

the cold war. What they usually seek is theory and criticism that is not in hock to any specific political ideology, that is free to play with ideas leading in any direction, and that is governed by a spirit of exploration and imagination, which political agendas necessarily restrict.

It seems to me that indiscriminately using the phrase “cold war” as a club is itself a way of perpetuating the old truisms. Such rhetoric does not address positions but instead dismisses by naming. In this respect, it is much like the indiscriminate use of “Slavophile,” although, of course, among Americans “cold war” is a more inflammatory term.

My introduction mentioned that Slavists, and many East Europeans, do not equate Marxism with liberation; the history of Marxist countries has led them, understandably enough, to the opposite conclusion. Ram mentions only the problems of Stalinism, not of Marxism generally, showing a selectivity that to East Europeans (and not only them) would seem like the sort of apology for Marxism with which they have long been depressingly familiar. It is as if the basic orientation, structure, and values of Marxist regimes have not been the problem, only the accidental “deviation” of Stalinism. But the bloodthirsty repressiveness of Lenin is also an attested fact. So is the repression by Marxist regimes that were not maintained by Stalin’s armies, from Cuba to Ethiopia to Cambodia. Thus I imagine that Russians and East Europeans would wonder at Ram’s suggestion that American college professors should “reveal to Russians” the nature of “Third World socialist cultures.” A Russian or an East European might also wonder at why American scholars of literature should feel qualified or entitled to instruct another culture in politics, which is hardly their expertise.

Ram is right, I believe, in recommending that we avoid old and easy dualisms. But I think the same logic applies to old triads. What sense does it make to speak of the “Third World” when the opposition of First World to Second has collapsed? And is a term that lumps together countries as diverse as Peru, Egypt, Nigeria, and Indonesia one that respects cultural differences? It is hard to see what these cultures have in common except that they are (or are said to be) *opposed to us*. Isn’t that a rather ethnocentric categorization?

It seems to me that *if* literary studies dedicates itself to serious reflection about recent history and politics, then it has to come to terms with the most obvious fact of our century: the rise and fall of totalitarian regimes, from the Thousand-Year Reich to the states established by Lenin, Mao, and Pol Pot. Such reflection is bound to yield some conclusions that are uncom-

fortable to many received assumptions. It would include such troubling questions as whether the last great imperialist export of the Western world has been Marxism itself. But that is *not* the course I myself, and I think most Slavists, would recommend for literary studies. Literature professors have a special competence in the study of literature, and if they are to make a real contribution, that is what their work should focus on. Above all, they should avoid setting themselves up as somehow occupying a privileged position, in time and of discipline, for “revealing” political truths (of whatever sort) to the rest of the world.

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“The Palm as the End of the Mind”

To the Editor:

I write this letter (and what can one write, asks Derrida, but letters?) to protest your exclusion of L. B. Simpson’s essay “The Palm as the End of the Mind: (P)Re-conceiving the Anglo/American Renaissance(s)” from your Theory of Literary History special section (107 [1992]: 13–104). Since (as your Editor’s Column states) history is merely “word and word of that word” (9), since we now know that political imperatives and human sympathy are merely optical illusions projected at the unfocused fringe of the framing master code of language, Simpson’s textual erotics surely deserve the space you waste on feminist complaints and Shakespearean admirations.

Why not let your readers judge for themselves? Though the space restrictions you impose on Forum letters allow me to present only the concluding sections, even these fragments enunciate correspondences so persistently inscribed in language itself as to discredit those who question the validity—the proof value—of some recent forms of criticism. This demonstration of the overdeterminations by which we find our truths must surely silence the doubting Thomists who dismiss as mere self-indulgence or careerist self-display the scientific excavation of the universe of writing we all inhabit.

IV

How deliciously naive to attribute “lust” either to Spenser’s Guyon or to Surrey’s unfortunate pudding cook, when the behavior group so designated was inherently unavailable at the moment of that de-flouring and remained so until the exact moment Melville undertook the second loop of the

m of the word “scrimshaw” in the manuscript of *Moby-Dick*—precisely, that is to say, when he had retroactively committed himself to the *i*, was already “loopy,” but had not yet returned to confront the “dotty” obligation thereby incurred (penmanship insistently figured as madness), the deficit that seemingly evokes from the erect pen(is) its ejaculatory *jouissance*. At that moment—while the dot hovered (egglike) only in pre-conception, prior to the semiotic conferral of intelligible life, a sort of flying Saussure—subjectivity became the resistance to its own economic manifestation as the hypothesized (because commodified, because co-modified) residue of the Other. Melville was, uncannily, *écriture* of his times.

