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NEW APPROACHES IN THE LITERARY-CRITICAL STUDY OF ROMAN POETRY

I. Introduction¹

Since the Second World War the literary-critical study of Greek and Roman texts has undergone a marked reorientation. The changes have been especially noticeable in the study of Greek literature, where Milman Parry's thesis alone, regarding the oral nature of Homeric epic, has wrought a lasting transformation in literary scholarship. However, the reorientation that has taken place is not only due to what might be called critical revolutions initiated by Classicists themselves within their own discipline; for the study of Greek and Roman literature has also been substantially affected by fundamental changes in hermeneutical perspective and critical methodology which had their beginning in the literary scholarship and criticism of the modern languages. In English studies the impact over the past half-century of the so-called New Criticism, with its heavily aesthetic-formal approach to literature, has still not been undone by the more recent structuralist and post-structuralist theories and methodologies;² in fact, the New Criticism has, to a considerable extent, assimilated these subsequent developments.

Classicists have, in general, been much more conservative than their fellow scholars and critics of the modern literatures; thus structuralist, post-structuralist, and feminist criticism, to name the three most influential approaches of the past two decades, have had, thus far, relatively little influence on literary scholarship in Classical Studies. On the other hand, the New Criticism has undoubtedly had a major impact. This paper will discuss the nature and extent of the

¹ This paper is based on two papers presented at annual conferences of the Classical Association of Canada: "Recent Literary Approaches to Propertius," at the Université de Montréal in May 1985, and "Recent Approaches and Future Possibilities in the Literary-Critical Study of Roman Poetry," at the University of Manitoba in June 1986. My sincere thanks are due to Peter Booth and Jim Jope for their stimulating discussions with me of some of the issues raised in this paper. I am also indebted to the two anonymous referees for their helpful comments and criticisms.

² A bibliography of works reflecting the theory and practice of New Criticism (or the aesthetic-formal approach to literature, to use a more general term applicable also outside the English-speaking world) during the formative years from the 1930's to the 1950's can be found in Rene Wellek and Austin Warren, *Theory of Literature*, third edition (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World 1962) 338-340 (section IV); section III (338) has a brief bibliography of works reflecting the methodology of the *explication de texte*, the virtual equivalent, in the French-speaking world, of the New Criticism.

reorientation in hermeneutical perspective and critical methodology as it has affected the study of Roman poetry, with particular reference to epic, lyric, and elegiac poetry. It will consider the fruitful consequences of the changes that have taken place, but also the inevitable limitations which each new approach brings with itself, and will suggest that the literary critic of Roman poetry is best served by a judicious, non-dogmatic eclecticism, certainly, at least, in his or her practical criticism, joined with a keen awareness of the hermeneutical presuppositions behind every form of scholarship and criticism.

II. The Assimilation of the New Criticism

The general direction taken by Propertian scholarship since the 1950's may be taken as a fair measure of the profound impact that the New Criticism and similar approaches have made on Classical Studies. Propertian studies over the past thirty years or so have also been characterized by a much more concentrated endeavor to understand the elegies in terms of the intricate network of all the aesthetic-formal techniques, strategies, and conventions which, for the New Criticism, represent the essence of poetry, and thereby to appreciate where the individuality and distinctiveness of Propertian elegy lie. The heavily historical and psychological approaches that were often typical of the older scholarship (of, for instance, such editors and commentators as P. Enk and M. Rothstein) are generally avoided, or at least guarded against, by the newer scholarship with its much stricter aesthetic-formal objectives.

A comparison between E. Reitzenstein's 1936 monograph, *Wirklichkeitsbild und Gefühlsentwicklung bei Propertius*,³ and John Warden's 1980 study, *Fallax Opus: Poet and Reader in the Elegies of Propertius*,⁴ well illustrates the profound changes in hermeneutical perspective and critical methodology that have taken place over the past few decades. Reitzenstein's study is, on the whole, very perceptive and also aesthetically sensitive in its discussion of the portrayal of the self in Propertius, and indeed as such it is undoubtedly superior to a great deal of older scholarship. However, while he certainly avoids the excesses of the naively-autobiographical approach so beloved of nineteenth-century romantic criticism, with its view of Propertian elegy as a poetry of diary-like self-revelation, Reitzenstein is still rather heavily influenced by the hermeneutical criterion of psychological and dramatic verisimilitude, which often leads to an inadequate understanding of some of Propertius' most complex and

³ E. Reitzenstein, *Wirklichkeitsbild und Gefühlsentwicklung bei Propertius*, *Philologus Supplementband* 29 (Leipzig: Dieterich 1936).

