the changing profession

Can We Read the Book of Love?

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Love is strange.
—Mickey and Sylvia

SOME PEOPLE SAY LOVE IS INCOMPREHENSIBLE, THAT LANGUAGE CANNOT CAPTURE IT. SOME PEOPLE NEVER STOP TALKING, THINKING, WRITING, SPECULATING, AND THEORIZING ABOUT IT. MAYBE OUR UNENDING DISCOURSE ABOUT LOVE ARISES IN THE TENSION THAT STRETCHES IT BETWEEN INEFFABILITY AND EXPRESSION.¹

Can we make sense of love? Or does love leave language behind? For a long time the conflict between the perspectives these questions reflect has threaded through thinking about love. It pulls between rationalist or scientific or even cynical analyses of amorous experience, attraction, or election, on the one hand, and, on the other, representations of love’s madness or uncognizability or inexpressibility or inaccessibility to reason, discourse, and language. Love insists on representation; love blocks representation. This contention frames what I examine in this essay.

For literary studies the matter is consequential. The texts we deal with speak endlessly of love. Yet in doing so they risk putting language in check. Love stymies discourse by seeming to exceed it, by forcing understanding to a crisis and threatening to expose its impotence. Love challenges language. But language is the foundation of our discipline.

Moreover, even if love is accessible to language, its verbalization seems to oscillate haplessly between the tongue-tied, unending I-love-you cliché—the perpetual word clump Roland Barthes spoke about—and the hyperbolic superfluity of two or three millennia of nonstop love texts pressing their impassioned verbosity in every genre known to humankind (Barthes 147; Ware 494).

These texts make “love studies” as uncompassable as literature itself. As Laura Kipnis wryly puts it, “The literature on love is vast” (198). So an essay on the state of thinking about love, makes graceless choices to constrain its limitless topic. I want to provide a rough mo-
saic of reflections that might frame the issue of love’s comprehensibility or representability and set them against assertions that love is simply inexplicable. In the opening section I begin with accounts of love that posit our ability to comprehend it. In the next section I consider discourses claiming the contrary position—that by its nature love passes understanding. In the first case love denotes an ongoing experience, what Philip Fisher calls a “disposition.” The second case refers to Fisher’s “passion,” the coup de foudre, the thunderclap—an “episodic, incandescent moment” of ardor (21). In the last section I consider how love relates to materiality. This perhaps unexpected connection with language’s other reopens the question of how far language can go in representing love. Where does language get to when it reaches its limit? Because this limit is unsurpassable, I conclude with a brief riff on what I term linguistic modesty in our relation to love and to its texts.

The choice interpreters make between Fisher’s two modes—disposition and passion—determines their position on love. The first stance is ironic and retrospective, involving detachment and analytic judgment. Contrariwise, the second necessitates a self-abandoning immersion in ardor, a perspective without perspective in which nothing is held back. We can write this position only if, like the passionate lover, we allow ourselves to be captured in the speechlessness that passion figures—the oxymoron of a speechless figure itself delineates the problem. No wonder, then, that these two perspectives seem to frame an ontological and cognitive disconnect. It’s as if we had two discrepant lives.

Love is important. We might be chary about writing such a commonplace down. But commonplaces are vital, and their anamnesis is the essence of critical thought. For many people, whether searching for it or glorying in it, love claims a cardinal share of consciousness. It is the quintessential idée fixe—in Marina van Zuylen’s terms, a “monomania.” Everybody recognizes that this obsession is omnipresent in literature. “As for love, it has been the major focus of my thoughts throughout my life” (Flaubert, Correspondance 124). What does this monomania produce? For literary reflection the point is this: it issues in representation—indeed, often overwhelms it. Love isn’t just a theme in literature, it is a fundamental structure in the writing imagination. The love dyad, the one to one, is the paradigm for all relationship. It models not only for itself but also for manifold other forms of individual and group interconnection. Stories go nowhere without such relationship between protagonists. In all these forms, the love dyad figures experience and generates narrative in its multifarious variegation: two replicate to become the world.