Why this con-strual of ejaculation as an exalted menstrual “period”? What pure-loined letter, what post-script of an enveloping ideology is thus con-signed to the dead-letter orifice by the male handlers of a culture of correspondence and its cancellation? If (as Melville’s own dead-letter-man Bartleby “preferred not to” admit) penmanship is always a hand job, then its “dotage” necessitates this “periodic” ejection of hermeneutic surplus, elicited by a displaced *unheimlich* maneuver. But must the erections of culture always find themselves complicit in the culture of erections? The very term *sexual dysfunction* privileges a phallic Enlightenment phantasy of social use—of “reproduction”—that traps the *in potentia* legitimacy of *impotentia* in a sinister surplus loop.

The only commodity fungible for this im-pounded *jouissance* in the semiotic marketplace is the *capitalization* of the *i*—the grotesque *afflatus* (disguised as transcendence) of the bourgeois Individual, the perpetual temptation to *je(u)* with oneself. *Jouissance* becomes joy-usance: a shy-Lockean pounding of the flesh. The orgasmic quality of the lowercase, ancillary to the Bakhtinian lower bodily strata, becomes in any paramodern episteme, not the orgiastic register of shared metaphoricality, but instead the Roman-numerical I, the illusion of unitary selfhood, recuperated from the hegemonic discourses of Whig classicism. So the self-I and the one-I would be identical—were it not that the concept of identity is already implicated in the *manufacture* of identity, as literally a pre-text for the con-scriptions of postfeudal industrialism. As Iago would have put it, I is not what I is.

I-identity—the meeting of eyes across a crowded room, in the shameless flirtation of positivism with its own reflections—becomes a transparency to Derridean *différance* only within the semiotic economy of the computer on which “I” compose these remarks, a device whose only “I” is *the very self-I it does not have*. Like the bourgeois subject who supposes that she—always she—knows the difference, this machine knows only its own indifference, an indifference visible only to the “eye” that is its constitutive lack—the lack, again, that enables its castration as a self-regarding subjectivity.

Whereas the typewriter enforced precisely *indifference* among the “office hands” of post-Edwardian commerce, the computer discriminates among homoscopomorphs: its *I* is not a *I*. As in the hand-sign system of a bladder-burdened

schoolboy, “number one” has nothing to do with *elle*—at least until software re-members itself as hardware, floppies as hard drives, oedipally defying any patrilinear identification with “IBM,” an anal-capitalist encodement that obstructs and obscures the seminal conjunction (schematically visible in Melville’s *im*) of the expressive Lacanian phallus with the paired Irigarayan lips. Orthography is pornography: the lay of the hand, and the lie of the mind.

V

If the life of “humanity” has textualized itself literally beyond the grasp of evolutionism, then the opposable thumb is nothing less than the *pièce de résistance*. The concept of “hand” is itself an essentialist mystification legitimizing the imperialist incursions of an appropriative gestural hegemony on a potentialist discourse of palms and digits. In our prejudicial lexicon, *palming* connotes a misrepresentation, whereas *fingering* someone (in the scenarios of film noir) exposes a “human” truth as and to espionage. As *Kunstwerk* becomes foreplay, we digitally remaster the scoring of modern sexual discourse. The musical faculty of desire is now o’ercastrated by its semi-conductors (precisely, *avec bâtons*)—Hamlet’s “pale cast of thought” in blackface, and drag.

That fled music returns, as the repressed, from latish Early Modern faery lands forlorn. Through abreaction—the shock of the always-already knew—the perpetually deferred *frisson* of *The Faerie Queene* climaxes in Spenser’s shrewdest and most seductive title: “Book II.” Readers who shake off their totalizing blinders (ye who have “I” ’s and will not see!) must surely acknowledge what they see with their own two eyes, namely, Spenser’s two I’s, a codependent mirror-transference, reflecting the valorization of the text’s doubled subjectivity: Sir Guyon and the Palmer. What is Book II’s thematoid “Temperance” but binocularism as an ethical configuration: as Lear’s Fool moots it, “to keep one’s eyes on either side’s nose, that what a man cannot smell out, he may spy into.”

By spying into the yellowed newsprint of 1968 (consulting microfilm would irresponsibly endorse the technologocentric containment of that era’s counterculture), we may at last catch the I’s of Spenser’s two-eyed Palmer: Arnold Palmer and Jim Palmer. Paradoxically, what renders this identification legible is its hegemonic erasure. County landfill records verify that some thirty million United Statists were compelled daily to deacquisition narrativized representations of these Palmers’ exploits throughout the so-called summer of love, in fetishistic rituals of exclusion involving crumpling (the words pressed against themselves in a crisis of inwardness) and packing hermetically (and what is hermetics but hermeneutics de-neutered?) among the detritus of the digestive economy.

