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The 'telepathy effect': notes toward a reconsideration of narrative fiction

This chapter aims to explore what is perhaps the most intriguing feature of narrative fiction and to open up new ways of thinking about it. As Dorrit Cohn has described it: 'narrative fiction is the only literary genre, as well as the only kind of narrative, in which the unspoken thoughts, feelings, perceptions of a person other than the speaker can be portrayed'.[1] There is uncanny knowledge. Someone is telling us what someone else is thinking, feeling or perceiving. That someone else may not even be aware of experiencing these thoughts, feelings or perceptions. The history of criticism of the novel is the history of the attempt to deal, or avoid dealing, with this seemingly mad scenario. For this strange feature of literary fiction tends also to be the least questioned, most taken-for-granted. Passing without comment, it appears as a sort of somnambulism of critical common sense. Perhaps this is not surprising: after all, there can be no final assurance about an appropriate vocabulary for it. No doubt this lack of assurance helps to account for the labyrinthine intricacies of much writing in narratology and narrative theory. Might there be ways of construing narrative fiction that would be responsive to its complexity and strangeness but without 'losing the plot' in theoretical abstraction, in particular without collapsing into the sort of enervative taxonomizing to which narratological discourse seems prone?[2] Questioning a certain ethos and style of narrative theory, what follows is an attempt to sketch a rethinking of narrative fiction.

The task will consist principally in a re-examination of two of the most familiar and widely used critical terms of the past hundred years or so: 'omniscience' and 'point of view'. Recent narrative theory has tended to speak less of 'point of view' and more of 'focalization'; but, as will become evident, all three of these terms are linked, swimming or sinking together. First of all, then, the peculiar feature of narrative fiction at issue is closely identified with the concept of omniscience. An awareness of this is hardly recent. As Dorrit Cohn shows, it is explicitly formulated, for example, in Friedrich von Blanckenburg's *Essay on the Novel* in 1774, where he declares: 'A writer, lest he wish to dishonor himself, can not hold to the pretense that he is unacquainted with the inner world of his characters. He is their creator: they have received from him all their character traits, their entire being, they live in a world that he himself has fashioned.'[3] Lodged within this charming if deceptive candour – of not being able to pretend that one is unacquainted with such an 'inner world' – is an early Romantic formulation of

what later came to be called authorial or narratorial omniscience. The writer is godlike, the creator who knows everything about the characters he (or she) has created. Blanckenburg's statement may now appear critically naive in its nondifferentiation between 'writer' and 'narrator': the twentieth century witnessed a slow but steadily sharpening sense that the 'I' of a narrative fiction cannot simply be talked about as if he or she were the author, and that this 'I' is just as much created *by* the narrative as s/he is the creator *of* it.[4]

But if the phrase 'authorial omniscience' now looks like a sort of redundant oxymoron (no author is omniscient, he or she can only ever have limited knowledge), 'omniscient narrator' and 'narrative omniscience' remain common critical parlance. Thus, for example, in his recent book on literary theory Jonathan Culler defines 'omniscient narration' as the situation in which

> the focalizer is a godlike figure who has access to the innermost thoughts and hidden motives of the characters ... Omniscient narration, where there seem in principle no limitations on what can be known and told, is common not only in traditional tales but in modern novels.[5]

Culler's characteristic clarity and serenity is somewhat troubling and ironic here. The trouble is indicated, first of all, in the hedging 'seem' and 'in principle'. Why 'seem' rather than 'are'? What does 'in principle' mean? What is this 'principle' of omniscience? The irony has to do with religion and can be brought out by quoting from another essay by Culler, from one of the least serene and most striking passages in all his writing. It comes in the essay 'Political Criticism: Confronting Religion', when he declares:

> The essential step is to take up the relation of our teaching and writing to religious discourse and to maintain a critical attitude when discussing religious themes – that is, not to assume that theistic beliefs deserve respect, any more than we would assume that sexist or racist beliefs deserve respect. This might involve us in comparing Christianity with other mythologies when we teach works imbued with religion, or making the sadism and sexism of religious discourse an explicit object of discussion, as we now tend to do when teaching works containing overtly racist language.[6]

We must, he suggests, be especially sensitive to – and critical of – anything that smacks of religion. Culler's advocacy of a heightened critical attentiveness to 'religious discourse', to all and any writing 'imbued with religion', becomes ironic because even a brief examination of the history of 'omniscience' indicates that it is a religious term, Judaeo-Christian or, rather, dominantly Christian, through and through.

For 'omniscience' the *OED* gives 'The quality of being omniscient. **a.** Strictly: Infinite knowledge; hence *transf.* the omniscient Being, the Deity': in the earliest sense of the term, it is the Christian God who, in His omniscience, 'searcheth the heart, discouereth the thoughts' (1612). The *OED* also records a 'hyperbolic' usage of the term (sense **b**), meaning 'Universal knowledge' (the first use in this sense being given as 1845). Correspondingly, the adjective 'omniscient' is defined as '1. Knowing all things, all-knowing, infinite in knowledge. **a.** Strictly: esp. Of God ... **b.** Hyperbolically: Having universal or very extensive knowledge.' 'Omniscience' is, strictly speaking then, a term for the Christian God; its deployment in any other sense is hyperbole.

What J. Hillis Miller once charted as 'the disappearance of God', looking back to Hölderlin and the late eighteenth century, might be rephrased here as the disappearance of omniscience; ghostly, like any thinking of disappearance, it would perhaps be legible in this hyperbolic appropriation of the 'omniscient'.[7] According to the *OED*, the earliest recorded use of 'omniscient' in this hyperbolic, i.e. ostensibly non-theistic context is in Boswell's *Life of Johnson* (1791), in the entry for 5 April 1776 where he refers to a man called Richard Jackson whom Johnson called 'the all-knowing'. In a footnote Boswell remarks of Jackson: 'A gentleman, who from his extraordinary stores of knowledge, has been stiled *omniscient*. Johnson, I think, very properly, altered it to all-knowing, as it is a *verbum solenne*, appropriated to the Supreme Being.'[8] The 'stiled' is a significant marker here. A curious thing seems to have happened to 'omniscience' since Boswell: in particular in the context of literary criticism and theory, the initially and explicitly 'hyperbolic' character of the word has tended to be repressed or disavowed.

A good example would be Robert Scholes's and Robert Kellogg's study *The Nature of Narrative* (1966). They have a number of critical reservations about 'the concept of omniscience' and are understandably cautious about its religious dimensions:

> 'omniscience' itself is not a descriptive term so much as a definition based on the presumed analogy between the novelist as creator and the Creator of the cosmos, an omniscient God. The analogy has a certain obvious relevance which has enabled it to maintain currency as a term in literary discussion. But it also, like most analogies, operates so as to prevent our seeing certain aspects of the thing analogized. In the case of omniscient narration in the novel, the analogy obscures an important duality in the fictional device. Omniscience includes the related god-like attribute of omnipresence. God *knows* everything because He *is* everywhere – simultaneously. But a narrator in fiction is imbedded in a time-bound artifact. He [*sic*] does not 'know' simultaneously but consecutively. He is not everywhere at once but now here, now there, now looking into this mind or that, now moving on to other vantage points. He is time-bound and space-bound as God is not.[9]

What Scholes and Kellogg seem to be describing here is a telepathic logic according to which a narrator – and thus a reader – is 'now looking into this mind', now into that. Their account motions toward a theory of narrative telepathy, not narrative omniscience. 'Omniscience', as they make clear, is a misleading and incoherent term: it 'obscures' the 'time-bound', 'space-bound' particularity of what is going on in literary fiction. Yet despite their reservations, Scholes and Kellogg continue to valorize and use the term, even when this entails depending on a nonsensical notion of 'full' (or non-full) omniscience.[10]

'Omniscience' has seemed useful in the context of literary studies as a means of gathering together the idea that a narrator or a narrative knows, or seems to know, not only what is going on in the minds and bodies of various characters, but also what is going to happen in the future. Just as a narrator inhabits the thoughts, feelings and perceptions of only one character at a time,[11] so the future that a narrator or narrative appears to know about is in fact highly circumscribed, limited and partial. The continuing use of the term 'omniscience' serves to promote and protect a thinking of the 'world' of narrative fiction as holistic, unified and closed. It colludes with a thinking of the experience of reading as asserting or presupposing a fixed and totalizing interpretation. It thus helps to ward off the transformative possibilities of reading, to limit and close down in advance what is incalculable and unprogrammable in the experience of a text.

A more precise way of talking about the fact that fictional narratives or narrators seem to have knowledge of the future might be in terms of clairvoyance. Again, as 'the alleged power of discerning things beyond the normal range of sense or perception' (*Chambers*), clairvoyance would be linked to a logic, not of omniscience, but of telepathy. God might be omniscient but one would not call her clairvoyant. To propose 'clairvoyance' as a more accurate term than 'omniscience' is not to advocate that narrative theory hurry up and become a branch of parapsychology. Rather it is to attempt to move away from uncritical, religious and other dogmatic assumptions about the nature of narrative fiction, while acknowledging and critically elaborating on what is uncanny, even 'magical' about such fiction. Concerned with seeing or feeling what is in the distance, clairvoyance is indissociably bound up with the telepathic. This might be succinctly illustrated by George Eliot's novella *The Lifted Veil* (1859, published 1878), a text which constitutes a meditation on the uncanny nature of storytelling, beginning: 'The time of my end approaches ... For I foresee when I shall die, and everything that will happen in my last moments.'[12] The narrator, Latimer, can read the minds of some but not all others (crucially, not his wife

Bertha's); he becomes appalled witness to 'all the suppressed egoism' (p. 19) of other people's speech and behaviour; he is subject of and to what in the mid nineteenth century was known as 'sympathetic clairvoyance' and what came in 1882 to be classified as telepathy.[13]

Omniscience is not simply a hyperbole, it is an incoherent and flawed plot-device in a story that critics and theorists have been telling for a hundred years and more. Why retain the concept of omniscience at all? The use of the words 'omniscient' and 'omniscience' in the context of narrative fiction remains inextricably entangled in Christian motifs, assumptions and beliefs. To assume the efficacy and appropriateness of discussing literary works in terms of 'omniscient narration' is, however faintly or discreetly, to subscribe to a religious (and above all, a Christian) discourse and thinking. But a continuing reliance on the term 'omniscience' in the context of literary studies could be said to testify to something else as well. This might be illuminated by taking up some observations made by Wallace Martin in his book *Recent Theories of Narrative* (1986).[14] Focusing on Ernest Hemingway's short story 'The Short Happy Life of Francis Macomber', Martin writes: 'One telltale sign of omniscience, beyond the third-person narrator's unnatural access to the minds of others, appears in the story: comments on what a character did *not* think' (p. 146). In his critical pursuit of what he calls 'an adequate account of omniscient narration' (p. 144), Martin speaks of 'omniscience in the usual sense (access to consciousness)' (p. 146): the force of what is strange or 'unnatural' here is at once registered and normativized. The 'telltale' feature of omniscience, on the other hand, the feature that evidently helps to make omniscient narration so full of 'contrivance' and 'shortcomings' (p. 144), is that it enables the reader to discover what a character is *not* thinking. What would be an 'adequate account' of this 'unnatural' world of narrative fiction? Why should 'omniscience' be presumed an 'adequate' term for glossing 'comments on what a character did not think'?