Comprehensible Love

On the molecular level, neurochemistry and psychobiology have illuminated determinants of love. But scholars in the humanities tend to be wary of such explanations. The closer one gets to the considerations concerning love that have preoccupied writers and thinkers for millennia—Why does one fall in love? What is this love one falls into? Why is one’s comportment in love so strange? Why are the emotions love engenders so powerful and potentially so contrary?—the further one is from explanation by molecular or chemical means. Scientific accounts do not seem to illuminate the complex mediations that link neurotransmitters to highly organized and variable experiences like love. Consequently, we shift back from the “natural” to the “human” sciences—to philosophy, psychology, anthropology, and literary representation—which batten on the ambiguous complexities of human behavior and experience, love perhaps first among these.

My sketch of the position that claims love’s comprehensibility begins in an unexpected
place: not with *amour courtois* or Shakespeare, Donne, or Stendhal—not indeed with *Mabharata* or *The Dream of the Red Chamber* (though I will return to some of these)—but with Hegel. Hegel is the acme and archetype of the view that love can be made sense of. He foregrounds this rationalizability in a calculus of measurement—as in his projection (for example, at the conclusion of the "Spirit" section of *Phenomenology of Spirit*) of a perfect equilibration of affect and affection between two people, of absolute and knowing reciprocity, of the realization of individual consciousness in a mutual recognition that supersedes duality.\(^8\) On the side of loving intimacy, this is the counterpart of Hegel’s thought experiment concerning contention between individuals in the master-slave dialectic (*Phenomenology* 111–19).

Hegel does not speak explicitly of love in *Phenomenology*. But comparison between the model of reciprocity there and the treatment of love in his *Elements of the Philosophy of Right* makes clear that for Hegel the realization of Spirit and the experience of love are paradigmatically indistinguishable:

\begin{quote}
In general love means the consciousness of my unity with another, so that I am not isolated on my own [*für mich*], but gain my self-consciousness only through the renunciation of my independent existence [*meine Fürsichkeit*] and through knowing myself as the unity of myself with another and of the other with me. (199; interpolations in orig.; trans. modified)
\end{quote}

Hegel’s theory of love is intended as a strategic reduction. His model projects a combinatory in which the relation between elements defines a paradigm for human relationships generally. On the other hand, narrative’s take on love is causal, situational, diagnostically expansive, and intricately pragmatic. While Hegel projects love almost as the materialization of a mathematical function, narrative relies on more local, variable, and discursive—indeed, often loquaciously circumstantial—means to represent it. The most extensive and intensive theory of comprehensible love, then, lies in prose fiction’s metacritical reflection on the generation and the determinants of its own narratives.

Love has preoccupied fiction since there has been fiction. In novels theory and narrative interrogate and interpret each other around the question of love. This has been true for millennia. But in the West critical and prototheoretical reflection on romantic love began to be focused and dominant in the eighteenth century. Abbé Prévost, Richardson, Rousseau, and Diderot innovated techniques to illuminate love’s complications and to manage representation of them. In the nineteenth century the novel increasingly took the analysis and the theory of love as its mission. The pattern is consistent not only in the realist period—say, in Stendhal’s theory in *De l’amour* and his narrativization in *La chartreuse de Parme*—but in modernism as well, preeminently in James, Proust, and Joyce. These writers concentrated on how to put love into text. What we term the novel’s psychology is, to a considerable degree, the working out of discourses and representations to make sense of love.

For this diegetic and analytic task, the once ubiquitous method of explication de texte (domesticated in the United States as close reading) functioned with such uncanny aptness that one might almost imagine the method had been designed with love as its object.\(^9\) Not that the dour pedagogues of close reading sought to induce students to lose themselves in delectation of the wanton. But even "chaste" novels are not chaste.\(^10\) In the novel of whatever category (and of course in lyric poetry), love—and its psychological perplexities and peripetelas—is inescapable. Close reading captured these representations with powerful analytic grasp.

Thus, in a brilliant protoexplication of sentence form in Stendhal, Proust conceptualized the double, parallel discourses—the
outward narrative of love and its inner analysis, its “psychology”—that have dominated fiction since the realists: “The most beautiful books add to [the narration of] events a simultaneous unpacking of the soul. In Red and Black every action is followed by a [second] part of the sentence that indicates what was going on unrecognized in the character’s heart.”

Proust thus captures the novel’s paradigm for comprehensible love. A pragmatics and a theory of love, unfolded (it might almost seem) out of the protocols of explication de texte itself, motivate the narrative process of novels. The same paradigm still determines our practice of reading and our theory of the novel. The novel gives us our most fully developed and most penetrating theory of love as a comprehensible experience.

