfman, derives precisely from such a search for lost origins, epitomized in the consequences of the primal scene, which answers the child’s question of where he came from with a diacritical solution that he cannot accept and that his neurosis thereupon represses and denies. But this would in turn suggest the affinity of psychoanalysis not only with obsessonality, but also with allegory. For the theoretical concern of the Wolfman case, argued out in the context of a polemic with Jung, is precisely to determine whether the scene of parental intercourse, the piercing of /ma/ by /pa/, observed by the Wolfman was indeed a primal scene or instead a primal fantasy. And when Freud, relying on a hypothesis of universal, cross-cultural phylogenetic inheritance, tells us that it is a matter of indifference whether we choose to regard it as either, we may well wonder whether the theory of the primal scene, which is in some sense at the center of every psychoanalysis, is not itself the theoretical primal fantasy of psychoanalysis, a theoretical origin that the theoretical structure of Freud’s thought obliged him to displace to the recesses of mythic history. The question becomes perhaps more urgent when we recall the theoretical status of what for Freudian metapsychology is its own maximum binary opposition, namely, the instinct theory, with its dualism of Eros and Death. For to the extent that these two instincts are different, it is only insofar as the recuperative, unifying impulses of Eros are provoked as response to the differentiating impulses of death, a /ma/ to the thanatotic /pa/. And even
before this, death is already conceived by Freud as itself such a dualism, already extended into time as the compulsive, obsessive repetition of its own diacriticality, that is, the repetition compulsion, which is the vicious Freudian metonym of the metaphoricity of death. Is it any wonder, then, that for evidence of all of this Freud can but point in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* to another piece of allegorical literature, to Plato’s story of Aristophanes’ story of divinely diacriticalized hermaphrodites, yet another case where desire originates in and as the loss of structure. And it is by no means accidental that Freud develops these same Aristophanic themes elsewhere, as in the allegory of his gender theory, with its unending quest by both hetero-sexes for the castrated phallus, powerful only in the division it teaches in its loss. And so too with psychoanalytic interpretation, which completes itself only when it points mutely to that passage in even the most thoroughly interpreted dream which has to be left obscure . . . a tangle of dream-thoughts which cannot be unravelled and which moreover adds nothing to our knowledge of the content of the dream. This is the dream’s navel, the spot where it reaches down into the unknown. The dream-thoughts to which we are led by interpretation cannot from the nature of things, have any definite endings; they are bound to branch out in every direction into the intricate network of our world of thought. It is at some point where this meshwork is particularly close that the dream-wish grows up, like a mushroom out of its mycelium.

Does this mean, then, that psychoanalysis as a science is “mere” allegory? Does the fact that the exposition of Freud’s theory of the psyche acts out its own theorization mean that psychoanalysis is but a symptomatic instance of its own thwarted desire to know: a neurotic epistemophilia at the end of a bankrupt tradition of philosophy? It is thanks to the genius of Lacan that we can see in this theoretical self-reflection of psychoanalysis, mirror of Freud’s original analysis of himself, both the historical necessity and the scientific validity of psychoanalytic allegoricization. For when Lacan makes the subject an effect of the signifier, when he defines the unconscious as the “discourse of the Other” (let us note, a direct translation of the etymology of allegory: ἀλλος, other; ἀγωρεύω, to speak), he establishes psychoanalysis as precisely that science whose concern is the split in the subject occasioned by the subject’s accession to language. If psychoanalysis has discovered anything, it is precisely this loss of the self to the self which we vaguely refer to when we speak of the function of the unconscious. And what Lacan has taught us, in a series of blindingly lucid formulations still defensively resisted by the psychoanalytic establishment, is that in the same way that *The Canterbury Tales* is divided and directed when it enters language, so too is the psyche when it learns to speak. This famous Lacanian barring of the subject—the loss of being that comes from re-presenting oneself in language as a meaning, correlative with the formation of the unconscious and the onset of desire, the Oedipeanization of the subject, and the acquisition of a place in the cultural order through the recognition of the Name of the Father—is what makes the psyche a critical allegory of itself and is what justifies psychoanalysis as the allegory of that allegory. For it is in search of the meaning of this division of the subject through the dialectics of desire, brought on by the structurality of the logos, that psychoanalysis finds its own epistemological project and its own initiatory desire.