What the continuing use of the term 'omniscience' masks is not only the religious and more specifically Christian ambience of literary criticism, even in some of its most sophisticated contemporary forms, but also any obligation to engage with the question of psychoanalysis. It is as if criticism were prepared to acknowledge the force and necessity of a logic of the unconscious, of presentations or representations of what a character does not realize he or she is thinking or feeling; but this acknowledgement is immediately, as if magically translated 'back' into a pre-nineteenth-century religious discourse. Reliance on the term 'omniscience' thus acts as a means by which criticism can avoid the obligation to reflect more rigorously on what psychoanalysis might have to say about unconscious knowledge and desire or, conversely, what literary fiction may have to say about psychoanalysis.

In historical terms, 'omniscience' became a widespread literary critical term just as psychoanalysis was establishing the structural and conditioning impossibility of complete knowledge of one's own thoughts and feelings, let alone complete knowledge of everyone else's. It is not a matter of arguing that literary criticism ought to adopt a more specifically psychoanalytic vocabulary, but rather of elaborating the space for a critical thinking that does not fall in with the scientistic elements of a psychoanalytically inflected critical approach to literary fiction either. The concept of telepathy is historically and epistemologically crucial in this context. Introduced in the late nineteenth century as a term to designate 'all cases of impression received at a distance without the normal operation of the recognised sense organs',[15] the emergence of 'telepathy' figures an important moment in what we have called the disappearance of omniscience, as well as in the origins of psychoanalysis. The significance of this emergence for a historical understanding of modern (and postmodern) fiction is considerable though remains insufficiently acknowledged. Telepathy is both thematically and structurally at work in modern fictional narratives, and calls for a quite different kind of critical storytelling than that promoted by the religious, panoptical delusion of omniscience. In particular, it calls for more rigorous critical reflection on the links between allegedly literary and non-literary discourses for, as the brief example from George Eliot may already have intimated, the emergence of 'telepathy' via 'clairvoyance' and 'sympathetic clairvoyance' is inextricably bound up with the language and forms of nineteenth-century literary fiction. In other words, 'telepathy' in its restricted, conventional, parapsychological sense (as 'communication between mind and mind otherwise than through the known channels of the senses' (*Chambers*)) is more literary than has generally been recognized.

'Telepathy' opens up possibilities of a humbler, more precise, less religiously freighted conceptuality than does 'omniscience', for thinking about the uncanniness of what is going on in narrative fiction. Such a conceptuality entails an unsettling and reworking of narratological and psychoanalytic vocabulary alike. The pertinence (and impertinence) of telepathy in the context of psychoanalysis lies in its status as a foreign body that, exemplarily in Freud's own writings, can be neither accepted nor rejected. The question of telepathy was one of the things that, by his own admission, drove Freud to distraction.[16] He just could not make up his mind about it. As Jacques Derrida has observed, it is 'difficult to imagine a theory of what they still call the unconscious without a theory of telepathy. They can be neither confused nor dissociated.'[17] Telepathy

introduces a *literary scenario* into any account or thinking of the unconscious. In offering another way of describing what is happening to the thoughts and feelings of a given fictional character without the knowledge of that character, telepathy dislocates all notions of *applying* psychoanalysis to literary fiction, of psychoanalysing fictional characters or of deriving psychoanalytic 'truths' from narrative fiction.

The other critical term widely used over the last century for describing what is perhaps the most intriguing feature of narrative fiction is 'point of view', that is to say (in the words of Gerald Prince), 'The perceptual or conceptual position in terms of which the narrated situations and events are presented'.[18] In this way, an author or narrator inhabits the mind and/or body of a character and describes things from their point of view. The use of this term can be traced back, in particular, to the critical prefaces of Henry James (1907–09), and to influential critical studies by Joseph Warren Beach (1918) and Percy Lubbock (1921).[19] Point of view and omniscience seem to go hand-in-hand. Consider the following remarks on Flaubert and *Madame Bovary* (1857), in Lubbock's *The Craft of Fiction:*

> Flaubert, the author of the story, must intervene with his superior knowledge. Perhaps it is something in the past of the people who have been moving and talking on the scene; you cannot rightly understand this incident or this talk, the author implies, unless you know – what I now proceed to tell you. And so, for a new light on the drama, the author recalls certain circumstances that we should otherwise have missed. Or it may be that he – who naturally knows everything, even the inmost, unexpressed thought of his characters – wishes us to share the mind of Bovary or of Emma, not to wait only on their words or actions; and so he goes below the surface, enters their consciousness, and describes the train of sentiment that passes there.[20]

Here, as elsewhere in his book, Lubbock talks about the 'omniscient author'. Of Thackeray's *Vanity Fair* (1847–8), for example, he says that, when not narrated from Becky Sharp's point of view, 'It is the omniscient author, and the point of view is his'.[21] The concept of omniscience is natural, without need of question or definition: the author 'naturally knows everything'. Again, however, what is in operation here is a logic not of 'natural' omniscience but rather of something like narrative telepathy: the ability to present things from Bovary's or Emma's point of view involves the familiar-unfamiliar logic of a narrator 'enter[ing a character's] consciousness', becoming temporary amanuensis to their 'inmost, unexpressed thought'. To recall the phrasing of Scholes and Kellogg, it is a matter of a narrator 'not everywhere at once' but 'now here, now there, now looking into this mind or that'.

Throughout *The Craft of Fiction* Lubbock privileges the visual. In this respect it might be said that he is simply following the example set by James, in his New York Prefaces. This privileging is evident in the extract just quoted, in the theatrical allusions to 'moving and talking on the scene' and 'a new light on the drama'. Above all, however, it is evident in the term 'point of view' itself. 'Point of view' is a visual metaphor that, for a hundred years and more, has worked to elide or negate the importance of voice, of narrative fiction in the sounds of words. Moreover, if its more colloquial sense ('point of view' as 'opinion') has contributed toward a further critical effacement of the *how* rather than the *what* of what is being said, the term has also carried with it a powerful set of assumptions about the unity of the speaker or thinker whose 'point of view' is being 'expressed'. 'Point of view' would be homologous with 'omniscience', in fact, in terms of a sense of unity and the One ('God', for example, or Molly Bloom). Together with 'omniscience', 'point of view' has been a key critical term for the safekeeping of the unitariness of the figures of 'author', 'narrator' and 'character' alike. For all its apparent commonsensicality, 'point of view' is a critical fallacy. There is no single, unitary or unified point of view in a work of fiction. *Point of view does not exist, any more than does omniscience.*

In recent years 'point of view' has become an object of suspicion among many narrative theorists. There is a preference for talking about 'focalization': this term was introduced by Gérard Genette, in his *Narrative Discourse* (1972), on the apparently non-comical basis that it is 'more abstract'.[22] In fact, the concept of point of view continues to remain in widespread critical use and indeed underpins the logic of the new term. 'Focalization' is deemed to be valuable because it avoids the confusions between 'who sees?' and 'who speaks?'. Wallace Martin, for example, sees it as 'crucial' for that 'adequate account of omniscient narration' he wishes to provide, observing:

> In treating grammatical person and access to consciousness as the defining features of point of view, traditional accounts of the subject overlooked a crucial distinction. 'Access to consciousness' has two meanings: a third-person narrator can look *into* a character's mind or look *through* it. In the first case, the narrator is the perceiver and the character's mind is perceived. In the second, the character is the perceiver and the world is perceived; the narrator seems to have delegated the function of seeing to the character, as if a first-person story containing phrases such as 'I noticed ... then I realized' had been rewritten in the third person ('she noticed ... then she realized'). (pp. 143–4)

Like 'point of view', 'focalization' is still being defined in terms of the visual (of who can 'look into' or 'look through' a character's mind).[23] Like 'point of view', 'focalization' – together with the related term 'focalizer' – continues to leave

unquestioned the unity of the one who sees and of the one who speaks: the 'function' of seeing can simply be 'delegated' by one identity to another, without this apparently having any implications or effects for thinking about the unity of either of these identities as such. For all its 'abstract' attractions (leading Genette to his celebrated spinning out of classifications and sub-classifications around 'internal', 'external', 'fixed', 'variable' and 'multiple focalization' and so on),[24] 'focalization' reinstates the basic problems already outlined in relation to 'point of view'.

Shifting back a hundred years and more, let us drood:

> An ancient English Cathedral town? How can an ancient English Cathedral town be here! The well-known massive grey square tower of its old Cathedral? How can that be here! There is no spike of rusty iron in the air, between the eye and it, from any point of the real prospect. What IS the spike that intervenes, and who has set it up? Maybe, it is set up by the Sultan's orders for the impaling of a horde of Turkish robbers, one by one. It is so, for cymbals clash, and the Sultan goes by to his palace in long procession. Ten thousand scimitars flash in the sunlight, and thrice ten thousand dancing-girls strew flowers. Then, follow white elephants caparisoned in countless gorgeous colors, and infinite in number and attendants. Still, the Cathedral tower rises in the background, where it cannot be, and still no writhing figure is on the grim spike. Stay! Is the spike so low a thing as the rusty spike on the top of a post of an old bedstead that has tumbled all awry? Some vague period of drowsy laughter must be devoted to the consideration of this possibility.
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> Shaking from head to foot, the man whose scattered consciousness has thus fantastically pieced itself together, at length rises, supports his trembling frame upon his arms, and looks around.[25]

This is 'The Dawn', the beginning of Dickens's *The Mystery of Edwin Drood* (1870), the dawn of 'The Dawn' and of a narrative fiction. Dicken's unfinished, final work opens with a dramatic scatter of questions and exclamations concerned primarily with the visual. What is it that is being presented? Is it really here? From what or whose 'point of view'? Who narrates who perceives or perceives who narrates? By the logic of what Henry James named 'aftersense',[26] some attempt may be made at rationalizing, naturalizing or normativizing what will have been going on. Thus, it may be proposed, Dickens's novel is a work of omniscient narration in which the narrative perspective moves from one character to another, in which the narrator-figure is aware of 'the secret springs of this [or that] dialogue' (p. 97), drifting in and out of what characters are thinking and feeling, in the 'twilight depths' (p. 176) of their waking and sleeping.[27] In particular here, in the opening paragraph of the novel, it is John Jasper, waking up from an opium binge, unsure of where he is or what he is seeing. But to do this would be to disregard, or fail to listen to, what is perhaps most forceful about this passage, namely its strange uncertainties of identification and perception, seeing and hearing. Published forty years and more before the establishment of the conventions of 'point of view' and 'omniscience', the opening of Dickens's novel marks, in effect, a scattering of the logic of such conventional terms of literary criticism. Where is the omniscience in this writing? Is there a place for asking questions in the logic of putative omniscience? Is this a real or hallucinated dawn? If 'The Dawn', which is the dawn of a literary fiction, begins only after itself, in aftersense, when and what is it? And what is happening when, as here, a narrative appears to be referring the force of such questions to the figure of a spike: 'What IS the spike that intervenes, and who has set it up?'