⁴ John Warden, *Fallax Opus: Poet and Reader in the Elegies of Propertius* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press 1980). Hans-Peter Stahl's recent major study of Propertius, *Propertius: "Love" and "War"* (Berkeley: University of California Press 1985) is more traditionally philological in its approach, but still shows, to a considerable extent, the influence of the New Criticism.

subtle poetry—one need think of the programmatic poems alone (and it is well to consider that the apparently straightforward, confessional first elegy of the *Monobiblos* is also very much a highly contrived programmatic poem).

John Warden's approach, by contrast, is less concerned with questions of psychologically realistic portrayal. His much sharper aesthetic-formal focus, which is well brought into play in the detailed literary analyses contained in the first part of his study, has led him to a greater awareness and more precise formulation of the really manipulative aspect of Propertius' poetry, of the variety and subtlety of the fictional poses enacted by the elegist, and of the richly modulated fantasy-world unfolded before the reader. He still uses terminology suggestive of a criterion of psychological verisimilitude (for instance, "emotional intensity"),⁵ but the literary-critical perspective that generally prevails in his study is one that emphasizes the role played by the poet as a supremely resourceful actor and communicator, rather than as a transparently sincere portraitist of his own self. Not all Classicists are comfortable with the *persona*-approach to personal poetry,⁶ but this reorientation in critical perspective has generally been fruitful for literary scholarship.

Of course, a strictly non-historical and non-philological New Criticism will never produce credible results in literary scholarship. The necessary dependence of the aesthetic-formal approach on the discipline of philology is, for instance, well demonstrated by the question of the structure of each of the four books of Propertius' elegies. Aside from the fact that the critic must be thoroughly conversant with the structural techniques and conventions displayed in this regard by the other personal poetry of the Augustan era, and indeed must be aware of the relevant literary tradition as a whole, he or she also cannot ignore the possibility that Book two of Propertius consists of what were originally two separate books, or that the *Monobiblos* probably enjoyed a very distinctly separate publication from the succeeding books;⁷ these have been interesting problems in Propertian scholarship since the nineteenth century. A 1984 article by G.O. Hutchinson represents a successful blend of contemporary literary-critical concerns and the interests of the more traditional scholarship with regard to the question of book structure in Propertius;⁸ welcome, among other things, is his rejection of any search for a numerically patterned structure in each book

⁵ John Warden (above, n.4) 87.

⁶ See, for instance, the sharp criticisms in this respect by Kevin McCabe, "Was Juvenal a Structuralist? A Look at Anachronisms in Literary Criticism," *G & R* 33 (1986) 78-84, especially 80-81.

⁷ For recent work on these questions see Otto Skutsch, "The Second Book of Propertius," *HSCP* 79 (1975) 229-233, and Edward P. Menes, "The External Evidence for the Division of Propertius, Book 2," *CP* 78 (1983) 136-143.

⁸ G.O. Hutchinson, "Propertius and the Unity of the Book," *JRS* 74 (1984) 99-106.

in favour of an elucidation of the complex and vibrant network of thematic interrelationships linking individual elegies to one another.

A purist New Criticism, then, with its ahistorical and synchronic bias, will not serve the Classicist very well.⁹ The historical perspective can never be ignored. In Roman studies, therefore, the insistence of both Jasper Griffin and M.L. Clarke that any meaningful examination and appreciation of the personal poets cannot be divorced altogether from a consideration of political, social and cultural milieu will always, and rightly, find a ready hearing.¹⁰ It is, of course, Marxist-oriented scholarship which will often score strongly on this point, and even scholars with decidedly non-Marxist sympathies can find valuable insights here.¹¹

Source-criticism, which has long been dear to traditional philology, has been a favourite *bête noire* of the New Criticism. But here again the Classicist

⁹ For some trenchant criticisms, from a general hermeneutical point of view, of the strictly ahistorical perspective of purist New Criticism, see Richard Palmer, *Hermeneutics* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press 1969) 221-253.

¹⁰ Jasper Griffin, "Augustan Poetry and the Life of Luxury," *JRS* 66 (1976) 87-104 and "Genre and Real Life in Latin Poetry," *JRS* 71 (1981) 39-49; M.L. Clarke, "Latin Love Poets and the Biographical Approach," *G & R* 23 (1976) 132-139. Hans-Peter Stahl in the introduction (x) to his recent book on Propertius (see n.4) recognizes that the Propertian critic, also, should not altogether abandon the traditionally historical orientation of Classical studies.