This critical perspective on love as the dynamic driving the novel’s narrative—and on psychological causality as the heart of its textualization—has been familiar in literary studies since the nineteenth century. For many in our discipline it was foregrounded by Erich Auerbach’s Mimesis—itself a book strikingly exemplifying the resources of explication de texte. Generations of literature students have seen Auerbach’s accounts of the novel since Manon Lescaut that occupy chapters 16 to 20 as constituting the essence of a genre across transformations over two and a half centuries. These accounts turned around the centering of the novel’s narrative on a psychology of love. More than in any other genre, the causality that makes novels novels focuses on analysis of the interdeterminations of love motive and love behavior.

In How Novels Think Nancy Armstrong theorizes the novel’s preparation for this task of representing love psychology. She argues that the eighteenth-century splitting of the female protagonist—Moll Flanders as wanton adventureress, Moll Flanders as capable narrator—established a standpoint from which human behavior could be explained (80), another intimate dyad. Armstrong cites Foucault’s History of Sexuality on the creation in emergent bourgeois society of a supersensitized subject whose attention is focused on love, sex, and their complications—what Foucault termed “erethism.” This formation still characterizes contemporary relation to the question of love.

Foucault’s erethic subject talks endlessly of love. But does such discourse master its referent? The novel’s elaborate analytic technology, developed over centuries of reflection and technical innovation, still leaves a mystery behind. Even Hegel’s totalizing rationalism runs aground on love, as Hegel recognized himself. The thought experiment in his Philosophy of Right, quoted above, that posits the possibility of an absolute definition of love leads not to the realization but disconcertingly to the annulment of such certainty. Hegel affirms the persistence at the heart of the love experience of a mystery irreducible by reason, beyond any possible explanation. He writes, “Love is therefore the most immense contradiction; the understanding cannot resolve it . . .” (Elements 199).

Ineffable Love

As this Hegel passage indicates and as everybody knows, love is hard to figure out and problematic to talk about. The limitation is important. Discourse about the mystery of love—“the understanding cannot resolve it”—points toward a paradoxical blockage of discourse itself. Language about the suspension of language torques speech and untexts text. If love is incomprehensible, if its enigmas are proof against understanding, perhaps the whole mass of love representations is founded on sand. The question then becomes, What could we say about the speechlessness this situation defines?

This inarticulateness is exacerbated in the case of love as coup de foudre, the sudden thunderclap of ardor that occurs when someone falls in love. This is love’s seemingly
prelinguistic or languageless conflagration—Fisher’s "extreme case." But extreme cases aren’t marginal. In the Western tradition most reflection on the passions reasons not from ongoing states but from emotional paroxysms, from the transfiguration of our whole intimate world (Fisher 22). Paradoxically, this makes the ineffable, the suspension of language, into the cardinal case in the study of love.

Thus the situation of Romeo, telling Benvolio of his disarray when he first saw Juliet: “I have lost myself; I am not here: / This is not Romeo, he’s some other where” (1.1.204–05). Thus the speaking speechlessness of Dante, unable to describe Beatrice’s smile except by saying that he cannot describe it:

How she appears when she gives a little smile
Cannot be explained or encompassed by the mind,
It is such a new and gentle miracle.

Quel ch’ella par quand’un poco sorride,
non si pò dicer, né tener a mente,
si è novo miraculo e gentile.

(Vita nuova 140–41; sonnet 21)

The unsayable forms a distinguished tradition; the book of love is full of what cannot be represented. Passion’s presence is overwhelming and absolutely persuasive. But, as in Dante’s sonnet, passion seems to be unrepresentable.

We might ask what rhetorical trope is at work in such situations. The figure might resemble apophasis (allusion to something by denying that it will be mentioned), adynaton (expressing the impossibility of expressing oneself adequately), or apopisoposis (leaving a sentence unfinished because of unwillingness or inability to continue). But none of these quite fits the case of love’s silencing of speech, stopping language in its tracks. Perhaps we should simply call the figure the trope of ineffability. Perhaps it is not a figure at all. In any case this mode of love silencing arises in the ontology of an experience beyond the control of its rhetor. The ineffable is where words collide with the unverbal—with what I will speculate below is materiality itself. This is a foundational confrontation.