The opening of Dickens's novel seems to remark upon its own origination, its own dawn, upon a spike that appears to have intervened as the very condition of seeing or reading. It prompts the thought that every novel or narrative fiction stages its own dawn: every literary work entails a singular and different kind of seeing, a new readerly eye. The dawn of Dickens's novel is unlike any other, even if it is recognizable as the dawn of another narrative fiction. And it is a mad dawn, a luculent cocktail of the real and hallucinatory. There is a madness of the day (to borrow Maurice Blanchot's phrase) from the very dawn of the dawn (from the very 'the' of 'The Dawn'). Despite the apparent emphasis on the visual, however, there is no sense here of a single, unified 'point of view': rather this mad dawn of writing seems to be explicitly remarking a phantasmagoric destabilization of 'any point of the real prospect'. Moreover, it is not simply a matter of light and vision run wild; it is a question of voice and thus of a new readerly ear. Above all, we are left to wonder of the opening passage of Dickens's novel: who is speaking, allowing all of this to seem 'fantastically pieced together', and in how many voices? To whom should we attribute the source of these numerous questions and exclamations, this 'drowsy laughter'? If, as the opening of *The Mystery of Edwin Drood* might have us suppose, narrative fiction presents a spiking of vision, there is also a spiking of narrative voice. In or on the verge of aftersense, we hear at least two voices, always at least two, spiked in advance. In order to describe what is going on here, neither 'omniscience' nor 'point of view' nor 'focalization' seems apt. They don't respond to the senses of hallucination, spiking and laughter, to the psychological, tonal and semantic scatteredness of this uncanny Dickensian dawn. They are not adequate to the psychic and textual peculiarity of what is sounding here.

In his book *Given Time: 1. Counterfeit Money*, Jacques Derrida discusses this sort of peculiarity of fictional narrative in terms of the secret, situating it as the very 'truth' of literature. In the context of a reading of Baudelaire's 'Counterfeit Money', a narrative poem which poses the question of whether the narrator's friend gave genuine or counterfeit money to a beggar, he writes:

> [T]here is no sense in wondering what actually happened, what was the true intention of the narrator's friend and the meaning hidden 'behind' his utterances. No more, incidentally, than behind the utterances of the narrator. As these fictional characters have no consistency, no depth beyond their literary phenomenon, the absolute inviolability of the secret they carry depends first of all on the essential superficiality of their phenomenality, on the *too-obvious* of that which they present to view. This inviolability depends on nothing other than the altogether bare device of being-two-to-speak [*l'être-deux-à-parler*] and it is the possibility of non-truth in which every possible truth is held or is made. It thus says the (non-)truth of literature, let us say the secret *of* literature: what literary fiction tells us about the secret, of the (non-) truth of the secret, but also a secret whose possibility assures the possibility of literature.[28]

The essential secret of literature has to do with 'the altogether bare device of being-two-to-speak'. As soon as there is the explicit figuration of someone speaking as someone else, of an author speaking as a narrator, or of a narrator speaking as (or for) a character, there is literature and there is something essentially secret going on. This essentiality of the literary secret is not something concealed, to be revealed or disinterred: it just is, and its being 'altogether bare' is what makes literature possible.

Derrida's work puts out of joint all normative thinking about the 'I' and/or the identity of the narrator in a work of narrative fiction. Having written at length about narrator-figures and 'I'-focused narratives (especially in the work of Kafka and Blanchot),[29] however, he has shown little interest in the analysis of character in fictional narratives.[30] Is there perhaps a way of grafting his insights concerning secrecy and the 'being-two-to-speak' on to a more conventional critical discourse concerned with, for example, character and character-study?[31] The value of Derrida's account lies most of all, perhaps, in a certain humility: there is a humility before the narrative fiction (it is inexhaustibly cryptic and rigorously, demandingly, lucidly unreadable), but there is also a humbling of origins and horizons. One does not need to invoke omniscience (explicitly religious or not) in order to describe what is going on in an allegedly 'knowing' third-person fictional narrative. Moreover, all the implicit self-assurances of 'point of view' or 'focus of narration' or subject of 'focalization' ('who sees' or 'who speaks') become uncertain, unfamiliar, strange: there is, from start to finish, no purity or propriety of a single 'point of view', no single perspective or position or focus for 'focalization'. Instead there is a different logic of identity, voice and knowledge, encapsulated in the structure of 'being-two-to-speak'.

Wallace Martin has remarked:

> When focalization is not treated as an independent category in the definition of point of view, 'omniscient narration' becomes a kind of dumping-ground filled with a wide range of distinct narrative techniques. A narrator may 'see with' one or more characters, presenting what they see, as if looking over their shoulders. A shift from one position to another does not imply omniscience in the usual sense (access to consciousness), but we have no other word to name the technique. (p. 146)

In the obscure midst of his ocularcentric language ('focalization', 'point of view', '"see[ing] with"', 'presenting what they see', 'looking'), Martin nudges towards a truth: we are dealing with something elusive and resistant to naming, something touching on the very essence of secrecy and literature, something which, by definition, cannot indeed be simply a 'technique'. This 'shift' of perception, thinking and affect whereby a text can enable us to have sudden, but temporary and circumscribed 'access to [the] consciousness' of another – a shift that involves a strange communication (whether one-way or undecidably more-than-one-way) between narrator and character – belongs to a world of telepathy and clairvoyance. Derrida's 'being-two-to-speak' is a telepathic structure. It entails an uncanny logic, a strangeness at the heart of the identity of a narrator or character alike: being-two-to-feel and being-two-to-think, as well as being-two-to-speak.

From Drood to Dalloway:

> 'Who can – what can – ' asked Mrs Dalloway (thinking it was outrageous to be interrupted at eleven o'clock on the morning of the day she was giving a party), hearing a step on the stairs. She heard a hand upon the door. She made to hide her dress, like a virgin protecting chastity, respecting privacy. Now the brass handle slipped. Now the door opened, and in came – for a single second she could not remember what he was called! So surprised she was to see him, so glad, so shy, so utterly taken aback to have Peter Walsh come to her unexpectedly in the morning! (She had not read his letter.)
>
> 'And how are you?' said Peter Walsh, positively trembling; taking both her hands; kissing both her hands. She's grown older, he thought, sitting down. I shan't tell her anything about it, he thought, for she's grown older. She's looking at me, he thought, a sudden embarrassment coming over him, though he had kissed her hands.[32]

To consider this passage from Virginia Woolf's *Mrs Dalloway* (1925) after the Dickens passage may be helpful in various ways, not least in suggesting how

'modernist' the latter seems. As with the opening of *Edwin Drood*, the religious, totalizing notion of ominiscience is not apposite in the context of Woolf's text; 'point of view' is correspondingly reductive and misleading. Neither takes account of the force of what is not conscious, of what is not present, of what is felt without being said, of what is undecidably conscious and unconscious, undecidably the articulated or partially articulated thought or feeling of *more than one* identity or speaker: the narrator, Clarissa Dalloway, Peter Walsh.

Mrs Dalloway is pervasively concerned with 'telepathy' in its so-called conventional, restrictive sense: the relationship between Clarissa and Peter, in particular, is crucially preoccupied with what is described as their 'queer power of communicating without words' (p. 55). But it is not just a question of an apparently telepathic or hyperbolically sympathetic rapport between characters, even though this is a pervasive feature of Woolf's fictional writing in general. It is also a question of telepathic bonds and connections at the most decisive and elementary structural level, between narrator and character.[33] What Derrida calls the secret of literature is in play here – in the undecidability of the structure of being-two-to-speak or being-two-to-feel, in, for example, the exclamation 'Now the door opened, and in came – for a single second she could not remember what he was called!' (p. 37). In the 'single second' of this strange third-person narrative 'now', whose voice is to be heard, whose thought and feeling, whose ability or inability to 'remember'? We move from the mind and body of Clarissa to the mind and body of Peter ('She's grown older, he thought ... She's looking at me, he thought, a sudden embarrassment coming over him'), but in a way that sustains a 'queer power' of uncertainty, of mixed and mixing identities, mixed and mixing inside and outside, detachment and intimacy. The novel thus also engages with a more generalized, less restrictive sense of 'telepathy', opening it up along the lines of a sort of affective and conceptual dissemination: 'tele-' evoking everything that has to do with distance and absence (not least, death), and 'pathos' as mind, feeling and suffering.

We move from a restrictive and no doubt restricting notion of telepathy as something that presupposes the identity and unity of a subject (he or she who receives or transmits a telepathic communication) to a writing of distant minds, apprehensions of feeling and suffering in and of the distance, phantom communications, unconscious, absent or ghostly emotions, without any return to stabilized identities. This is why it becomes misleading, in the context of Woolf's work, even to talk about a narrator: it is not so much a matter of a telepathic narrator (the fiction of someone who has a fixed identity and consciousness, moving in and out of characters' minds and bodies, fundamentally unaffected in its identity by such moves), but rather any identity that one might assign to a narrator would be inseparable from the movements it enacts. It would be more accurate to speak of a fictional narrative like *Mrs Dalloway* in terms of its telepathic narration (as distinct from narrator). The novel is a telepathic network or tunnel-work.[34] 'Tunnelling' – the term Woolf herself proposes as a means of describing the way *Mrs Dalloway* works[35] – is a telepathic principle. It operates at unseen, unforeseen and unforeseeable depths, in darkness, never appearing in its entirety, always lacking totalization or completion, at once conditioning and interrupting the 'now'. Mole-like, it is foreign to both 'omniscience' and 'point of view'.