¹¹ For a general brief overview of East European Marxist scholarship on Classical Literature, see Chester E. Natunewicz, "East European Classical Scholarship: Some Recent Trends," *Arethusa* 8 (1975) 171-190, especially 173-175. That it would be overly tendentious to claim that Marxist East European critics and scholars remain so closely wedded to the cause of social realism as to overlook the aesthetic merits of art and literature which cannot be fitted into this tradition is well demonstrated by the fine appreciation shown by the Soviet scholar A.S. Bogomolov (who is drawing on the work of other Soviet scholars) of Lucretius' originality as a philosopher-poet, who transformed the "mechanistic" world picture of Democritus and Epicurus into "a poetical image of living nature" (see A.S. Bogomolov, *History of Ancient Philosophy*, translated from the Russian [Moscow: Progress Publishers (1985) 273-278]; the quotation is taken from 274). The Italian school of neo-Marxist literary scholarship is best represented by the work of Enrico Flores, especially his *Letteratura Latina e Società* (Naples: Liguori Editore 1973) and *Latinità Arcaica e Produzione Linguistica* (Naples: Liguori Editore 1978); particularly relevant to this survey are the papers on Livius Andronicus, Lucretius and Juvenal in the former work. This scholar's often penetrating insight into the socio-political aspect of Roman poetry is based on careful historical scholarship, which stays clear of any carelessly unhistorical use of key-terms such as "class struggle" and "revolution;" thus, at the conclusion of his paper on Lucretius, "Lingua e Ideologia in Lucrezio" (*Letteratura Latina*, 23-43), he qualifies his final statement, "Lucrezio in relazione al suo tempo fece, e fu consapevole di fare, un uso politico-rivoluzionario dell'arte," with a warning against any anachronistic conceptualization of the term "revolution."

cut distinction made by the generic approach between form and content.¹⁵ This distinction, which was characteristic of the study of rhetoric and literary composition during the Hellenistic and Roman periods (Longinus' *On the Sublime* being the great exception), does not meaningfully operate, as Professor Williams well demonstrates, in the best Roman poetry of the late Republican and Augustan periods. Generic criticism seems to be most effective in its analyses of the literary conventions at work in the less reflective types of poetry composed mainly in response to an external occasion or demand. Thus the generic approach is indeed elucidating in Alex Hardie's 1983 study of Statius' *Silvae*, although even here complexities and ambiguities that are not easily accommodated by literary prescription and convention are glossed over (especially in *Silvae* 3.4 and 5.2).¹⁶ The generic approach, then, is a very useful component in contemporary literary criticism of Roman poetry, but it cannot pretend to be a full critical repertory.

III. The Assimilation of Structuralism

Modern structuralism is best regarded as a methodology with a strong orientation towards linguistics.¹⁷ However, even as a methodology it has its philosophical presuppositions, and it can be put to ideological uses. The basic heuristic motive behind structuralism might be described as a quite far-ranging attempt in our century to bring the humanities and social sciences together again under the aegis of a cohesive, unified hermeneutics, in reaction to the increasing intellectual fragmentation that had characterized the rapid, indeed constantly-accelerating, accumulation of knowledge during the nineteenth century. The dominant positivist mental outlook of the last century was a powerful catalyst that encouraged the centrifugal trend in the development also of the various scholarly disciplines, including Classical philology. Nineteenth-century hermeneutics, whether it was Hegel's idealist dialectic or, later, Dilthey's advocacy of the unity and special character of the human sciences (*die Geisteswissenschaften*), failed to impose its visions of scientific and intellectual coherence. Following Robert Scholes, we might regard both dialectic materialism (i.e. philosophical Marxism) and psychoanalysis as precursors of

¹⁵ Gordon Williams, *Figures of Thought in Roman Poetry* (New Haven: Yale University Press 1980) ix.

¹⁶ Alex Hardie, *Statius and the Silvae* (Liverpool: Francis Cairns 1983); in an article, "Panegyric and Candour in Statius 3.4," to be published in *Studies in Latin Literature and Roman History*, volume V (1987), *Collection Latomus*, I shall discuss the problems posed by *Silvae* 3.4 and 5.2.

¹⁷ The best introductions in the English-speaking world to literary structuralism are Robert Scholes, *Structuralism in Literature* (New Haven: Yale University Press 1974), and Jonathan Culler, *Structuralist Poetics* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press 1975).

knows that literary tradition is always of intrinsic importance to the study of Greek and Roman poetry. Thus, on the one hand, the critic will avoid a narrowly-conceived *Quellenforschung* and would probably agree with Alexander Dalzell's caution against the assumption that Propertius' handling of Homeric themes must have been strongly indebted to (now lost) Hellenistic sources;¹² on the other hand, the same critic will never altogether disregard the possibility of a literary tradition lying behind a certain theme, motif, or detail, and might therefore be receptive, for instance, to John Yardley's arguments that Propertius' first mistress, Lycinna, whom the poet mentions in 3.15, may very well be a figure based less on personal experience than on the literary tradition of comedy.¹³