In literary texts representation of this paradigm is ubiquitous. It manifests a gap between a comprehensible state of being and an inarticulable one. Expression becomes interrupted by wordless ecstasy. For example, the narrative break at the heart of chapter 15 of Le rouge et le noir when Julien Sorel and Mme de Renal make love for the first time—a moment represented in its unrepresentability by the silence of Stendhal’s text concerning what we could argue is the most important moment in the novel. Or Proust’s narrator’s wordlessness as he contemplates the sleeping Albertine (“I no longer had to say anything” [“Je n’avais plus à parler”; Recherche 3: 578]). Or the moment in Anna Karenina when, at the extremity of silenced passion, Kitty and Levin acknowledge their love in a word game that disables words, that in effect strips them away (397–98).

The irruption of rapture determines the effacement of language. These are moments of what the Stoics called catalepsy, in which we are penetrated by something whose source and cause are indeterminate but whose authenticity overwhelms us with a certainty beyond language. Catalepsy is elemental, visceral, wordless, and impossible to doubt (Nussbaum 263–75). As Dante’s sonnet to Beatrice makes clear, these moments cohere with a rhetoric of miracles. Think of Paul on the Damascus road (Acts 9) or Augustine upon hearing the toll, lege at the moment of his conversion: “No further did I desire to read, nor was there need” (225; bk. 8, sec. 29).

Theoretical models of the incomprehensibility or unrepresentability of love are rarer than such narratives of narrative’s arrest. How to understand this reticence? In the matter of love, reflection has plenty to say about the state that precedes the coup de foudre. And after a period of psychological and cognitive reorientation, there will be plenty to say
about the succeeding condition as well, what Fisher terms love as disposition (21). But the epiphany—the transition, with its immersion in what I called perspective without perspec-tive—is speechless. What would its theory be?

For writers there are interdixts in a situ-ation where language runs aground, where the writer's mode of being seems in jeopardy. We need a secular analogue of the theory of miracles, a contemporary conceptualiza-tion of the ineffable. But in our age of post-Nietzschean, post-Weberian “disenchantment of the world,” discourses of miracles are in short supply.27 This contradiction might help explain why today a theory of the speechless modality of the ineffable seems blocked so that it appears only in deviation or disguise.

One candidate for such a model is found in Derrida's linked conceptions of the “event” and the “à-venir.”28 In Derrida’s usage the event is what is “to come” (“à-venir”) in the sense of being what is not here now. It is conceived miraculously as an absolute, unfigurable rupture or break.29 As such, it is unspeakable. If it were expressible, repre-sentable, performable, predictable, or determined, entailed, or conditioned in any way, it could not be an event in Derrida's sense of the term. An event is messianic and miraculous, a leap beyond any proposition, postulate, or project. “The event is . . . that which I do not first of all comprehend. Better, the event is first of all that I do not comprehend . . ." (Philo-sophy 90). Only what cannot be thought before it happens is an event. But how can we understand something for which we have no language, how could we recognize it?30 In its paralogism the situation evokes the inarticulate coup de foudre.

Derrida might seem an unexpected proponent of a theory of the ineffable because speechlessness appears to evade his celebrated insistence on limitless textuality (Terdiman, Body 39–40, 133–47). But in an interview Derrida himself enacted such a blockage when he was asked about love. He replied—with visible irritation—that he had nothing to say about it (“Je n'ai rien à dire de l'amour” (“Jacques Derrida”).21

However, Derrida has provocative things to say about this not saying, though his saying emerges obliquely as if he did not want to acknowledge its implications.32 So almost in the mode of Freudian denegation, it is possible to interpret Derrida's grouchy silence about love. I essay such a construction here. It is consequential as a recent example of forms of discourse that conceive love as unspeakable, as without language. I want to mobilize the notion that in the mode of its ineffability, love lies beyond the limits of text. Love is a mystified hors texte, like death in Michel de Certeau's reinterpretation of deconstruction (316).

Much of the power of Derrida's thought comes from the radicalism of its effort to free itself from prescribed determinations. Consequently, in his paradigm, particularly in his later work, things often seem to come out of nowhere. If they had come from somewhere they could hardly be said to have come at all: they were already here. The hors texte, the Derridean event in general, and falling in ineffable love in particular are novas or aeroliths, things that cannot be accounted for by natural or social determinations or discourses. They interrupt the flow of language or temporality or quotidian affect. They can never be anticipated, expressed, or organized for. Derrida calls this mysterious situation the “impossible possible” (Without Aiibi 234). It is the oxymoronic or paralogistic limit of any antideterminist theory of liberation and any absolutist textualism.