In order to conclude this tentative historical sketch of the disappearance of omniscience and the case for a rethinking of the role and effects of telepathy in an understanding of modern narrative fiction, we could consider a more contemporary work, Salman Rushdie's *Midnight's Children* (1981).[36] The telepathic here accedes to a new level of explicitness.[37] The novel's canonical significance, indeed, might be judged in terms of how it situates telepathy as a determining figure within so-called 'postcolonial literatures in English', 'magical realism' and 'postmodern fiction'. The narrator, Saleem Sinai, is 'a radio-receiver' (p. 164), his head full of voices: he is telepathic. As Patricia Merivale has remarked, his telepathic powers constitute 'the primary self-reflexive image for the creative imagination in *Midnight's Children*'.[38]

Rushdie himself has pointed out that this novel was initially begun as a third-person omniscient narrative.[39] The very composition of *Midnight's Children* thus dramatizes the untenability of 'omniscient narration'. What the novel instead offers is the metadiscursive trope of 'omniscient third-person' reconfigured as 'telepathic first-person' – in other words, it demonstrates in a new, even unprecedented way the fundamentally telepathic (rather than omniscient) structure of fictional narration more generally. To begin with, Saleem regards his telepathic 'gift' as explicitly corresponding with authorial omniscience: 'I had entered into the illusion of the artist, and thought of the multitudinous realities of the land as the raw unshaped material of my gift. "I can find out any damn thing!" I triumphed, "There isn't a thing I cannot know!"' (p. 174). But this is pointedly an 'illusion', one that ignores or takes refuge from the other, more radical consequences of the telepathic, as the narrator also makes clear: 'If I had not believed myself in control of the flooding multitudes, their massed identities would have annihilated mine' (p. 175). Thus his telepathic gift enables him to realize that death exceeds, dislocates, fragments any thought of omniscience. As he goes on to confirm: 'death ... still managed to take me by surprise' (p. 175).

Midnight's Children also offers a provoking account of telepathy in relation to history, historiography and historical narrative. As one of the midnight children born at the same time as 'India's arrival at independence' (15 August 1947), the narrator came into the world already 'heavily embroiled in Fate' (p. 9). Telepathy allows Saleem access to the thoughts and feelings of the other midnight children, but it is also the enabling fiction for an understanding of history itself. To the extent that *Midnight's Children* can be read as a so-called 'historical novel', its conception of history is inextricably bound up with telepathy. It explores the notion that any given moment, indeed the very possibility of time, depends on the fiction that everyone is experiencing the *same moment*, uncannily interconnected, sharing the same 'now'. Rushdie's novel analyses the ways in which history is inevitably conceived in narrative terms, but complicates this with the sense that what we might traditionally think of as history is in some respects itself grounded in telepathic fantasy.

Saleem describes his 'gift' as follows:

> Telepathy, then; the kind of thing you're reading about in the sensational magazines. But I ask for patience – wait. Only wait. It was telepathy; but also more than telepathy. Don't write me off too easily.
>
> Telepathy, then: the inner monologues of all the so-called teeming millions, of masses and classes alike, jostled for space within my head. In the beginning, when I was content to be an audience – before I began to *act* – there was a language problem. The voices babbled in everything from Malayalam to Naga dialects, from the purity of Lucknow Urdu to the Southern slurrings of Tamil. I understood only a fraction of the things being said within the walls of my skull. Only later, when I began to probe, did I learn that below the surface transmissions – the front-of-mind stuff which is what I'd originally been picking up – language faded away, and was replaced by universally intelligible thought-forms which far transcended words ... but that was after I heard, beneath the polyglot frenzy in my head, those other precious signals, utterly different from everything else, most of them faint and distant, like far-off drums whose insistent pulsing eventually broke through the fish-market cacophony of my voices ... those secret, nocturnal calls, like calling out to like ... the unconscious beacons of the children of midnight, signalling nothing more than their existence, transmitting simply: 'I.' From far to the north, 'I.' And to the South East West: 'I.' 'I.' 'And I.'
>
> But I mustn't get ahead of myself. In the beginning, before I broke through to more-than-telepathy, I contented myself with listening; and soon I was able to 'tune' my inner ear to those voices which I could understand; nor was it long before I picked out, from the throng, the voices of my own family; and of Mary Pereira; and of friends, classmates, teachers. In the street, I learned how to identify the mind-stream of passing strangers – the laws of Doppler shift continued to operate in these paranormal realms, and the voices grew and diminished as the strangers passed.
>
> All of which I somehow kept to myself. (pp. 168–9)

This passage foregrounds several issues already at stake in the emergence of 'telepathy' in the late nineteenth century. There is always 'a language problem'. Telepathy is always 'more than telepathy'. The attempted appropriations or transpositions of 'telepathy' into mystical, psychoanalytic or scientific understanding alike ('universally intelligible thought-forms which far transcended words', 'the unconscious beacons of the children of midnight', 'the laws of Doppler shift') remain caught up in 'a language problem' – even as the '-pathy' of 'telepathy' signals the possibilities and desires of an affectivity beyond the normal and thus perhaps 'beyond' any ordinary notion of language.[40] Despite the apparent straightforwardness of the metadiscursive gesture by which Saleem distinguishes his account from 'the kind of thing you're reading about in the sensational magazines', 'telepathy' remains a cryptic and uncanny term, always already other and 'more than itself', figuring a crisis in intelligibility and sensibility, an irreducibly interruptive moment in *reading*.

Hence, perhaps, the curious absurdity and intractable paradoxes of Saleem's account. What allegedly 'far transcended words' is nevertheless claimed to be 'universally intelligible': what is the fiction of the 'universally intelligible' if not some kind of a language? Telepathy, for Saleem, comes down to a sort of minimal (but therefore also maximal) egoism – 'the children of midnight ... transmitting simply: "I" ... "I." "I." "And I"' (p. 168). The 'And' is crucial here, the last of these 'unconscious beacons' signalling not only 'I', but the inevitable grafting of an 'and' that accompanies any and every 'I': identity is never absolutely pure or singular; it is always iterable, *anded about*. Despite having a mind constantly invaded by the voices and 'mind-stream' of others, Saleem claims that everything in his head is 'simply' his own ('All of which I somehow kept to myself'). In this respect, *Midnight's Children* is strikingly consonant with George Eliot's *The Lifted Veil*. Both are concerned with the revelation of a 'suppressed egoism' concealed beneath everything. Both could thus be said to subscribe to the conservative conception of telepathy as something that is figured on the basis of the assumed unity and identity of a subject. But, as we have seen, this conception is necessarily haunted by a more radical, indeed strictly incalculable notion of telepathy as (in the words of Claudette Sartiliot) what 'breaches the discreteness and unity of the subject, as well as the systems of thought derived from it'.[41]

Some sense of the ineluctable modality of the telepathic, as a characteristic of narrative fiction in general and of modern fiction in particular, provides a basis for thinking literary narrative differently. It is not a matter of asking, 'Are there any examples of telepathy in this narrative?', for there are no literary fictional

works that do not involve a thinking of telepathy. The question is rather: 'How does this narrative engage with the telepathic, and how are we as readers already embroiled in it?'

The obligation, desire or anxiety to provide some sort of metadiscursive level, frame or register within which to talk about narrative fiction has no doubt been crucial in the production and institutionalization of such terms as 'omniscience', 'point of view' and 'focalization'. These terms are also self-remarking, plotting and defining the space of a certain discourse. In other words, they perhaps describe critical and theoretical writing rather better than they do literary works themselves. At the very least it may be suggested that they leave their traces as, for example, an implicit drive towards epistemological mastery over the literary work (omniscience) and an upholding of the rhetoric and culture of the authoritative, autonomous, individual subject-as-critic (point of view, focalization). All of these institutionalised terms ('omniscience', 'point of view', 'focalization') are in fact critical fallacies. We have attempted to sketch some of the possibilities for a new and different historical understanding of narrative fiction, from at least George Eliot to the present.

We have to reckon with telepathy as a concept and effect intimately bound up with writing and death, the spectral and unprogrammable. 'Telepathy' calls to be considered perhaps first of all as a *literary phenomenon*, rather than as a psychological problem.[42] There is a kind of madness or 'magical thinking' in literature, and in particular in the narrative scenario of being-two-to-speak. The uncanny nature of narrative fiction is indissociable from the strange telepathic reality of being-two-to-speak or being-two-to-feel: the question remains how to countersign this peculiar feature in a critical, faithful and productive way. New kinds of critical writing concerned with this 'telepathy effect' would seek to elucidate, to affirm and keep generatively open the strange uncertainties of identity, thought and feeling in the world of narrative fiction.[43]

NOTES

1 Dorrit Cohn, *Transparent Minds: Narrative Modes for Presenting Consciousness in Fiction* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1978), p. 7. See also Käte Hamburger, *The Logic of Literature*, trans. Marilyn J. Rose (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1973), p. 83.

2 In this respect it seems especially appropriate, if ironic, that Mieke Bal should make lamenting reference in her recent Preface to the Second Edition of *Narratology: Introduction to the Theory of Narrative* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1997) to narratology's 'positivistic claims, formalist limitations, and inaccessible, idiosyncratic jargon' (p. xiv). The present account shares Bal's stated desire to focus more carefully on the strange nature of narrative fiction as such. She rightly notes the irony that, in recent years, 'with the growth of the study of narrative, interest in what makes narratives "be" or "come across" has only declined' (ibid.).

3 Quoted in Cohn, *Transparent Minds*, p. 8.

4 Freud evidently subscribes to the Romantic conception of the author as godlike. There is no obvious attempt, either in the essay on 'The Uncanny' or elsewhere in his writings on literature, to think through questions and problems concerning distinctions between author and narrator in this context. Doubtless there *is* something potentially uncanny about the notion of author (or narrator) as godlike. This is perhaps most clearly suggested in 'The Uncanny' when Freud evokes a sense of the eerie machinations by which the reader becomes a sort of automaton, controlled and manipulated in whatever way the 'imaginative writer' may choose. He writes: 'The imaginative writer has this licence among many others, that he [*sic*] can select his world of representation so that it either coincides with the realities we are familiar with or departs from them in what particulars he pleases. *We accept his ruling in every case*' (U, p. 373, emphasis added). He goes on to refer to the '*peculiarly* directive power' (p. 375, Freud's emphasis) of the 'storyteller' (this last term characteristically by-passing any problems or questions concerning distinctions between 'author' and 'narrator'). This uncanny power is perhaps difficult to dissociate, in Freud's work, from the significance that he gives to the notion of the 'omnipotence of thoughts'. In *Totem and Taboo* (1913; *PFL*, 13: 43–224), we may recall, Freud talks of how he has borrowed this phrase, 'omnipotence of thoughts', from a patient (the 'Rat Man'). Freud remarks on the essentially 'uncanny' nature of this idea: the 'omnipotence of thoughts' constitutes, for Freud, the 'principle governing magic' (see *PFL*, 13: 143–4 and 144, n. 1). 'Omnipotence' and 'omniscience' are not identical, of course, but there is perhaps a crucial connection here for thinking about what may be called the 'magic of literature'. In the context of our own concerns, it is striking that Freud characterizes the 'world of magic' in terms of a specifically telepathic logic. Evidently playing upon the inscription of 'distance' in 'tele-', he writes: 'Since distance is of no importance in thinking – since what lies furthest apart both in time and space can without difficulty be comprehended in a single act of consciousness – so, too, the world of magic has a telepathic disregard for spatial distance and treats past situations as though they were present' (*Totem and Taboo*, *PFL*, 13: 143). Or as he remarks a little earlier in the same text, in a formulation that bears a special ironic resonance in the context of our concerns in the present chapter: 'telepathy is taken for granted' (p. 138).