It is useful to discuss under the heading of the New Criticism the critical theory and methodology of what might be called the criticism of generic composition, which was pioneered by Francis Cairns in the early 1970's.¹⁴ With its emphasis on the overriding importance of literary convention, it is, on the whole, very much grounded in classical philology. However, with its equal concentration on the specific configuration that a literary tradition assumes in an individual work, it also satisfies, to some degree, the hermeneutical expectations of the New Criticism. Professor Cairns sees the individual poet as being largely guided by the thematic and formal conventions of the relevant genres or sub-genres; even what appears to be originality on the author's part can often just as well be explained in terms of a complex process of cross-fertilization, so to speak, that may take place between different genres or sub-genres. The central task of the literary critic is to situate an individual poet within the literary tradition; ultimately, this tradition can be formulated for any genre of literature (for instance, love elegy) in terms of a typology of recurring themes and motifs and the rhetorical-literary forms that go with these. For suitable terminology and classificatory schemata in the construction of such typologies, the critic is directed mainly to the handbooks on rhetorical and literary composition written during the Hellenistic and Roman periods.

Generic criticism is sound in its insistence on the weight carried by literary tradition, but it tends to be too heavily focused on the utilization and adaptation of traditional themes by the individual author—on *inventio*, in other words. As such, it can hardly do full justice to the full aesthetic-formal nature of any particular work of literature. Also, following Gordon Williams in his 1980 study, *Figures of Thought in Roman Poetry*, one may question the rather clear-

¹² Alexander Dalzell, "Homeric Themes in Propertius," *Hermathena* 129 (1980) 29-36.

¹³ John C. Yardley, "Propertius' Lycinna," *TAPA* 104 (1974) 429-434.

¹⁴ Francis Cairns, *Generic Composition in Greek and Latin Poetry* (Edinburgh: University of Edinburgh Press 1972).

structuralism, for both of these engaged in a strenuous and sustained attempt to develop a comprehensive and unified heuristic model for the practice of the humanities and the social sciences.¹⁸ However, with their clearly reductionist tendencies, they both clearly failed to provide an adequate philosophical framework for the study of human experience and culture.

What may be termed structuralism proper has its origins in the work of Ferdinand de Saussure and the later Prague school of linguistics and semiotics; these have given modern structuralism a theoretical foundation that leans heavily on linguistics and semiotics. It was Claude Levi-Strauss who first applied the concepts and methodology of linguistics and semiotics to a non-linguistic discipline, namely the study of myth, and as such, of course, acquired the reputation of being the structuralist *par excellence*. At the same time, the study of literature came within the purview of structuralism in the work of A.J. Greimas, Roland Barthes, Roman Jakobson, and many others.

Unfortunately, modern structuralism, whenever practised holistically and uncritically, is as reductionist as Marxist and Freudian theory. The linguistic and semiotic model of human experience and culture, subtle and refined though it may be in some of the best work of the structuralists, does not provide an ultimate heuristic key. Structuralist theory and analysis have been fruitful, I think, in the study of the mental patterns underlying myth or of the narrative conventions underlying folk-tales and much popular literature¹⁹ but, exactly because of their exclusively linguistic and semiotic foundations, they have been far less successful with the more complex literary genres. Thus I agree with Jonathan Culler's criticism of Roman Jakobson's structural analyses of lyric poetry: from an aesthetic-formal point of view, these are indeed remarkably irrelevant and arbitrary in their findings.²⁰ A thorough-going linguistic and semiotic methodology has proven to be too crude a tool in any area of literary study where a finely-nuanced aesthetic-formal methodology (such as one can expect from the best New Criticism) as well as, perhaps, a keen awareness of literary tradition and historical context are absolutely necessary prerequisites.

Structuralist theory and methodology, then, must be applied with extreme selectiveness by the literary critic studying Roman poetry. In general, Classicists have not been swept along by the structuralist tide as have been their

¹⁸ Robert Scholes, 1-2.

¹⁹ The classic structuralist work on the analysis of popular narrative literature (e.g. the detective novel) is probably Roland Barthes, *Introduction to the Structural Analysis of Narratives* (translated from the French), in *A Barthes Reader*, ed. Susan Sontag (New York: Hill & Wang 1982) 251-295; there is also now a structuralist-influenced study of Apuleius' *Metamorphoses* by John J. Winkler, *Auctor and Actor: A Narratological Reading of Apuleius' Golden Ass* (Berkeley: University of California Press 1985).