For those who have experienced the coup de foudre, it would be hard to detect any distance between that experience (if it can be called an experience) and Derrida's figuration of the event, which we can never anticipate and into which we fall astonished and uncomprehending. So Derrida has a lot to teach us about falling in love, particularly a love beyond textualism. He illuminates
the inarticulate conditions of possibility of that event. There is no “thunderclap” unless we are willing to conceive the world outside subjectivity and unmastered by text as free to unleash on us what it wants—“Venus utterly seizing her prey” (“Vénus toute entière à sa proie attachée”), as Racine expressed it in *Phèdre* (1.3.306). This sovereignty of the material, this independence from language or will, is the price of emptying out rationality and cognition in favor of the unknowable “what’s coming,” the “à-venir.” Once we get taken by the event of another person with whom we find ourselves inexplicably in love, the only thing we say is that we can’t say anything. Derrida defines—negatively—any field that has no language. But, no more than anyone else, he cannot square that theoretical circle or find the language to capture a situation that is without words.

The coming of the new—of the event, of love—is wordless. I suggest that the best model we have for this situation arises in the theory of materiality (Terdiman, *Body* 51–53, 88–92). I think this is what catalepsy means: a penetration of the body, bypassing language and cognition, by an unanswerable material solidarity, by the inexorable weight of matter. Proust’s description of his love affair with Albertine, which Martha Nussbaum is discussing when she raises the theory of catalepsy (265–66), expresses the situation as an “immense new jolt” (“nouveau bond immense”; *Recherche* 4:7), a “physical blow to the heart” (“coup physique au cœur”; 8), a “thunderbolt” (“sillon de la foudre”; 8). We lose consciousness. No wonder there are no words.

People speak; matter is silent. Matter’s wordlessness confronts and confounds intellect and discourse. It figures language’s contrary in a moment when language is blocked. Even more, it determines the blockade. This is a crucial condition for those of us working with words. In the event of love, as in miracles, ineffability—and Derrida as its theorist—fetches up speechless against materiality. Derrida’s notion of the event is his way of confronting unspeakable matter. Materiality materializes the ineffable.

**Material Love**

Love thus models for the crisis of representation. In 1958 the Monotones posed a good question: “who wrote the book of love?” (Davis, Malone, and Patrick). But how does love become a text to begin with? And who could have thought that love was ever only a text? If it is, there must be texts we cannot write and cannot read. In the book of love, many pages are blank.

Silence (ineffable love) and volatility (comprehensible love) seem contradictory. Yet in experience they are not contraries. There is no contradiction between the two registers of love or between their theories. These are not simply frozen, contradictory states. Instead, they create the possibility of the history of love: of change unfolding in lives and in time. With love we cannot discredit the time before we can speak. Silence here is not a devolution. Silence contravenes language. But it generates what it contravenes.

So love can’t speak and does speak. But it doesn’t define an antimony or a random oscillation between representation and speechlessness. Love is written in a history. Its ineffability is impermanent; its silence engenders narrative. It tends toward representation by infecting toward the livable and the writable. Not, to be sure, that in its fraught propinquity dispositional, representable love is unproblematic. But saying what it is becomes possible. Then love gains a story and becomes cognizable in its mysterious transmutation. Love might then be a paradigm for any hermeneutics of the impossible and of the generation of its possibility.

People love being in love, and when they are they talk and write about it with an expansive intensity. Those of us in literary studies know this side of the love dialectic well.
We teach and write about these texts; they are our stock-in-trade. But we can hardly teach the *hors-textes* with the same explanatory focus. They are inaccessible. Yet it is difficult to imagine that their inexplicable existence—the affective centrality of the ineffable and unspeakable—does not reflect our pedagogy concerning love texts and, beyond them, our understanding of textuality and of language itself. The silence of passion is not a fall from the happy state of textuality. I would argue for a construction of the story of love that seeks to reaccrediting love in its time without words and to underline its capacity to engender what it is not.