5 See Jonathan Culler, *Literary Theory: A Very Short Introduction* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), p. 91.

6 Jonathan Culler, 'Political Criticism: Confronting Religion', in his *Framing the Sign: Criticism and Its Institutions* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1988), p. 80.

7 J. Hillis Miller, *The Disappearance of God: Five Nineteenth-century Writers* (London and Cambridge, MA: Oxford University Press and Belknap Press, 1963).

8 James Boswell, *Life of Johnson* (London: Oxford University Press, 1953), p. 730.

9 See Robert Scholes and Robert Kellogg, *The Nature of Narrative* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1966), pp. 272–3.

10 Thus they propose, for example, that 'the authoritarian monism of the fully omniscient mode of narration has become less and less tenable in modern times, while the multifarious relativism of that same mode has seemed increasingly appropriate' (p. 276).

11 There is a principle of telepathic proliferation here. If a narrator inhabits (or is inhabited by) only one character at a time, the scenario is telepathic. If a narrative presents an inhabiting of

more than one character at a time, the telepathic dimension only becomes more accentuated: there is telepathy *between* characters. In neither case, however, is it a matter of omniscience.

12 George Eliot, *The Lifted Veil*, with an Afterword by Beryl Gray (London: Virago, 1985), p. 1. Further page references are given parenthetically in the text.

13 See Beryl Gray, Afterword to *The Lifted Veil*, p. 84; and also the chapter on George Eliot, entitled 'On Second Sight', in Nicholas Royle, *Telepathy and Literature: Essays on the Reading Mind* (Oxford and Cambridge, Mass.: Blackwell, 1991), pp. 84–110.

14 Wallace Martin, *Recent Theories of Narrative* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1986), p. 146. Further page references will be incorporated in the main body of the text.

15 'First Report of the Literary Committee' (9 December 1882) by W. F. Barrett, C. C. Massey, Rev. W. Stainton Moses, Frank Podmore, Edmund Gurney and Frederic W. H. Myers, in *Proceedings of the Society for Psychical Research*, vol. 1, pt 2 (London: Trübner, 1883), 81.

16 See Ernest Jones, *Sigmund Freud: Life and Work*, vol. 3 (London: Hogarth Press, 1957), p. 462.

17 Jacques Derrida, 'Telepathy', trans. Nicholas Royle, in *Deconstruction: A Reader*, ed. Martin McQuillan (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2000), pp. 496–526: here, p. 505.

18 Gerald Prince, *A Dictionary of Narratology* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska, 1987), p. 73.

19 See Henry James, *Literary Criticism: French Writers, Other European Writers, The Prefaces to the New York Edition* (New York: Library of America, 1984), pp. 1035–341; J. W. Beach, *The Method of Henry James* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1918); Percy Lubbock, *The Craft of Fiction* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1921). A by now classic historical survey is Norman Friedman, 'Point of View in Fiction: The Development of a Critical Concept', *PMLA*, vol. 70 (1955), 1160–84. Wallace Martin's remarks on omniscience appear in a chapter entitled 'Points of View on Point of View': see *Recent Theories of Narrative*, pp. 130–51.

20 Lubbock, *The Craft of Fiction*, p. 65.

21 Lubbock, *The Craft of Fiction*, p. 115. See also p. 120.

22 See Gérard Genette, *Narrative Discourse*, trans. Jane E. Lewin (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1980), p. 189. Genette notes that his use of the term is in turn indebted to Cleanth Brooks's and Robert Penn Warren's phrase 'focus of narration' in their *Understanding Fiction* (1943).

23 Cf. Shlomith Rimmon-Kenan's argument that 'the term "focalization" is not free of optical-photographic connotations, and – like point of view – its purely visual sense has to be broadened to include cognitive, emotive and ideological orientation'. See her *Narrative Fiction: Contemporary Poetics* (London: Methuen, 1983), p. 71. It should perhaps be stressed that it is not our aim here simply to dismiss the importance of the visual in thinking about narrative fiction, but rather it is to argue for a more affectively and sensorily complex and differentiated conception.

24 See Genette, *Narrative Discourse*, pp. 189 ff.

25 Charles Dickens, *The Mystery of Edwin Drood* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1974), p. 37. Further page references are to this edition.

26 Henry James, Preface to *What Maisie Knew*, in *Literary Criticism: French Writers, Other European Writers, The Prefaces to the New York Edition* (New York: Library of America, 1984), p. 1165.

27 With respect to this last, one thinks especially perhaps of the extraordinary account of 'the unconscious Durdles', both prior to and during sleep: see *The Mystery of Edwin Drood*, pp. 155 ff.

28 Jacques Derrida, *Given Time: 1. Counterfeit Money*, trans. Peggy Kamuf (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1992), p. 153.

29 On Kafka see for example 'Before the Law', trans. Avital Ronell and Christine Roulston, in Jacques Derrida, *Acts of Literature*, ed. Derek Attridge (New York: Routledge, 1992), pp. 181–220; on Blanchot, see for example 'The Law of Genre', trans. Avital Ronell, in *Acts of Literature*, pp. 221–52, and 'Living On: Border Lines', trans. James Hulbert, in Harold Bloom et al., *Deconstruction and Criticism* (New York: Seabury, 1979), pp. 75–176.

30 His standoffishness in this context is suggested by the remark that he has 'never drawn great enjoyment from fiction, from reading novels, for example, beyond the pleasure taken in analyzing the play of writing, or else certain naive movements of identification'. See Derrida, *Acts of Literature*, ed. Derek Attridge (New York: Routledge, 1992), p. 39.

31 Conventional critical discourse here might be said to include the work of Mikhail Bakhtin. The concepts of polyphony, heteroglossia and dialogism have no doubt significantly altered English-language critical perceptions of narrative fiction and its workings over the past two decades in particular. Approaching literary narrative in terms of the telepathic offers a new and different, though in some respects complementary framework. The importance of Bakhtin's work lies in its foregrounding of the social nature of language-use in a literary context. The concern of the present chapter is with what might be called Bakhtin back to front, with the possibilities of a *socius* conceived *in the wake of* the telepathic.

32 Virginia Woolf, *Mrs Dalloway* (London: Granada, 1976), p. 37. Further page references are given parenthetically in the text.

33 For a reading of one of Woolf's works of short fiction in this context, see 'A Walk in "Kew Gardens"', in *Telepathy and Literature*, pp. 111–20.

34 A similar point could indeed be made about *The Mystery of Edwin Drood*, with its crypt-like narrative passages, constructions and excavations. To reiterate the broader historical argument here, critical terms such as 'omniscience' and 'point of view' (or 'focalization') were *already* anachronistic, inappropriate and reductive by the time of *Edwin Drood*, let alone by the time of modernist fiction.

35 In a diary entry for Monday, 15 October 1923, and in a spirit of explicit disagreement with Lubbock's assumptions about writing and conscious control, she writes of *Mrs Dalloway*: 'It took me a year's groping to discover my tunnelling process, by which I tell the past by instalments, as I have need of it. This is my prime discovery so far; and the fact that I've been so long finding it proves, I think, how false Percy Lubbock's doctrine is – that you can do this sort of thing consciously.' See Virginia Woolf, *A Writer's Diary* (London: Granta, 1976), pp. 66–7. In an earlier entry (30 August), she describes how she 'dig[s] out beautiful caves behind [her] characters ... The idea is that the caves shall connect and each comes to daylight at the present moment' (p. 65).

36 Salman Rushdie, *Midnight's Children* (London: Pan Books, 1982). Further references are given parenthetically in the text.

37 'New', for example, in comparison with E. M. Forster's telepathically preoccupied *A Passage to India* (1924), a novel that is in this and various other ways an important intertext for *Midnight's Children*. For a reading of *A Passage to India* in terms of telepathy, see Nicholas Royle, *E. M. Forster* (Plymouth: Northcote House, 1999), pp. 72–84.

38 Patricia Merivale, 'Saleem Fathered by Oscar: *Midnight's Children*, Magic Realism, and *The Tin Drum*', in *Magical Realism: Theory, History, Community*, eds Lois Parkinson Zamora and Wendy B. Faris (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1995), p. 339.

39 See John Haffenden, *Novelists in Interview* (London: Methuen, 1985), pp. 237–8.

40 For a sense of Rushdie's own commitment to the mystical see his comments on 'transcendence' in the essay 'Is Nothing Sacred?': 'What I mean by transcendence is that flight of the human spirit outside the confines of its material, physical existence which all of us, secular or religious, experience on at least a few occasions ... The soaring quality of

transcendence, the sense of being more than oneself, of being in some way joined to the whole of life, is by its nature short-lived. Not even the visionary or mystical experience ever lasts very long. It is for art to capture that experience, to offer it to, in the case of literature, its readers.' See Salman Rushdie, *Imaginary Homelands: Essays and Criticism 1981–1991* (London: Granta Books, 1991), p. 421.

41 See Claudette Sartiliot, 'Telepathy and Writing in Jacques Derrida's *Glas*', *Paragraph*, vol. 12, no. 3 (1989), 215.

42 The only reference that Freud makes to telepathy in 'The Uncanny' would seem, at least indirectly, to corroborate this view. Discussing E. T. A. Hoffmann's *Die Elixiere des Teufels* (*The Devil's Elixir*), he refers to the novel's emphasis on 'mental processes leaping from one [character] to another – by what we should call telepathy – so that one possesses knowledge, feelings and experience in common with the other' (U, p. 356). Freud is using the term 'telepathy' to describe the relation between characters; but his phrasing ('one possesses knowledge, feelings and experience in common with the other') would also be apt for what we have been saying about the relation between character and narrator. It strangely anticipates – or recalls – the definition of narrative fiction from Dorrit Cohn with which we began.

43 'Telepathy effect' is a phrase used by J. Hillis Miller in a statement published on the back cover of *Telepathy and Literature*: 'Royle argues that literature as a whole is a "discursive formation" penetrated through and through by what he calls a "telepathy effect".' The author of *Telepathy and Literature* encountered these words not long before receiving final proofs of the book. He looked through his typescript in vain for the presence of the phrase in question. Feeling that Miller had understood his work far better than he himself ever might, Royle inserted, at the end of a sentence in a chapter on *Wuthering Heights*, the 'missing' supplement: 'Thus the telepathic, foretelling, foretune-telling, mad network of narrators and narrating that constitutes the text, weaving and crisscrossing it: telepathy effect' (p. 53).