If, then, the structure of Freud’s thought, as it develops, becomes immanent as theme, if Freud’s theory repeatedly valorizes those very images of loss which make his conceptual representations possible in the first place, this is to say no more than that Freud’s hermeneutics are at one with the object of their inquiry. This is not the internalist fallacy; rather, it is the way psychoanalysis realizes itself as practice—by determining its object under a concept (Hegel’s definition of science). For psychoanalysis is no empty theory, but instead the operative science of the unconscious, and the unconscious is precisely that part of the self lost to the self by its articulation, just as Freud’s theory embodies itself only through its endless, questing theoretical self-deconstruction; or so the heroic, allegorical example of Freud and the rigorously figurative style of Lacan persuasively suggest.

This is to see in psychoanalytic structure and in psychoanalytic structuralism the conclusion of a search for wisdom that has motivated Western philosophy from the very beginning. In the declension
of theoretical speculation about the order of order that begins as ontology, cosmology, theology, and that, starting with the Renaissance, is internalized in the sciences of man as anthropology, sociology, psychology, there occurs a completing or a breaking of the hermeneutic circle when psychology, defining the psyche as an effect of the logos, is itself transformed, in Kenneth Burke's phrase, into logology. This is the Heideggerean theme straightforwardly developed in Lacan's thought. And, of course, it is against just this appeal to the order of order and the meaning of meaning that Derrida has directed his critique of Lacan, seeing in such a psychoanalysis nothing but the inherited after-effects of Western logocentric metaphysics, where the phallus is the castrating, fascistic, transcendental signified that condemns man's desire to a forever unsatisfying nostalgia for the lost origin of a chimerical Golden Age. As an alternative, as we now all know, Derrida proposes instead a metaphysics and a psychoanalysis of difference itself, "La différence" of both structure and time, to be comprehended by a philosophy avant la lettre, before structure, before logos; in short, a philosophy of the effacing and trace of prelinguistic, diacritical.

But as Derrida is well aware, and as he repeatedly reminds the most enthusiastic Derridistes, this return to structuralist first principles can occur only after the structural fact, for it is only in structure that the origin and its loss emerges. The sign is always thought through difference, but it is always eventually thought out to the signifying conclusion that erases the difference upon which it depends, which is why "difference cannot be thought without the trace." Thus, if Lacan is logocentric, as Derrida says, it is because Lacan characterizes the first logocentric lapse through which "différence" itself will be thematized and conceived, so that any criticism of Lacan, including Derrida's, will already have committed the Lacanian lapse. This accounts for the positivist illusion that there are things before differences, but it also explains the intrinsic belatedness of every deconstruction.

For this reason, too, we cannot accept any of the so-called post-structuralist critiques of structuralism, again including Derrida's, as being themselves anything more than the aftereffects of structuralism. They are already defined, by the criticism implicit in their "post" and in their hyphen, as the allegorical response to a metaphor of structure and a structure of metaphor in which they are already implicated and by which they are already implied. Whether the origin is perpetually displaced by Derridean "différence," or whether it is historically located and crystallized by the Girardian catastrophe of "no-difference" whatsoever, the thematic valorization of origin as loss survives. And post-structuralism therefore gains its prestige only insofar as it thus prolongs itself as the critical metonymy of the structuralist metaphor.