Love produces enveloping flows of words. But that's not all it produces concerning language. All models break down—even language itself. Love then offers a lesson in linguistic modesty. Some of the fundamental moments of our lives are speechless. Thus, movingly, Whitman writes:

When he whom I love travels with me or sits a long while holding me by the hand,
When the subtle air, the impalpable, the sense that words and reason hold not, surround us and pervade us,
Then I am charged with untold and untellable wisdom, I am silent, I require nothing further.

This other side of the dialectic was pinned not only by Whitman, Dante, and Derrida but also, memorably, by Mickey and Sylvia. Love, they sang, is strange. Perhaps we can interpret the uncanny or discomfitting quality to which their song refers as the *unheimlich*—ultimately determining and determined by a loss of language. Perhaps this register of love's paradigm, its ineffable and inarticulate moment, arises in the wordlessness of orgasm (Barthes 149). Maybe. For something has to explain why lovers—and texts—go silent when the *coup de foudre* hits them. It is as if they were dreaming of stone, as Baudelaire puts it in a startling image in "La beauté." It is as if they were trying to become materiality itself, as Flaubert expresses this dream in the delirious concluding words of *La tentation de Saint-Antoine* ("être la matière!"; 198).

Let us not forget this speculative theory and this possible origin. If following the thunderclap love transforms itself into a voluble and companionable—and readable—text, let us remember that (along with our whole discipline) it may begin in passion, as a song without words, sung in a moment without language. Rock 'n' roll got it right:

Yes, my heart stood still.
Yes, his name was Bill.
And when he walked me home,

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**NOTES**

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1. As many in my age cohort will recognize, my title alludes to Warren Davis, George Malone, and Charles Patrick's 1957 doo-wop sensation "Who Wrote the Book of Love?" recorded by the Monotones. My epigraph quotes the 1956–57 top-20 hit by Mickey "Guitar" Baker and Sylvia Vanderpool Robinson, recorded by them as Mickey and Sylvia (sometimes credited to Bo Diddley ("Sylvia Robinson"). Scholars of love need to attend more closely to rock 'n' roll.

2. This essay deals with what most call romantic love. This is why I will not consider, e.g., the powerful work of Emmanuel Levinas. For Levinas the meaning of love has a wider scope. For a reflection on love strongly influenced by Levinas, see Marion, *Prolegomena*, esp. ch. 4. Badhwar offers a broader conspectus on romantic, familial, and friendly love. For want of space I am unable to consider lyric poetry in any focused way—a regrettable omission.

3. Many will think of the final sentence in Wittgenstein's *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*: "Whereof we cannot speak, thereof we must be silent" ("Wovon man nicht sprechen kann, darüber muss man schweigen"); 189; 188; prop. 7; trans. modified).

4. The idea of forgetting what is closest to us is often associated with Heidegger (e.g., 36).

5. All translations are my own unless otherwise noted.
6. As is well known, Freud viewed love, particularly sexual love, as the "stereotype plate" for many forms of behavior beyond erotic intimacy ("Dynamics" 99–100 and "Notes" 241 [the "Rat Man" case]). For a causal but nonpsychoanalytic paradigm of desire and the erotic, see Kern 147. Elizabeth Povinelli extends a model based on the love relationship in anthropological, historical, and political directions far beyond individual intimacy, so that love becomes a determining paradigm for broader forms of behavior (17).

7. See, e.g., Weiner, particularly ch. 9. While not dealing specifically with the love experience, Flesch offers another view of the biological origins of experiences that scholars of literature are accustomed to discussing. A men gives an overview of the neurochemical basis for love and its perturbations.

8. "A reciprocal recognition which is absolute Spirit" ("ein gegenseitiges Anerkennen, welches der absolute Geist ist"; *Phänomenologie 408; *Phänomenologie 493). Kant is saucily more down-to-earth: "This natural union of the sexes... is the union of two persons of different sex for life-long reciprocal possession of their genitalia [Geschlechtseigenschaften, usually translated more primly as "sexual faculties"]" (*Science* 110; *Metaphysik* 81; trans. modified).