²⁰ Jonathan Culler (see n.17) 55-74.

fellow critics and scholars in the modern languages and literatures. In fact, one could wish, with John Peradotto, for a greater awareness among Classicists of at least the theoretical and methodological implications of structuralism and other contemporary schools of hermeneutics and critical practice.²¹ The Latinists have been especially conservative. Thus in the study of Roman poetry there is nothing comparable as yet to Charles Segal's structuralist-influenced *Tragedy and Civilization: An Interpretation of Sophocles*.²² I suspect that it is the primary, less derivative nature of the Greek literary classics, which stand so much closer to the mythical world-view and frame of mind than their Roman counterparts, which is largely responsible for this state of affairs. Greek literature has been drawn into the focus of a great deal of structuralist-influenced analysis of myth (for instance, in the works of Jean-Paul Vernant and Marcel Detienne), and this has had inevitable spin-off effects on the literary study of the Greek Classics, especially early epic and didactic poetry and Classical tragedy.

However, the small amount of structuralist-influenced work that has been done on Roman poetry generally reflects the judicious selectiveness which I would advocate. The outstanding example is Gordon Williams's heuristically fruitful use in *Figures of Thought in Roman Poetry* of Roman Jakobson's linguistic-semiotic categories of metaphor and metonymy in order to develop his thesis that in the best personal poetry of the Augustan era, which is, above all, a poetry of reflection rather than of declamation, theme and form are deployed with such rich subtlety that the two blend, as it were, into one poetic whole, transcending the conventional rhetorical dichotomy between them.²³

In an article on Catullus 85 (*Odi et amo...*), Pierre Colaclides offers a detailed analysis of what might be called the poetry of syntax at work in this epigram and in others structurally similar to it.²⁴ The analysis is presented as a "lecture linguistique" and shows the influence of structuralist methodology (for instance, that of E. Benveniste and Roman Jakobson), but it also draws upon the resources of more traditional philosophy and literary criticism, and thus emerges as a convincing piece of criticism that satisfies, I think, the demand of the New

²¹ John Peradotto, "Texts and Unrefracted Facts: Philology, Hermeneutics and Semiotics," *Arethusa* 16 (1983) 15-33.

²² Charles Segal, *Tragedy and Civilization: An Interpretation of Sophocles* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press 1981). Structuralist hermeneutics and methodology are also at work in his *Dionysiac Poetics and Euripides' Bacchae* (Princeton: Princeton University Press 1982), especially chapters 2-5.

²³ Williams (see n.15) is indebted especially to the section, "The Metaphoric and Metonymic Poles," in Roman Jakobson and Morris Halle, *The Fundamentals of Language* (The Hague: Mouton 1956) 76-82.

²⁴ Pierre Colaclides, "Odi et Amo—Une Lecture Linguistique de c. LXXXV de Catulle," *Contemporary Literary Hermeneutics and Interpretation of Classical Texts*, ed. S. Kresic (Ottawa: University of Ottawa Press 1981) 227-333.

Criticism for a keen and rigorously articulated sensitivity to individual aesthetic form.

Finally, the Italian scholar Alfredo Ghiselli has made what is thus far the most thorough and ambitious structuralist-influenced study of a single Roman personal poem, namely Horace, *Odes* I.1, which he analyzes according to a number of structural schemata.²⁵ In general, Ghiselli's study is sound from an aesthetic-formal point of view and underlines the rich, multi-layered semantic and formal complexity of this lyric. However, a few of the analyses seem less than relevant; I agree with Henri Bardon (in his generally favourable review) that, for instance, the homophonic structures uncovered by Ghiselli are mostly linguistic rather than aesthetic-formal in character.²⁶ One will also endorse Bardon's criticism that Ghiselli totally neglects historical context.²⁷ Such an omission is, of course, altogether typical of structuralist analysis and is a logical consequence of the structuralist conception of textuality, which views literature as a polymorphous, synchronic whole in contrast to the hermeneutical perspective of traditional scholarship, which examines the individual work of literature as a historically and formally determinate artistic entity.²⁸ The more purist forms of the New Criticism, as I have noted, are equally ahistorical in intent; however, since they emphasize aesthetic form in its individual manifestation, they avoid the universalizing tendencies of structuralist hermeneutics and methodology.

The literary-critical studies that have been cited illustrate, each in its own way, that effective use can be made by Classicists (such as Colaclides and Ghiselli) of structuralist methodology, or at least of some structuralist categories for linguistic-semiotic analysis (as with Williams). But again, it needs to be underlined that no structuralist-influenced literary criticism will be credible unless it draws plentifully upon the wealth of knowledge, insights, and heuristic resources offered by traditional philology and the more recent New Criticism.

IV. The Assimilation of Post-Structuralism and of Other Contemporary Schools of Literary-Critical Practice

Post-structuralism, which is best represented by the work of Jacques Derrida and Paul de Man from the 1960's onwards, should not be understood as implying

²⁵ Alfredo Ghiselli, *Orazio, Ode I.1: Saggio di analisi formale*, second edition (Bologna: Patron 1983).