But this is also why we must stress again in what sense the scientific thematization of structure which we find in psychoanalysis spells an end to the tradition of literary allegory as we have known it since first century Alexandria. For when psychoanalysis itself turns into allegory, criticism for the first time in our tradition must admit to the irrecoverable distance between itself and its object. Having consciously formulated the allegory of its own desire, criticism must wake up from its dream of interpretation to a daylight where desire is but the memory of the night's desire. We have laid it down as a law of literary form that the diacriticality effaced by literary structure emerges as theme in the register of loss. Our example has been the way pilgrimage is thematized in The Canterbury Tales, but we might have illustrated the point with any of a wide variety of texts. We may lay it down as a second law that profoundly self-conscious texts eventually realize their responsibility for the loss upon which their literariness depends, and that, when this happens, this responsibility is itself thematized as sin. From silence, to difference, to loss, to sin—and sometimes, in texts whose literary integrity is absolute, through sin back to silence once again, as in the Retraction with which The Canterbury Tales concludes, where the allegory, as Derrida again would say, re-marks what is its most distinctive mark, re-tracts its constituting trait. These laws of literary form apply also to the structure of literary history, whether we consider the development of an individual author or the evolution of a literary genre. But this leaves open a way for poetry and for the history of poetry to remain literary even in their silence, whereas criticism ceases to be
criticism when it turns mute. Because the things of poetry are words, poetry can, in a way that criticism cannot, conclude itself when it cannot continue. When poetry can find no new words with which to maintain the meaning of its longing, it can lapse into significant literary silence, thereby pro-longing its desire ad infinitum, as when The Shepheardes Calender concludes by promising yet more poetry beyond its end, or the way The Faerie Queene concludes by breaking off before its end with the vision of Colin Clout making melody to the Muses and the image of his own desire. But criticism, whose things are not words but the meanings of words, meanings forever foreclosed by words, will find in silence only the impetus for further speech and further longing, which it will thereupon thematize as its own responsibility for the loss of meaning. Whereas a poem can be closed poetically even by a gesture of self-abandon, criticism, discovering the futility of its pro-ject, can only go on and on, frustratingly repeating its own frustration, increasingly obsessed with its own sense of sin—unless, of course, in the psychoanalytic sense, it projects its own critical unhappiness onto literature whose self-deconstructions would then be understood as criticism.

Thus it is that when the tradition of English pastoral which begins with Chaucer’s Prologue finds its own conclusion, it remains literary even in its self-disgust. And Eliot, drawing the thematic structure of the genre to its absurdly melancholic, ultimate reduction, can still articulate a meaning pre-dicative of yet more poetic desire:

April is the cruellest month, breeding  
Lilacs out of the dead land, mixing  
Memory and desire, stirring  
Dull roots with spring rain.

With his habit of making a beginning out of ends, Eliot can imagine that the gap in landscape poetry, which his poem proleptically prepares, will become a significant silence in a perpetually meaningful literary tradition that will forever feed meaning back into his Waste Land. In contrast, Freud, whose Judaic thematizations of guilt and sin, as in Civilization and its Discontents, are at least as forceful and serious as any of Eliot’s Anglican regrets, can do no more than continue to repeat his themes with increasingly phlegmatic and precisely nuanced resignation, as in the fragment with which his corpus movingly concludes, prophetically and self-reflectively entitled “The Splitting of the Ego in the Process of Defence.” This is the insight into self-division and sin which psychoanalysis—interminable analysis—leaves as legacy to contemporary critical thought, which continues to repeat Freud’s themes, though perhaps without the rigor of Freud’s resignation. Here I refer to that note of eschatological salvation which sounds so strangely in current literary discourse, as when Girard looks forwards to a revivification of difference through sacralizing violence, or when Derrida, telling us it is not a question of choosing, includes himself amongst those who “turn their eyes away in the face of the as yet unnameable which is proclaiming itself and which can do so, as is necessary whenever a birth is in the offing, only under the species of the non-species, in the formless, mute, infant, and terrifying form of monstrosity.” It would seem, by the rules of the endgame Beckett wrote in Waiting for Godot, that contemporary thought here turns pastoral nostalgia for a golden age into the brute expectations of a sentimental apocalypticism. But we will wait forever for the rough beast to slouch its way to Bethlehem; so too, for a philosophy or a literary criticism of what the thunder said: DA.

NOTES


3. Ibid., p. 90.

4. See Jean Pépin, Myth et allégorie: Les origines Grecques et les contestations Judaico-Chrétienne (Paris: Aubier, 1958), pp. 87-88. Plutarch is ambivalent about such figurative readings. On the one hand, “by forcibly distorting these (homeric) stories through what used to be termed ‘deeper meanings’ (μετάφορας), but are nowadays called ‘allegorical interpretations’ (διδακτικά) some people say that the Sun is represented as giving information
about Aphrodite in the arms of Ares, because the conjunction of the planet Mars with Venus portends births conceived in adultery, and when the Sun returns in his course and discov- ers these, they cannot be kept secret” (“How the Young Man Should Study Poetry,” Moralia, 19E, The Loeb Classical Library, vol. 1 (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1949), pp. 100–101). On the other hand, “Such, then, are the possible interpretations of these facts suggest. But now let us begin over again, and consider first the most per- spicious of those who have a reputation for expounding matters more philosophically. These men are like the Greeks who say that Cronus is but a figurative name for Christus Moralis (363D), vol. 5, pp. 76–77).