The “playings through” of a man whose best work was done in irons—whose followers recuperated their status as militant dissenters by the cognomen Arnie’s Army—were thus displaced into Books of Sport by a phallogocentric hierarchy as threatened by this bogeyman as it was by Jim’s efforts to pick men (especially those “in scoring position”)

off their material base, to the only too audible approbation of the entire Frankfurter school. Can it any longer surprise anyone that the tools of these eponymous bearers of the palm—the part of the hand that keyboards exclude from even the marginalized powers of articulation afforded by a penile culture, just as women can have no language as long as concavity has no writing—were club and ball, held in the palm? “Tropical” sports, indeed! The belletristic evasions that characterize Jamesianism and Arnoldianism were generated by late Victorian culture to preclude the sacred violence our latter-day Jim and Arnie would always already again have presented.

As all subversion inevitably turns into containment, the Palmers have turned from mastering pitching wedges and pitching mounds to serving as pitchers for sanitary undergarments (Jim) and Trilateralist oil profiteering (Arnie). The reductivist—and quietistic—assertion that these men were chosen to “represent” Jockey and Pennzoil merely because they were “handsome” (italics mine, to the extent that I am me) immediately exposes itself. Little wonder, then, that Arnie never fails to receive “a nice hand” at the oxymoronically named US Open—played, we are asked to believe, on “fair-ways,” but always ultimately in preparation for the Masters. Geertz’s Balinese cockfights are only too germane. The phallus is always the Lacanian object-of-subject-desire, and Arnie told the *New York Times* (a title conflating chorography with diachronics) that his primary desire was “nothing but a tee-off time.” And if we take Arnie *at his word*, if we indeed take the *t* off *time*, what remains at the originary point but the same collision of *i* with *m* that haunted the young sperm-*meister* Melville, the clash of which every *-ism* is a tortuous evasion? Only by displacing the ejaculatory surplus can that collision become a legible elision: *I’m*, the infatuated apostrophe of the recapitalized self to its own being, Cartesian *cogito* as cock-teasin’ coochie-coo. This alone can explain Melville’s hysterical refusal to begin that noblest *roman* of them all with the words “I’m Ishmael.”

So when essentialists ask, Why *not* let the hand de-scribe the palm?, let us remind them that history is nothing more than language; that prosopopoeia is nothing less—and nothing other—than patricide; and that synecdoche, the figure in which a “part” stands for a “(w)hole,” enlists universalism in a heterosexualist campaign against metonymy, the figure in which one “thing” stands for another “thing”—in every sense a meeting of likes, the rhetorical trope the Tudor philologist Puttenham calls “picking on somebody your own size.” If we fail to perform what we might term a recuperative “palm reading” on all the speaking parts whose ravishment has cost them their tongues, then (as “Donne” writes) “a great prince in prison lies.” That prince is our prints, our textual track across a desert of apartheid

and onanism where our fingerprints alone inform against our own deformations. A manumission must be authorized; re-member *le main*. Oedipus-like, we have nothing to lose but our *l’eyes*. Only then will containment signify liberation, fingers and palms alike disappearing, only to become a fist thrust skyward.

His fist in the air, L. Barthes Simpson here stalked off the academic stage—forever. Two weeks after delivering this stunning talk, he succumbed to a heroically strong misreading of his medicine cabinet, aggravated by an inability to communicate effectively with the emergency dispatchers (the 911 tapes reveal a characteristically agile disquisition on the implications of “finding one’s true address”). He languished unsought by his graduate students, who assumed their enigmatic mentor was imparting a Zen-master-like lesson about absent presences. His colleagues supposed he was attending yet another important conference, flirting with yet another rival university, or enjoying yet another course relief thereby coaxed from the dean. There was in fact no course relief—no relief of any kind. In other words (and words, quips Derrida, are always Other), Simpson died from his own sheer brilliance, precisely a *pharmakos* of the modern academic tribe.

Let not his prophecies die too without honor in this their own house. No one’s literary estate deserves to be more promptly and prominently executed. To those who matter, Simpson mattered. His Bakhtinian-Lacanian meditation “The Ordure of Things Phallusy: Foucault in Sodom” (*Diuretics: Emissions from the Lower Stratum* 8 [1984]: 69–86) probed the deepest recesses of our body-cultural, exposing the distinction between urinating and defecating as a self-legitimizing binaristic mytheme of venture capitalism, enabled by the invention of the gerund—an insight that is truly Deleuzian. As facilitator of the Los Angeles Mobilization to Eradicate the Representational Discourse of Exploitation, which sponsored the 1989 MLA convention by-invitation-only Extra-Special Session titled Opening the Academy where Simpson first proffered his “Palm,” I demand that you supplement Simpson’s *Diuretics* output with this absolute masterpiece.

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