²⁶ *Latomus* 44 (1985) 186.

²⁷ *Ibid.*

²⁸ For an excellent discussion of the structuralist understanding of the "textuality" of literature, see Carl A. Rubino, "*Lectio Difficilior Praeferenda Est* : Some Remarks on Contemporary French Thought and the Study of Classical Literature," *Arethusa* 10 (1977) 63-83, especially 71-75.

a radical break with structuralism.²⁹ Rather, it is best characterized as a late, perhaps the final, phase of structuralism itself, for it is only a logical extension of the linguistic and semiotic model of human experience and culture which is the foundation of structuralist hermeneutics. Post-structuralism simply "absolutizes," as I would term it, the fundamental structuralist principle that all signification is relative and arbitrary. Thus meaning in the spoken language is produced through the arbitrary binary differentiation of phonic signs. According to the structuralist conception, a sign (any sign, not simply a phonic sign) is always basically arbitrary, for it possesses its actual signifying power only by virtue of its distinguishability from other signs. For the post-structuralist thinker and critic, any text contains potentially a series of significations that runs, in fact, to an infinite regress. Thus it is impossible to identify any stable locus of meaning. Any text can be deconstructed (to use the common post-structuralist term, which has become highly fashionable now in literary criticism) into an immeasurably complex and ultimately contradictory "logic" of signification. For Jacques Derrida, in particular, the search for *logos* has been the grand obsessive will-o'-the-wisp of Western thought. For him all human discourse, too, is governed by the Heraclitean flux, and the only activity that he and other post-structuralist critics aspire to perform upon a literary text is to uncover at least some of the more striking antinomies of meaning with which it is teeming.

The typical Classicist, well weaned on Classical *logos*, will not, I am sure, be attracted to this intellectually vertiginous hermeneutics, which seems to rule out any stably focused study and criticism of texts and to reduce the entire enterprise to one gigantic *aporia*.³⁰ However, post-structuralism has been useful in that it has unmasked the fundamental antinomy—that is, the linguistic-semiotic reductionism leading to the impossibility of stable logical identification—that lies concealed within "orthodox" structuralism. On a more practical basis, post-structuralist criticism has shown itself to be remarkably

²⁹ A lucid and incisive introduction to post-structuralist hermeneutics and critical practice is offered by Jonathan Culler, *On Deconstruction: Theory and Criticism after Structuralism* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press 1982), who also deals extensively with feminist approaches to literary criticism; there is a helpful comprehensive bibliography.

³⁰ For a Classicist's thoughtful response to "deconstruction," see Thomas Rosenmeyer, "The *Nouvelle Critique* and the Classicist," *Comparative Literature Studies* 18 (1981) 215-229; much along the same lines are the criticisms made by M. Heath in a review, *CR* n.s. 35 (1985) 243-246, of Simon Goldhill's post-structuralist study of Aeschylus in *Language, Sexuality, Narrative: The Oresteia* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1984). The at times post-structuralist approach taken by Charles Segal in his *Dionysiac Poetics* (see n.22) remains, I think, closer to the mainstream of literary criticism in classical studies than Goldhill's hermeneutics and methodology.

Post-structuralist criticism has continued the long-standing tradition that philosophy must concern itself also with literary hermeneutics and may indeed venture out into practical criticism. Earlier in this century this venerable tradition had been maintained by phenomenology and existentialism, and is displayed, in particular, in the writings of José Ortega y Gasset, Martin Heidegger, and Jean-Paul Sartre. The outstanding example of the assimilation of a non-philosophical Classical text into a phenomenological and existentialist perspective is Martin Heidegger's well-known meditation on the "Ode to Man" in Sophocles' *Antigone*.³⁶ Philosophically-oriented criticism of Roman poetry has always been very sporadic in this century, including the past few decades, and is likely to remain so: no matter what the philosophical perspective might be, there are very few critics who can skilfully mesh this with practical literary criticism. Some Classicists will fault Heidegger's approach on this score, although his meditation, for all its generalizing ontological concerns, also consistently presents itself as a detailed *explication de texte*.