20

Phantom text

> Nihilism stands at the door: whence comes this uncanniest of all guests? Point of departure: it is an error to consider 'social distress' or 'physiological degeneration' or, worse, corruption, as the *cause* of nihilism. Distress, whether of the soul, body, or intellect, cannot of itself give birth to nihilism (i.e., the radical repudiation of value, meaning, and desirability). Such distress always permits a variety of interpretations. Rather: it is in one particular interpretation, the Christian-moral one, that nihilism is rooted. (Friedrich Nietzsche)[1]

> How can [one] claim to *prove* an absence of archive? How does one prove in general an absence of archive, if not in relying on classical norms (presence/absence of literal and explicit reference to this or to that, to a this or to a that which one supposes to be identical to themselves, and simply absent, *actually* absent, if they are not simply present, *actually* present; how can one not, and why not, take into account *unconscious*, and more generally *virtual* archives? (Jacques Derrida)[2]

As remarked at the beginning, this study is haunted by the many texts that have explicitly addressed the question of the uncanny, especially in relation to the ghostly. One of the most obvious of its inexorable revenants is Jacques Derrida's *Spectres of Marx*.[3] In the following few pages, I propose to consider not only what *Spectres of Marx* has to say about spectrality and phantoms, but also what it does *not* say, or says (perhaps) without saying. *Spectres of Marx* is concerned with another thinking of the spaces of academic research and scholarship. Scholars and phantoms make strange bedfellows. As Derrida remarks, near the beginning of the book:

> There has never been a *scholar* who really, as such, deals with phantoms [*fantômes*]. A traditional *scholar* does not believe in phantoms – nor in all that one might call the virtual space of spectrality. There has never been a *scholar* who, as such, does not believe in the sharp distinction between the real and the unreal, the actual and the inactual, the living and the non-living, being and non-being ('to be or not to be', in the conventional reading), in the opposition between what is present and what is not, for example in the form of objectivity. Beyond this opposition, there is, for the *scholar*, only the hypothesis of a school of thought, theatrical fiction, literature, and speculation. (p. 11/33)[4]

This quotation provides, in a sense, the framework of Derrida's book. The context, as indicated by the parenthetical reference 'to be or not to be', is that of a reading of Shakespeare's *Hamlet*. Derrida is meditating on Marcellus's words in the face of the Ghost of Hamlet's father: 'Thou art a scholar, speak to it, Horatio.'

He describes this member of the King's Guard as suffering from the 'Marcellus complex', that is to say a blindness to, or ignorance of, that 'singularity of a place of speech, of a place of experience, and of a link of filiation, places and links from which alone one may address oneself to the phantom' (p. 12). Derrida is here focusing on something which has become particularly evident in his more recent writing, namely the uncanniness of solitude, the experience of the impossible, the aporias of what happens in 'my life' as 'what only happens to me'. ('It only happens to me' is an insistence made in the autobiothanatoheterographical text entitled 'Circumfession'.)[5] Or as he puts it elsewhere in *Spectres of Marx*: 'everyone reads, acts, writes with *his or her* ghosts' (p. 139).

'"Thou art a scholar, speak to it, Horatio" ... ' (p. 279): these are also the last words of *Spectres of Marx* and they mark, in effect, a turning back to the reader or listener, a return to or revenance of the Marcellus complex but now, perhaps, in a more critical, even deconstructive form. Marcellus's apostrophe, then, provides the curtain on Derrida's book. It is with the notion of the phantom that the book concludes. Derrida asks:

> Could one *address oneself in general* if already some phantom did not come back? If he [*sic*] loves justice at least, the 'scholar' [*le 'savant'*] of the future, the 'intellectual' of tomorrow should learn it and from the phantom. He should learn to live by learning not how to make conversation with the phantom but how to talk with him, with her, how to let it speak or how to give it back speech, even if it is in oneself, in the other, in the other in oneself: they are always *there*, spectres, even if they do not exist, even if they are no longer, even if they are not yet. They give us to rethink the 'there' as soon as we open our mouths ... (p. 176/279)

These passages from *Spectres of Marx* suggest why one might want to describe Derrida as both scholarly and unscholarly. On the one hand, like the traditional scholar, he upholds 'the sharp distinction between the real and the unreal, the actual and the inactual, the living and the non-living, being and non-being'. It is in this context that he says of phantoms: 'of course they do not exist' (174). On the other hand, unlike the traditional scholar, Derrida looks towards a new notion of scholarship, other spaces of intellectual thinking, spaces that can be called affirmatively spectral or phantomistic. It is in this context that he says of phantoms: 'of course they do not exist, *so what?*' (p. 174, my emphasis); and that he argues that 'the logic of spectrality' is 'inseparable from the very motif ... of deconstruction' (p. 178, n. 3). There *are* phantom effects, even if phantoms do not exist. The unscholarly or perhaps one should say the ascholarly dimensions of deconstruction are linked to this spectrality or phantomistics. If beyond 'the opposition between what is present and what is not ... there is, for the *scholar*, only the hypothesis of a school of thought, theatrical fiction, literature, and speculation', deconstruction would be concerned with what may be uncannily glimpsed there, with new ways of thinking about 'schools of thought', 'theatrical fiction', 'literature' and 'speculation'. What today are the chances of writing *as* phantom text?

Everything begins by coming back to the question of mourning. Of mourning Derrida writes:

> It consists always in attempting to ontologize remains, to make them present, in the first place by *identifying* the bodily remains and by *localizing* the dead (all ontologization, all semanticization – philosophical, hermeneutical, or psychoanalytical – finds itself caught up in this work of mourning but, as such, it does not yet think it; we are posing here the question of the spectre, to the spectre, whether it be Hamlet's or Marx's, on this near side of such thinking). One has to know ... *who* and *where*, to know whose body it really is and what place it occupies – for it must stay in its place. In a safe place ... Nothing could be worse, for the work of mourning, than confusion or doubt: one *has to know* who is buried where – and *it is necessary* (to know – to make certain) that, in what remains of him, *he remain there*. Let him stay there and move no more! (p. 9)

This passage signals towards a certain phantomistic topography in *Spectres of Marx*, concerning what Derrida does *not* say in this book, areas of silence, unspoken or unspeakable. In a sense what I want to do here is elucidate in another way what has been called symptomatic reading, to unfold in a perhaps new way Pierre Macherey's thesis that 'The speech of a book comes from a certain silence ... [T]he book is necessarily accompanied by a *certain absence*, without which it would not exist.'[6] Such a phantomistic topography perhaps calls for a new terminology: neither 'subtext' nor 'intertext', neither 'source' nor 'precursor' seem to me appropriate critical vocabulary for the identification of what would be, perhaps, encrypted in this topography. In a text called 'Living On/ Border Lines', dating from 1979, Derrida declared: 'One text reads another ... Each "text" is a machine with multiple reading heads for other texts'.[7] *Spectres of Marx* provokes an elaboration on this claim and in particular it leads us towards an exploration of the effects or effectivities of *texts which do not exist*. It is a question of a feeling, to begin with, a feeling I have about the passage on mourning just cited and about the strange 'place' (atopical topos) of the work of Nicolas Abraham and Maria Torok in relation to this. In particular my feeling has to do here with Abraham's notion of anasemia as what is on the 'near side' (to pick up Derrida's phrase) of meaning, as what in some sense precedes 'all semanticization', 'psychoanalytical' or otherwise.

Although Derrida has written a book about spectres, spirits, ghosts and phantoms, nowhere in *Spectres of Marx* does he discuss the writings of Nicolas

Abraham and Maria Torok.[8] Given the amount of attention he gives to their work in other writings, Derrida's apparent silence on Abraham and Torok in *Spectres of Marx*, and in particular his silence about Abraham's so-called theory of the phantom, and even more particularly Abraham's theory as expounded specifically in relation to *Hamlet*, seems rather remarkable. Let me stress that I am not interested here in making hypothetical pronouncements about Derrida's 'debt' to or swerve away from Abraham, or about Abraham's theory of the phantom as a precursor, or even as an intertext, for Derrida's book. Rather I am interested in the way in which Abraham's theory might itself be said to constitute a phantom which, in motioning us towards a spectral topography in *Spectres of Marx*, might serve as a sort of model for thinking about texts in general in terms of phantom effects. It is a question, then, of phantom texts – textual phantoms which do not necessarily have the solidity or objectivity of a quotation, an intertext or explicit, acknowledged presence and which do not in fact come to rest *anywhere*. Phantom texts are fleeting, continually moving on, leading us away, like Hamlet's Ghost, to some other scene or scenes which we, as readers, cannot anticipate.

In his essay 'Notes on the Phantom: A Complement to Freud's Metapsychology' (*SK*, pp. 171–6), Abraham begins with the idea that 'the theme of the dead – who, having suffered repression by their family or society, cannot enjoy, even in death, a state of authenticity – appears to be omnipresent (whether overtly expressed or disguised) on the fringes of religions and, failing that, in rational systems' (p. 171). His emphasis is on the fact that 'the "phantom", whatever its form, is nothing but an invention of the living'. His argument is that phantom effects can arise if (and, it would seem, only if) 'the dead were shamed during their lifetime or ... took unspeakable secrets to the grave'. The phantom is an invention of the living in so far as it embodies 'the gap produced in us by the concealment of some part of a loved object's life ... what haunts are not the dead, but the gaps left within us by the secrets of others' (p. 171).

Abraham puts strange flesh on, or perhaps takes strange flesh off this argument in 'The Phantom of Hamlet' (*SK*, pp. 191–205), his posthumously published fictional supplementary Sixth Act to Shakespeare's play. 'The Phantom of Hamlet' was written, Abraham tells us in his introductory statement ('The Intermission of "Truth"', pp. 187–90), in response to his sense that 'The final scene of the *Tragedy of Hamlet* does not close the dramatic action, it simply cuts it off' (p. 187). He proposes that the characters in Shakespeare's play are, in fact, the 'puppets of a phantom' (p. 188). 'The Phantom of Hamlet' is a short text, composed in decasyllabic verse, in which the ghost of Hamlet's father returns and this time is

obliged to confirm that the secret he took to the grave was not his death at the hands of his brother Claudius but another secret, namely the fact that, in collusion with Polonius, he had thirty years earlier murdered the father of Fortinbras. With this fictional supplement Abraham seeks to expose and transform that 'state of mind' which in Shakespeare's play (he says) 'forces itself upon us like an inescapable necessity emanating from some unknown source' (pp. 187–8). 'The Phantom of Hamlet' is Abraham's attempt to 'reduce the phantom'; 'to "cure" the *public* of a covert neurosis [which] the *Tragedy of Hamlet* has, for centuries, inflicted upon it' (p. 190); to exorcize the crypto-phantomatic power imposed on our culture by the silences in Shakespeare's play.