5. See John D. Cooke, “Euhemerism: A Medieval Interpretation of Classical Paganism,” Speculum 2, no. 4 (1927): 396–410. Cooke’s survey of the medieval tradition concludes by noting that “Chaucer nowhere subscribes to the euhemeristic interpretation” (p. 409). For Cicero, that certain heroes did indeed become gods, just as the myths detailing divine trans- and of words; see, for a famous example, Plato, in the Cratylus. As such, it is the beginning that leads directly to Heidegger.


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varying between types of /b/ and types of /p/, but still within a distinct "family of sounds."


Our alphabet reflects this "family" orthographically, writing "p" as upside-down "b."


38. Thus The Canterbury Tales begins with a beginning already past the beginning, with
the Ram already having run half his course. In liturgical iconography, this is the first period
of erring, or wandering from the way: "The whole of this fugitive life is divided into four
periods: the period of erring, or wandering from the way; the period of renewal, or return;
the period of reconciliation; and the period of pilgrimage. The period

39. I am concerned here with the way literary structures are thought and so feel no ob­
ligation to restrict my argument to cases that explicitly instance Jakobson’s phonological thesis,
neither. In the course of writing this essay, I have enjoyed collecting concrete examples, as in the first line of "Iliad" from which I take my epigraph, where the wrathful examples, as in the first line of "Iliad" from which I take my epigraph, where the wrathful
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manns, Green, 1941), pp. 1-2; cited in Robert P. Miller, Chaucer: Sources and Backgrounds (New York: Oxford University Press, 1977), p. 14. Adam's fall (which brings death into this world) is an affective projection of this origin-displaced-from-itself—a decisive ex­
ample in our tradition of the way literature thematizes its own enabling displacement as sin.
Woman, namely Eve, is the characteristic occasion of this disjunction, which is why in
literature she is /mal, not /pal. From this Lacan develops a theory of desire.

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45. Ibl, My Dear Dick (the female version of which, of course, is Madame Bovary).

46. Fletcher, Allegory, pp. 174-80.

47. The issue of Freud’s and psychoanalysis’ obsessiosity is a subject for another essay.
It takes the hermeneutic form of attempting to plug up what are thematized as gaps. The
culminating moment of Freud’s analysis of the obsessional Ratman comes, for example,
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position...a pot was turned upside down on his buttocks...some rats were put into it...and they...he had again got up, and was showing every sign of horror and resistance—"bored their way in..."—into his anus, I helped him out.

"Notes upon a Case of Obsessional Neurosis" (1909; 1955), SE, 10:166. Murray Schwartz suggested this reading of the Ratman to me. I would say that we can follow out the same language and desire, not only in Freud's biography, but in psychoanalytic theory and meta-theory—a hermeneutic sodomy. This anal thematic also follows from the structure of "Pa/Ma." I develop this point briefly in terms of the difference between a philosophical and a literary name in "The Significance of Literature: The Importance of Being Earnest," in October 15 (1981).

42. "From the History of an Infantile Neurosis" (1914; 1955), SE, 17, 1. "I should myself be glad to know whether the primal scene in my present patient's case was a phantasy or a real experience: but taking other similar cases into account, I must admit that the answer to this question is not in fact a matter of very great importance," p. 97.

43. "Beyond the Pleasure Principle" (1920; 1955), SE, 18.

44. SE, 19: 1961. "The Dissolution of the Oedipus Complex" (1924; 1961): "The Infantile Genital Organization" (1923; 1961). "Some Psychical Consequences of the Anatomical Distinction between the Sexes" (1925; 1961). Freud's psychoanalytic theory develops as a whole in exact imitation of the little boy whose sexual development the gender theory describes, with the theory itself passing through oral, anal, and phallic stages as it strives to develop a grown-up theory of desire. In the course of this canonical development, a moment of castration disavowal occurs in the essay "On Narcissism" (1915; 1961), in which Freud denies the importance of castration. The bad faith of this theoretical disavowal effects Freud's subsequent rethinking of psychoanalytic metapsychology, which is why his theory never fully resolves its Oedipus Complex and therefore never fully justifies, or even attains, the coherent theoretical genitality to which it aspires.