One will further object that a great deal of Roman poetry will not really accommodate a heavily philosophical perspective. Lucretius and Vergil, of course, will, but the same cannot be said of the personal poetry. However, there are some personal poems where a philosophically-oriented criticism, perhaps along phenomenological and existentialist lines, can reveal a rich layer of meaning which cannot but help to deepen our literary appreciation. This is certainly true of Michael Murray's Heideggerian analysis of Horace's Soracte-Ode (*Odes* 1.9), which displays a sensitivity to aesthetic form and poetic structure that accords well with the literary-critical expectations of any aesthetic-formal approach.³⁷ The well-known hermeneutic thinker, Hans-Georg Gadamer, in his study of Catullus 8 (*Miser Catulle...*), also shows an excellent ability to set practical criticism within the context of basic philosophical (i.e. hermeneutical) considerations, such as that of polysemy, while at the same time to offer in his practical criticism a perceptive and sharply-focused interpretation of the poem.³⁸

Kinds of Ambiguous Expression," *TAPA* 100 (1969) 221-235; Martinella T. Chersoni, *Struttura e Funzionalità della Lingua Poetica di Propertio* (Bologna: Pàtron 1973) especially chapter 2, "L'Ambiguità nel Linguaggio Poetico di Propertio;" and J.P. Sullivan, *Propertius: A Critical Introduction* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1976) 147-158. Propertian humor, wit and irony are also the subject of E. Lefèvre's monograph, *Propertius Ludibundus* (Heidelberg: Winter 1966).

³⁶ Martin Heidegger, *An Introduction to Metaphysics* (translated from the German) (New Haven: Yale University Press 1959) 146-165.

³⁷ Michael Murray, "Horace's Soracte ode (I.9): The Hermeneutic Response," *Contemporary Literary Hermeneutics* (see n.24) 281-285.

³⁸ Hans-Georg Gadamer, "A Classical Text—A Hermeneutic Challenge," (translated from the German), *Contemporary Literary Hermeneutics* (see n.24) 327-332.

sensitive to such features of a literary text as irony, ambivalence, ambiguity, tension, and paradox, with which the more traditional forms of criticism are also concerned. While the Classicist may want to skirt the ultimate hermeneutical impasse held out by post-structuralist criticism, he or she can draw insights from its careful *explication de texte*, which at times reminds one of the practice of the New Criticism.

The only major example thus far of post-structuralist literary criticism in the study of Roman poetry is John Brenkman's lengthy article on Ovid's version of the myth of Echo and Narcissus in Book Three of the *Metamorphoses*.³¹ Not surprisingly, it explores the paradox of personal identity as set out in Ovid's handling of the story but, like most post-structuralist criticism, it also explores issues of a primarily ontological and epistemological nature, which it finds implicit in the logic of the text. Thus, for Brenkman, the paradoxical relationship between Narcissus' *corpus* (the self) and his *imago* (the other, without which, however, the self cannot know itself), besides reflecting the ontological paradox of self-consciousness, also points to the paradoxical relationship between writing and the spoken language: "As the non-living representation of the voice, writing installs a relation to death within the processes of language."³² It is difficult to do justice to Brenkman's complex analysis within one paragraph; however, its central intellectual thrust is a philosophy of ontological and epistemological flux, and this strikes me as typical of all post-structuralist criticism.

Of course, one hardly has to be a post-structuralist critic in order to uncover major elements of paradox in a literary text, as is shown by Niall Rudd's recent article on the same episode in the *Metamorphoses*;³³ this is also well demonstrated by W.R. Johnson's remarkable study of the grim ironies and dark undertones in Vergil's *Aeneid*,³⁴ or by the keen sensitivity that has grown in Propertian criticism over the past few decades to the semantic and total complexity of many of the poet's elegies.³⁵ However, the ultimate objective of the post-structuralist critic seems to be philosophical rather than literary-critical in nature: the literary text only serves as an instrument on which to sound the perpetual theme, so to speak, of Heracleitan flux and sophistic paradox.

³¹ John Brenkman, "Narcissus in the Text," *Georgia Review* 30 (1976) 293-327.

³² *Ibid.* 317.

³³ Niall Rudd, "Echo and Narcissus: Notes for a seminar on Ovid, *Met.* 3.339-510," *EMC* 30 (1986) 43-48.

³⁴ W.R. Johnson, *Darkness Visible: A Study of Vergil's Aeneid* (Berkeley: University of California Press 1976).

³⁵ On irony, semantic ambivalence, and related literary characteristics of Propertian elegy, see M.W. Edwards, "Intensification of Meaning in Propertius and Others," *TAPA* 92 (1961) 128-144; D.N. Levin, "Propertius, Catullus, and Three

hoped, therefore, that this line of criticism will continue to make its presence felt in the study of Roman poetry.

V. Conclusion

As I already intimated in the introduction, the literary criticism of Roman poetry will fare best if it continues to present itself as an unabashedly eclectic discipline, free from the quasi-dogmatic dominance of one particular brand of hermeneutics or scholarship. At the same time, practical eclecticism should not go hand-in-hand with hermeneutical ignorance or complacency; the critic cannot afford to be unaware, or refuse to become aware, of the theoretical foundations that undergird the whole enterprise of literary criticism.⁴⁴ The philosophically-oriented and feminist schools of criticism, in particular, have demonstrated a keen awareness of the hermeneutical presuppositions that lie behind any reading of a text. The cultivation of such an awareness cannot but help to foster not only a philosophical discernment in questions of literary theory, but also a vigorous practical criticism.