Abraham's account of the phantom, especially in the form of this poetic supplement to Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, is very different from Derrida's. I would suggest that there are at least four ways in which it would be necessary to distinguish between Abraham and Derrida here:

(1) Derrida's conception of revenants, spirits, ghosts or phantoms is specifically bound up with an experience of language as an experience of the impossible. If, as he says in *Spectres of Marx*, 'one cannot speak of generations of skulls or spirits ... except on the condition of language' (p. 9), this speech is caught up in a ghostly prosopopoeia: we are ourselves spoken by skulls and spirits. Whereas for Abraham and Torok, in *The Wolf Man's Magic Word*, there is the supposition of a magic word ('tieret') at the heart of a psychoanalytic treatment or case-history, for Derrida there is rather what he calls 'the *cryptic* structure of the ultimate "referent"'.[9] If deconstruction is inseparable from a logic of spectrality, it is because the trace or différance is ghostly: all language, every manifestation of meaning, is the phantom effect of a trace which is neither present nor absent, but which is the condition of possibility of the opposition of presence and absence. The trace cannot become present, or absent, in its essence: it is the revenant at the origin.

(2) In his essay 'Notes on the Phantom', Abraham's emphasis is quite heavily on what passes down from generation to generation – he speaks for example of '"phantomogenic" words' that can 'rule an entire family's history and function as the tokens of its pitiable articulations'. He contends that 'the "phantom effect" progressively fades during its transmission from one generation to the next and that, finally, it disappears' (p. 176). Derrida's position appears less teleological and less fixed. As if in passing, he remarks at one point in *Spectres of Marx* that ghosts 'trick consciousness and skip generations' (p. 30). However tacitly, Derrida's account breaks up the family, interrupts the logic of the linear, skips successiveness. His focus in *Spectres of Marx* is rather on anachronism, contretemps, time out of joint.[10]

(3) Derrida's conception of the logic of exorcism is in many respects less benign than Abraham's. In 'The Phantom of Hamlet', for example, Abraham is concerned with an 'exorcism' that may lead (as he puts it) to 'a higher wisdom about oneself and the world of humans at large' (p. 189). Derrida's account of ghosts and phantoms in *Spectres of Marx* would call, in effect, for a subsuming of the Abrahamic conception within a broader, distinctly less humanist and more troubling perspective in which ghosts do not die and exorcism is in some sense impossible. For Derrida, 'to exorcize' is 'to attempt to destroy and to disavow' – 'exorcism consists in repeating in the mode of incantation that the dead man [or woman] is really dead ' (p. 48). We may here recall the case reported in January 1996 of a sixty-one-year-old woman in Cambridgeshire, Daphne Banks, pronounced dead by her GP, but discovered, in 'her' body bag, to be still breathing.[11] Uncanny: to be, or not to be, buried alive. To 'pronounce dead' is, like exorcism, a performative. As Derrida points out, in *Spectres of Marx*: it is 'a performative that seeks to reassure but first of all to reassure itself by assuring itself, for nothing is less sure, that what one would like to see dead is indeed dead. It speaks in the name of life, it claims to know what that is' (p. 48). At issue here, among other things, is a strange but compelling shift in the definition and concept of murder. It is a question of rethinking the teleological work of mourning, such as one encounters in the writings of Freud or in Hamlet's uncle Claudius (mourning must have an end, it is something that we should know how to 'throw to earth', as Claudius says [1.2.106]). As Derrida observes in a related essay on *Hamlet*, entitled 'The Time Is Out of Joint', such a notion of mourning 'presumes ... that mourning depends on us, in us, and not on the other in us. It presumes above all a knowledge, the knowledge of the date. One must indeed know *when: at what instant* mourning began. One must indeed know *at what moment* death took place, really took place, and this is always the moment of a murder.'[12] To pronounce dead is to collude in murder. To pronounce dead or to exorcize, for Derrida, is '*effectively* a performative. But here effectivity phantomalizes itself' (p. 48). To exorcize is not to escape from phantom-effects, rather the reverse.[13]

(4) There are at the same time various respects in which Derrida's account of ghosts and phantoms is perhaps *more* benign, more open than Abraham's. This distinction is perhaps most evident in relation to the temporality of the phantom or ghost. For Abraham the phantom comes from the past. For Derrida it comes at least as much from the future: 'It is a proper characteristic of the spectre, if there is any, that no one can be sure if by returning it testifies to a living past or to a living future ... [A] phantom never dies, it remains always to come and to come-back' (p. 99). 'The thinking of the spectre', he proposes, 'contrary to what good sense leads us to believe, signals toward the future' (p. 196, n. 39).

With these four distinctions in mind, I want to ask: What happens if one lets Abraham's account of the phantom come back, filtering itself through the singularity of Derrida's account, into a space which does not exist but which might be said nevertheless to appear 'through' *Spectres of Marx*? Into what space of virtual spectrality might a reading of Abraham-through-Derrida lead us? In particular, what happens if one follows the sense that *Spectres of Marx* is to a large degree silently, but perhaps all the more powerfully on that account, a book as much about Christianity as about Marxism, and above all a book that fastens on the notion of Jesus Christ as the most spectral force in politics today, in the 'world war', as Derrida calls it, that is all around us, even if it has its most concentrated focus on the question of 'the appropriation of Jerusalem' (p. 58)?

If there is a publication which (alongside *The Interpretation of Dreams* or *Finnegans Wake* or *Of Grammatology*) has claims to being among the most devastating texts to have appeared in the twentieth century, it might be *The Nag Hammadi Library*.[14] It consists of twelve books, plus eight leaves taken from a thirteenth, altogether amounting to fifty-two tractates. The manuscripts themselves are now in the Coptic Museum in Cairo and some readers may already be familiar, for example through the work of Elaine Pagels, with the bizarre history of the discovery of these texts in December 1945 by a cannibalistic murderer called Muhammad Ali of the al-Samman clan in the Naj Hammadi region of Upper Egypt.[15] Among the more striking details of the process by which these fourth century papyrus books came to be disseminated across the world and finally brought back together in Cairo and eventually published in a single volume in English are the fact that most of Codex I was acquired in May 1952 by the Jung Institute in Zurich and initially published as the 'Jung Codex' (the history and legacies of psychoanalysis are thus already implicated here, in the most material fashion) and the fact that Muhammad's mother, Umm-Ahmad, later admitted that she'd used up a fair amount of the papyrus for (one hastens to add, non-cannibalistic) cooking purposes at home.

The Nag Hammadi library is in Coptic, though thought to have been originally written in Greek. There is evidence in the texts themselves that they were intended to have been preserved in a jar in a mountain until the end of time. They are, in Freudian terms perhaps, uncanny texts *par excellence* – texts which ought to have remained secret and hidden but have come to light. The texts in the Nag Hammadi library transform the history and conception of Gnosticism and early Christianity. Of particular interest in the present context is the evidence

furnished by some of these tractates showing that certain features originally thought to be characteristic of Christian Gnosticism are in fact non-Christian in their provenance. James M. Robinson refers to two of the tractates, 'The Three Steles of Seth' and 'The Paraphrase of Shem', as being 'without Christian ingredients' (p. 7). Perhaps most dramatic, however, is the double-tractate published as 'Eugnostos the Blessed' and 'The Sophia of Jesus Christ' (pp. 220–43), in which the latter emerges in a particularly explicit fashion as a fictional reworking into a Christian discourse of the pre-Christian discourse of the former.

Theologians have not, to date, rushed into the breach or into the strange aporias hereby generated. Thus Elaine Pagels, for example, argues that the Nag Hammadi library enables us to 'begin to see that what we call Christianity – and what we identify as Christian tradition – actually represents only a small section of specific sources, chosen from among dozens of others' (p. xxxv). While acknowledging that the discovery of the Nag Hammadi texts makes it more difficult than ever to argue the case for which of the sayings of Jesus may or may not be 'genuinely authentic' (p. 148) – in other words, while implicitly recognizing that the Nag Hammadi library fundamentally disturbs and even phantomizes the basis on which the teachings of Jesus have been read and understood – Pagels's account in her book *The Gnostic Gospels* remains a curiously static and conservative one. In her Conclusion she asserts that 'the discoveries at Nag Hammadi reopen fundamental questions. They suggest that Christianity might have developed in very different directions – or that Christianity as we know it might not have survived at all' (p. 142). History, in the eyes of Elaine Pagels, is finished, achieved, already written. Rather than speculate on the 'very different directions' in which Christianity 'might [or might not] have developed', would it not be more critical and productive to consider how the discoveries at Nag Hammadi *change* history by transforming our conception of Christianity *to date* and *in the present*? The history of Christianity in this sense would lie in 'the opening of the future itself' (to borrow a phrase from Derrida).[16]

It can perhaps readily be acknowledged that the Nag Hammadi library constitutes a scandal in its own right: it phantomizes our reading of the New Testament and suspends the possibility of Christianity 'as we know it'. Let us conclude with the evocation (in the strong sense of that word: to evocalize or call up from the dead) of another, perhaps differently scandalous text, a phantom text generated out of Abraham, Derrida and the Nag Hammadi library. This text does not have a name. It might be said to belong to a virtual archive, a palimpsestuous phantom text, an effect of the anasemic, spectral topography I have been trying to describe in these few pages.

This text is fragmentary. Like 'The Sophia of Jesus Christ' (*NHL*, pp. 220–43), it presents us with a revelation discourse spoken by Christ to Mary Magdalen after coming back from the dead. And like 'The Gospel of the Egyptians' (*NHL*, pp. 208–19) and 'Allogenes' (*NHL*, pp. 490–500), it refers to the idea of the text itself being concealed in a mountain until the end of time or until the coming of the 'dreadful one'. It reads as follows:

> And Jesus came back and appeared unto Mary Magdalen and this woman was greatly afraid. Fear not, Mary, saith the Lord; I am come as a spirit to comfort you and tell – [text missing] – thunder – [text missing] – and [why] this stone was rolled away, with trembling of the earth three days and nights, and why I now appear in cloth as fresh and smelling sweet as when my body was anointed for the tomb. Let the word pass to [the chosen?]: I am a spirit come back to tell the secrets of my time on earth. – [text missing] – The heaven and the earth will be rolled up in your presence. Know now that I am not he who died on the cross, but I replaced and hid myself. The one who died in my place was unknown, a stranger. I ask for your forgiveness, as I have asked forgiveness of my father. – [text missing] – Write down the things that I tell you and place this book in the mountain. Then you shall adjure the Guardian, 'Come Dreadful One'.

This fragment would presuppose a rereading of Christianity in its biblical and related contexts as the story of a phantom or phantom effects at once inaugurated and revealed, legible in a new way. It would constitute a sort of futuristic ur-text for Abraham's account of the phantom, a strange figuring of what Derrida calls the *arrivant* ('a thinking of the past, a legacy that can come only from that which has not yet arrived': *SM*, p. 196, n. 39).