45. "Interpretation of Dreams" (1900; 1953), SE, 5:525; see also SE, 4:111n.


48. The "Pa/Ma" model phonologically instantiates what Heidegger describes more generally in terms of the history of metaphysics: "In the service of thought we are trying precisely to penetrate the source from which the essence of thinking is determined, namely aletheia and physis, being as unconcealment, the very thing that has been lost by 'logic.'" An Introduction to Metaphysics, trans. R. Manheim (New York: Anchor Books, 1961), p. 102. For Derrida's criticism of Lacan, see "Le Facteur de la vérité," in La Carte postale: de Socrate à l'etre et au-delà (Paris: Flammarion, 1980); an early version of this in Poétique 21 (1975); and a version of this in Graphose: Perspectives in Literature and Philosophy, Yale French Studies, no. 52 (1975). For Derrida's criticism of Heidegger, which proceeds by applying Heidegger's critique of Western metaphysics to itself, see "Logik und Spassan": A Note to a Footnote in Being and Time," in Phenomenology in Perspective, ed. F. J. Smith

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(1975) p. 27-73.


52. Thus Of Grammatology positions itself with an attack on structural linguistics, de-criticalizing difference itself, pt. 1, chap. 2, pp. 27-73.

53. Spenser self-consciously expands Chaucer's description of months and seasons into allegorical eclogue when both he and Colin Clout, poet-hero of The Shepheardes Calendar, look directly back to Tityrus-Chaucer, "the loadstarre of our language" (E.K. quoting Lydgate in the preface), as to an inspiring origin and poetic source that now is lost forever: "The God of shepheards Tityrus is dead" (June, 81). In accord with a familiar Renaissance theory of poetic imitation, Spenser dramatizes the situation of the poet whose poetic desire grows out of his freedthought effort to match an original model, which he lags after, from which he is distanced, and which he therefore adores: Goe lyttle Calender, thou hast a free passeporte, Goe but a lowly gate emongste the meaner sorte. Dare not to match thy pipe with Tityrus his style, Nor with the Pilgrim that the Ploughman playde a whyle: But followe them farre off, and their high steppes adore. (Envoy to December)
the same time, Colin Clout comes home once again, this time to see the image of his desire disappear (FV, VI, 10; all Spenser citations are from The Poetical Works of Edmund Spenser, ed. J. C. Smith and E. de Selincourt (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1912).

For the infinite intentions of allegory, its intention to enclose its own infinities, see Bunyan's "Apology" for The Pilgrim's Progress:

And thus it was: I, writing of the way
And race of saints in this our gospel day,
Fell suddenly into an allegory
About their journey and the way to glory,
In more than twenty things, which I set down;
This done, I went no more had in my crown;
And they again began to multiply,
Like sparks that from the coals of fire do fly.
Nay then, thought I, if that you breed so fast,
I'll put you by yourselves, lest you at last
Should prove ad infinitum, and eat out
The book that I already am about.

54. See, for example, Gayatri Spivak: "Je voudrais suggérer la possibilité d'envisager la poésie dans une perspective exactement contraire [contrary to a common understanding that would see poetic language as that in which sign and sense are identical, as in music], comme ce qui tend à maintenir la distance entre le signe et le sens sémantique. J'aurai recours, pour étayer mon argumentation, à la notion de'allégorie. "Allégorie et histoire de la poésie: Hypothèse de travail," Pédagogue 8 (1971): 427-41, 427.

In effect, I am suggesting that we are still entitled to retain the idea of the book, the poem, the art, as opposed to the infinite, indefinite, unbounded extension of what is currently called textuality. Thus I also maintain the critical force of the distinction between literature and its criticism, though, in accord with my argument above, this distinction only becomes speakable or operative relatively recently with the conclusion of psychoanalytic hermeneutics. What distinguishes the literary from its criticism is that the logocentric book or poem can effect the closure of representation precisely because it can structure silence, as silence, into its discourse, just as language does with the combination of consonant and vowel. The result is a polysemic, structured literary universe. If contemporary literary criticism can do this, it chooses not to and thus pronounces itself the ongoing voice of the inconclusive textuality it attributes to literature.

I realize that Derrida would characterize the distinction between structure and time which structuralism thus proposes as dependent upon, in Heidegger's phrase, a "vulgar concept of time" (see Of Grammatology, p. 72). My concern is, however, with how these concepts have functioned and continue to function as decisively powerful metaphors in the Western literary critical tradition, regardless of how philosophically untenable they may have been for thousands of years, for they have had their historical effect even as phantasmatic. More precisely, I am assuming here, and drawing the conclusion that follows from, the "necessary and perennial "recuperation," if that is what it should be called, of difference by logocentrism. This is a decisive, repeated, and historical metaphysical occurrence, with its own directionality, one that determines the contours and the contents of both our literary and our philosophical traditions. Thus we will even agree that all literary texts share the same indeterminate meaning, for they can make even their own silence echo itself. But we conclude, therefore, for just this reason, that this predetermined indeterminacy of meaning. Only sentimentally can one deny the necessity or the specificity of this significance, which inexorably generates the (meaningless

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but significant, phantasmatic but nevertheless effective) distinction between the literary and the philosophico-critical. At the level of generality with which we deal here, this literary significance is, generically, the significance of literature, but, in principle, there is no reason why we cannot characterize this significance more precisely in local cases so as to speak to the thematic particularities of a given text's literariness. For example, if we were presently engaged upon a close literary reading of the opening lines of the Prologue to The Canterbury Tales—and it should be clear that we are not now so engaged—we would necessarily take up the way the lines eroticly regret the allegorical Pa/Ma structure that they nevertheless retain. Thus there is something immediately and noticeably disturbing about the way a traditionally female April is made to fecundate a traditionally male March, and this is the case not simply because conventional sexual agency is in this way instantly reversed. By tradition, woman is receptively but not ejaculatively moist, so it is doubly peculiar to introduce April in terms of "his shoures soote." The same thing is true in reverse for "The Drouhte of March" (Mars), though in our literature the male is only rarely thematized as actively damp. Similarly, the image of veins, the conduit of liquid, themselves bathed by a liquidity in which they are immersed. "And bathed every veinie in swich licour"—establishes an antistructure of invaginated categoriality whose insides and outsides, contents and forms, introvertedly coalesce. Again, we have preparation in these first few lines for larger thematizations in The Canterbury Tales as a whole; for example, the stipulated reversal of sex roles and of the norms of specifically literary, bookish, patriarchal "Auctoritee" in the Prologue and the story of the Wife of Bath. Yet these and other imagined alternatives to the structure of allegorical desire all serve to reinscribe the initial literary authority of Pa/Ma.

Thus the riddle of the Wife of Bath, "What thynge is it that worn men moost desieren" (line 905), has as its answer the desire of women to be men:

Women desiere to have sovereignty
As wel over his houesbond as hire love,
And for to been in maitriye hym above.

(lines 1038-40)

All Chaucer citations are from F. N. Robinson, ed., The Works of Geoffrey Chaucer (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1957). The enigmatic power of the question of desire, which is the question that constitutes desire, thus survives even its answer, as was the case with Freud:

"The great question that has never been answered and which I have not yet been able to answer, despite my thirty years of research into the feminine soul, is 'What does a woman want? (Was will das Weib?)'" Reported by Ernest Jones, The Life and Work of Sigmund Freud, ed. L. Trilling, S. Marcus (New York: Basic Books, 1961), p. 377. This is why Lacan, characteristically faithful to the literary tradition out of which psychoanalysis derives, says: "Il n'y a pas de dames." Le Séminaire de Jacques Lacan: Encore (Paris, Éditions du Seuil, 1975), p. 54.

55. "The Splitting of the Ego in the Process of Defence" (1940) SE, 23:275-78. The essay takes up the "rit in the ego which never heals but which increases as time goes on," p. 276. Freud's illustrative example is castration disavowal.

Foucault shares post-structuralist millenarianism: “In attempting to uncover the deepest strata of Western culture, I am restoring to our silent and apparently immobile soil its rifts, its instability, its flaws; and it is the same ground that is once more stirring under our feet.” Michel Foucault, *The Order of Things* (New York: Vintage Books, 1970), p. xxiv; originally published as *Les Mots et les choses* (Paris: Editions Gallimard, 1966).