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use of psychoanalytical theory has been made very recently by Charles Segal in his study of Senecan tragedy, *Language and Desire in Seneca's Phaedra* (Princeton: Princeton University Press 1986). His principal hermeneutical point of departure is the depth psychology of Jacques Lacan, which is concerned with the interaction between language and the unconscious. Segal's approach, which is skilfully combined with post-structuralist perspectives, is exegetically fruitful, among other things, in its appreciation of the intrinsically organic and dynamic (as opposed to merely decorative) function of rhetoric in Seneca's tragedy, and is thus much more sophisticated and satisfactory, from a strictly literary-critical point of view, than the older psychoanalytical methodology with respect to the study of literature—well exemplified by George Devereux's recent *The Character of the Euripidean Hippolytus* (Chico: Scholars Press 1985)—which focuses far too heavily on characterology, i.e. the study of individual character and character-types.

⁴⁴ The penetrating discussion by Florence Verducci, in the first and final chapters of her recent book on Ovid's *Heroides* (*Ovid's Toyshop of the Heart* [Princeton: Princeton University Press 1985]), of the far-reaching problems of interpretation raised by this work amply demonstrates that hermeneutical awareness and sophistication do not at all entail any faddish espousal of the latest trend in literary criticism.

There can be no doubt of the fresh perspective that has been shed on Roman poetry by feminist-oriented criticism, addressing such important issues as phallogentrism, misogyny, and the social stereotyping of gender roles. These are all perfectly valid questions, which can also be meaningfully discussed in a Roman literary context and can lend new intellectual vigor to the discussion of many of the major and minor classics. Thus Judith Hallett argues for the presence in Augustan love elegy of a "countercultural" sensibility which is characterized by a strong empathy with women.³⁹ Leo Curran, in his study of the stories of divine seduction in the earlier books of Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, detects moral and ethical implications which have an almost feminist resonance.⁴⁰ In J.P. Sullivan's article on sexual attitudes in Martial, this poet emerges as a paradigm not so much of Roman *simplicitas* in matters sexual as of traditional male chauvinism and misogyny.⁴¹ Despite her, at times, somewhat careless use of texts and a few questionable generalizations, Amy Richlin's *The Garden of Priapus: Sexuality and Aggression in Roman Humor* offers many valuable social and psychological insights into some literary genres, notably the *Priapea* and verse satire.⁴² In its discussion of the portrayal of sexuality in Roman literature, feminist-oriented criticism has shown itself superior in sensitivity to historical and socio-cultural context to the older psychoanalytical approach, which ran largely dry in the 1960's.⁴³ It is to be

³⁹ Judith Hallett, "The Role of Women in Roman Elegy," *Arethusa* 6 (1973) 103-124. She undoubtedly makes exaggerated claims for the "countercultural," feminist character of the thematics and sensibility of Augustan love elegy and leans too heavily towards a biographical reading of the poetry; the criticisms voiced by Ava Berensky in *Arethusa* 6 (1973) 267-269 are quite justified in these respects.

⁴⁰ Leo Curran, "Rape and Rape Victims in the *Metamorphoses*," *Arethusa* 11 (1978) 213-241.

⁴¹ J.P. Sullivan, "Martial's Sexual Attitudes," *Philologus* 123 (1979) 288-302.

⁴² Amy Richlin, *The Garden of Priapus: Sexuality and Aggression in Roman Humor* (New Haven: Yale University Press 1983). The detailed and highly-critical review by H.D. Jocelyn in *EMC* 29 (1985) 1-30 does not detract, in my judgment, from the general validity of Richlin's study.

⁴³ Richard Caldwell, "Selected Bibliography on Psychoanalysis and Classical Studies," *Arethusa* 7 (1974) 117-134, offers on 129-130 a brief survey of psychoanalytically-influenced scholarship on Roman literature until the 1960's. John P. Sullivan's discussion in "*Castas Odisse Puellas: A Reconsideration of Propertius' 1.1.*" (*WS* 74 [1961] 96-110), on Propertius' attraction to Cynthia as an instance of *Dirnenliebe*, as it was first clinically described and analyzed by Freud, is an excellent and relatively sophisticated example of this approach. Richard Minadeo's more recent study of sexual motifs and images in Horace's *Odes* (*The Golden Plectrum: Sexual Symbolism in Horace's Odes* [Amsterdam: Rodopi 1982]) is not characterized by any psychoanalytical orientation and methodology, and leans generally towards a New Criticism approach joined with a keen awareness of the force of literary tradition. I should finally mention that a fresh