9. Explication de texte has a long history, beginning with the exegesis of sacred books. It took on a singular prominence in pedagogy from the late nineteenth century in France through the New Criticism in the mid-twentieth century in the United States. In the method of explication, vigilant examination of inner motive (as in various confessional practices [Terdiman, *Present Past*, ch. 3]) joined with the long tradition of Scholastic textual commentary, with the humanist secularization of the technique in the Renaissance, and with the rise of a more scientific philology in the nineteenth century to become formalized in Gustave Lanson’s influential late-nineteenth-century pedagogy. Lanson is widely recognized as the primary promoter of the method, but it had begun to be institutionalized before him. In the Villenain and Cousin reforms of 1840 in France, explication de texte became a required exercise in oral examinations for the baccalauréat and licence. In 1853 it became a required part of the agrégation. Lanson, appointed to the chaire d’éloquence française at the Sorbonne, promoted explication de texte as both an oral and a written exercise. This revision was adopted in 1902 and fully implemented by 1910. See Compagnon, *Troisième république*, secs. 11–12, esp. 79–85, and Lanson. Lanson came to the United States in 1911 to take up a visiting appointment at Columbia University, where he promoted explication de texte as an indispensable method of literary study. The important Proustian Robert Vigneron at the University of Chicago continued this proselytization in the 1920s. See Stoekl 12 and Ford 22–23.

10. Rousseau made the point in the preface to *La nouvelle Héloïse*: "Jamais fille chastie n’a lu de romans" ("No chaste young woman can ever read novels"), 4). The novel’s relation to pornography is cosier than some scholars may feel comfortable acknowledging. On the vexed connection between pornography and novels, see Ferguson; Williams, *Hard Core and Porn Studies*. Steven Marcus’s classic *The Other Victorians* lays this relation bare.

11. "Les beaux livres ajoutent aux événements une tranche d’âme cocainisée. Dans Le rouge et le noir, chaque action est suivie d’une partie de la phrase indiquant ce qui se passe inconsciemment dans l’âme..." (Contre 665).

12. See Armstrong, *How Novels Think* 170n2, and Foucault 120–21. Love has surely not remained identical over the centuries. Foucault’s historicization reflects that. But there is no need to claim there have been absolute breaks in amorous ideology or practice or that the notion of love can’t make conceptual connections across these differences.

13. Love is assuredly not the only effect or experience to which forms of ineffability or inexpressibility are attributed or to which the peculiar verbally interdicted "strangeness" I’m referring to here is ascribed. Pain, trauma, and (at the other end of the eudaimonistic scale) forms of joy other than that afforded in love are all represented as speechless. I make no claim to set love above these other forms of experience. I argue that love’s strangeness is typological, but it is not unique. Moreover there is an inherent strangeness any time a context passes over into text. See Rorty 154.

14. On the shattering "break" of the I in love, see Nancy 247–48 and Ware 492.

15. There is a helpful history of this rhetoric in ch. 6 of Marion, *Visible* ("What Cannot Be Said: Apparition and the Discourse of Love" [101–18]). See also sec. 28 of Marion, *Erotic Phenomenon* ("Words for Saying Nothing" [143–50]), and Riffaterre 109.

16. Despite its 2,758-page length and extracts from the fifth century BCE to the present, there is no index entry on "love" in the *The Norton Anthology of Theory and Criticism*.

17. The Weberian phrase ("Entzauberung der Welt") came from Schiller (Gerth and Mills 51), Weber used it extensively (Schaft 224–32). A well-known appearance of the term is in Weber’s "Science as a Vocation" 155.


19. The conception of such a rupture or break is a consistent theme from the beginning of Derrida’s work. An early and intransigent statement of it comes in the "Exergue" to *Of Grammatology*: "The future... is that which breaks absolutely with constituted normality and can only be proclaimed, presented, as a sort of monstrosity" (5).

20. There is an evident resemblance between this Derridean complex and Foucault’s unreasonalizable interepistemic breaks or parallel formations in Bachelard and in Althusser (Derrida, *Acts* 27).

22. The interpretation of obliquity is fundamental to deconstruction. It is similar to the case Derrida detects in Rousseau ("Rousseau says it without wishing to say it", Grammatology 200). More generally, the hermeneutic Derrida practices here projects "a certain relationship, unperceived by the writer, between what he commands and what he does not command of the patterns of the language that he uses" (158). This is a situation from which Derrida would have been the last to exempt himself.

23. For this 1963 top-10 hit, "And When He Walked Me Home," recorded by the Crystals, see Berry, Greenwich, and Spector.

WORKS CITED


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