Two supplementary remarks by way of cutting things off:

(1) As Geza Vermes has argued, if there is a single thing about which there would appear to be consensus regarding the death of Jesus, it is 'the one disconcerting fact … that the women who set out to pay their last respects to Jesus found to their consternation, not a body, but an empty tomb'.[17] The various Gospel, Nag Hammadi and other accounts of seeing the dead Jesus alive again, together with the discovery of an empty tomb, constitute a testimony to what can be described, in Abraham's terms, as a vast phantom effect. Christian belief would be structured by the phantom effect of a figure whose reappearances beyond the grave, bolstered by the disappearance of his corpse, testify to unspoken or unspeakable secrets. In this context we might turn round Elaine Pagels's question: 'Why does faith in the passion and death of Christ become an essential element – some say, *the* essential element – of orthodox Christianity?' (p. 75). Rather than, like Pagels, wonder at it, wonder at our supposed wonder, might we not then reflect and elaborate in a critical, even deconstructive fashion on the

passion, death and resurrection scene as precisely cryptic and phantomatic? Jesus did not die on the cross but rather had himself substituted – an unknown man, an anonymous stranger, perhaps someone who looked similar to him, was taken away and crucified in his place. This shameful secret will have been at the heart of the ghost-story called Christianity. The crucifixion might then call to be re-thought as the passion of (to borrow Maurice Blanchot's fragmentary formulation) 'The unknown name, alien to naming'.[18]

(2) At the same time, we would be impelled to read this phantom text in terms of the way Derrida in *Spectres of Marx* seeks to situate the significance of Jesus Christ for Marxism and deconstruction. Following Marx and Max Stirner, Derrida declares: 'Christ is the most spectral of spectres. He tells us something about absolute spectrality' (p. 144). Marx, like Stirner, was concerned to dissolve 'the mirages of Christian onto-theology' (p. 191, n. 14). Derrida is willing to describe this as a work of deconstruction. But Marx's and Stirner's attempts to dispose of 'that arch-ghost in flesh and blood that is ... Christ, God made Man in the incarnation' are themselves haunted, Derrida suggests:

> Their 'deconstruction' is limited at the point at which they *both* oppose this spectral onto-theology ... to the hyper-phenomenological principle of the flesh-and-blood presence of the living person, of the being itself, of its effective and non-phantomatic presence, of presence in flesh and blood. (pp. 191–2, n. 14)

Spectres of Marx delineates a Marxist deconstruction of Christian onto-theology but suggests that the Marxist conception is itself still too much bound up in another kind of mirage, namely that of 'non-phantomatic presence, of presence in flesh and blood'. To be mere 'flesh and blood', to have 'ears of flesh and blood', is to be a ghost. The word 'Christ' is Greek for Messiah. *Spectres of Marx* calls for a de-Christification of experience, for 'a messianism without religion' (p. 59). This messianism or 'messianic' is desert-like and strange: Derrida remarks that one could consider it to be 'uncanny' (p. 168). This messianic is 'irreducible to any deconstruction', he suggests; it entails a 'suspension', 'trembling' or 'hesitation' that is 'essential to the messianic in general', a 'thinking of the other and of the event to come'. He writes: 'what remains irreducible to any deconstruction, what remains as undeconstructible as the possibility itself of deconstruction is, perhaps, a certain experience of the emancipatory promise' (p. 59). The 'perhaps', as elsewhere in Derrida's writing, testifies to the trembling that *is* the messianic. The messianic 'would no longer be messianic if it stopped hesitating' (p. 169). This hesitation is the destabilization of every identification and localization, and it is promised, if one can say this, by mourning.

The phantom text evoked here concerns the logic of what Derrida speaks of as the 'furtive passage' (p. 168): trembling in the unspoken of *Spectres of Marx* and the writings of Nicolas Abraham, it does not *belong*, it does not rest, perhaps, anywhere. The fragment would constitute a phantom effect of what Derrida elsewhere describes as the project of an 'internal critique' of Christianity and the 'putting on trial' of a 'fabricated mystery', the deconstruction of what is private, of privacy as such.[19]

NOTES

1 Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Will to Power*, trans. Walter Kaufmann and R. J. Hollingdale (New York: Vintage, 1968), p. 7.

2 Jacques Derrida, *Archive Fever: A Freudian Impression*, trans. Eric Prenowitz (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1996), p. 64.

3 Jacques Derrida, *Spectres of Marx: The State of the Debt, the Work of Mourning, and the New International*, trans. Peggy Kamuf (New York: Routledge, 1994). Further page references are given in the text, preceded by the abbreviation '*SM*' where clarity dictates. Where appropriate, references to the French text, *Spectres de Marx: L'État de la dette, le travail du deuil et la nouvelle Internationale* (Paris: Galilée, 1993), are given in parentheses, following the English translation page number and a slash.

4 The translation/untranslatability of '*fantôme*' in Derrida's text is ultimately perhaps indissociable from that of the '*es spukt*' (it spooks, it apparitions, it phantoms) on which Derrida meditates in relation to Freud's 'The Uncanny': see *Spectres*, pp. 172–4. For reasons which I hope may become more apparent as I go on, I have preferred to translate 'fantôme' as 'phantom' rather than as 'ghost' (Peggy Kamuf's translation). Otherwise I have generally followed Kamuf's fine translation throughout.

5 Jacques Derrida (with Geoffrey Bennington), *Jacques Derrida*, trans. Bennington (Chicago and London: Chicago University Press, 1993), p. 305.

6 Pierre Macherey, *A Theory of Literary Production*, trans. G. Wall (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1978), p. 85.

7 'Living On', trans. James Hulbert, in Harold Bloom et al., *Deconstruction and Criticism* (New York: Seabury Press, 1979), p. 107.

8 There is a footnote reference on p. 178 but this is to Derrida's '*Fors*: The Anglish Words of Nicolas Abraham and Maria Torok', rather than to the book to which that essay formed the foreword, *viz. The Wolf Man's Magic Word: A Cryptonymy*, trans. Nicholas Rand (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1986). In what follows I also refer to Nicolas Abraham and Maria Torok, *The Shell and the Kernel*, 1, ed., trans. and with an Introduction by Nicholas T. Rand (Chicago and London: Chicago University Press, 1994): further page references are given in brackets in the text, abbreviated '*SK*' where appropriate.

9 '*Fors*: The Anglish Words of Nicolas Abraham and Maria Torok', p. xxvi.

10 If there is what he calls the 'tableau of an ageless world' (the subtitle of Chapter 3 of *Spectres of Marx*), the 'ageless' here is not a reference to some putatively ahistorical notion of the 'timeless' but rather to a punctual anachronism – a two-timing or split-time that comports the very old and the very new *at the same time*. For comparison one might think here of the

proposition, in *Memoirs of the Blind: The Self-portrait and Other Ruins*, trans. Pascale-Anne Brault and Michael Naas (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1993), that love is 'an ageless ruin – at once originary, an infant even, and already old' (pp. 68–9).

11 See Edward Pilkington, 'Thwarting the Grim Reaper', *Guardian*, 6 January 1996, p. 1.

12 Jacques Derrida, 'The Time Is Out of Joint', trans. Peggy Kamuf, *Deconstruction is/in America: A New Sense of the Political*, ed. Anselm Haverkamp (New York: New York University Press, 1995), p. 20.

13 As with his observation (quoted earlier) about mourning's enigmatic commitment to 'identifying the bodily remains and ... *localizing* the dead', Derrida's conception of the place and time of death – and therefore of the place and time of life, of presence, of experience itself – is perhaps best described as a trembling, a trembling conception and trembling of the concept. His thought is oriented by a sense of the injustice and even impossibility of 'localizing the dead' or of knowing 'at what instant mourning began'. This thought is not to be confused, however, with mere 'confusion' or 'doubt' ('Nothing could be worse, for the work of mourning, than confusion or doubt: one *has to know* who is buried where': p. 9): knowledge itself is spectralized. Similarly, it is not a matter of mourning as something to be thought 'merely' within us. As he suggests, in a related context, in *Mémoires*: 'thought is not bereaved interiorization; it thinks at boundaries, it thinks the boundary, the limit of interiority' (*Mémoires: For Paul de Man*, trans. Cecile Lindsay, Jonathan Culler and Eduardo Cadava (New York: Columbia University Press, 1986), p. 71).

14 *The Nag Hammadi Library in English*, trans. and introduced by members of the Coptic Gnostic Library Project of the Institute for Antiquity and Christianity at Claremont, California, ed. James M. Robinson, 3rd, completely revised edn (New York: HarperCollins, 1990). Further page references are given in the text, preceded by the abbreviation '*NHL*' where clarity dictates.

15 See Elaine Pagels, *The Gnostic Gospels* (New York: Vintage, 1979), pp. xiii–xvi. Further page references to Pagels's book are given parenthetically in the text.

16 Jacques Derrida, 'Afterw.rds: or, at least, less than a letter about a letter less', trans. Geoffrey Bennington, in *Afterwords*, ed. Nicholas Royle (Tampere, Finland: Outside Books, 1992), p. 200.

17 Geza Vermes, *Jesus the Jew: A Historian's Reading of the Gospels*, 2nd edn (London: Collins, 1983), p. 41.

18 Maurice Blanchot, *Writing the Disaster*, trans. Ann Smock (Lincoln: Nebraska University Press, 1986), p. 47.

19 See Jacques Derrida, *The Gift of Death*, trans. David Wills (London and Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1995), especially pp. 109–12. I consider this issue in more detail in Chapter 21.

21

The private parts of Jesus Christ

private: *adj.* independent, own, relating to personal affairs, not public, not open to the public, not made generally known, retired from observation, alone.

part: *noun* something less than the whole, a portion, a member or organ, share, region, participation, concern, interest, a role or duty, a side or party, a character taken by an actor in a play, the words or actions of a character in a play or in real life, a voice or instrument in concerted music, a section of a work in literature or in music. (*Chambers*)

) *The private parts of Jesus Christ*, how will you read that, subvocalizing in silence, that is my question, I have no interest in getting beyond it, only in trying to think what might be going on in it, how to hear this phrase, if it is a phrase, in other words at once a small group of words expressing a single idea or constituting a single element in a sentence and also an idiomatic expression, a pithy saying or catchword, in short a kind of shibboleth. (

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Already plural, irreducibly, despite the appearances of the single and unitary, for example in the 'the' or in the phrase 'phrase'. (

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At issue are the writings of Jacques Derrida in relation to Christianity and the question of how to think, after Derrida, about writing and messianicity, in one's own manner, with a view to the solitude of an unidentifiable church, to inventing one's own religion or rather (as Derrida says) doing or making a truth that perhaps does not come 'under any religion, for reason of literature, nor under any literature, for reason of religion'.[1] (

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The private parts of Jesus Christ: does this phrase, if it is a phrase, sound blasphemous, idolatrous, perverse? If so, to whom will one have been listening, to what voice or tone within oneself that would not be one's own, perhaps, but the voice or tone of another within oneself, one who speaks ill (as the etymology of the word 'blasphemy' suggests), one to whom blame might be assigned? Is the voice or tone of blasphemy within oneself or outside oneself, and who can bear witness to this? It is a matter of trying to think the question of religion, and specifically here Christianity, in terms of performative utterance. As Hent de Vries puts it: