

André Brink

# THE NOVEL

*Language and Narrative from  
Cervantes to Calvino*

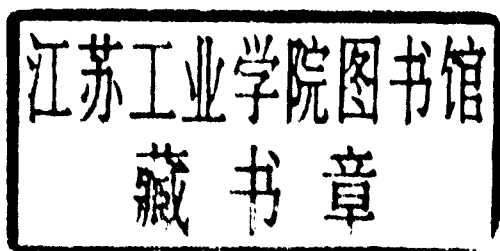


# The Novel

---

Language and Narrative from Cervantes  
to Calvino

André Brink





© André Brink 1998

All rights reserved. No reproduction, copy or transmission of this publication may be made without written permission.

No paragraph of this publication may be reproduced, copied or transmitted save with written permission or in accordance with the provisions of the Copyright, Designs and Patents Act 1988, or under the terms of any licence permitting limited copying issued by the Copyright Licensing Agency, 90 Tottenham Court Road, London W1P 9HE.

Any person who does any unauthorised act in relation to this publication may be liable to criminal prosecution and civil claims for damages.

The author has asserted his rights to be identified as the author of this work in accordance with the Copyright, Designs and Patents Act 1988.

First published 1998 by  
MACMILLAN PRESS LTD  
Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire RG21 6XS  
and London  
Companies and representatives  
throughout the world

ISBN 0-333-68408-7 hardcover  
ISBN 0-333-68409-5 paperback

A catalogue record for this book is available  
from the British Library.

This book is printed on paper suitable for recycling and  
made from fully managed and sustained forest sources.

10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1  
07 06 05 04 03 02 01 00 99 98

Printed in Malaysia

# Contents

---

Introduction: Languages of the Novel	1
1 The Wrong Side of the Tapestry Miguel de Cervantes: <i>Don Quixote de la Mancha</i>	20
2 Courtly Love, Private Anguish Madame de la Fayette: <i>La Princesse de Clèves</i>	46
3 'The Woman's Snare' Daniel Defoe: <i>Moll Flanders</i>	65
4 The Dialogic Pact Denis Diderot: <i>Jacques the Fatalist and His Master</i>	86
5 Charades Jane Austen: <i>Emma</i>	104
6 The Language of Scandal Gustave Flaubert: <i>Madame Bovary</i>	126
7 Quoted in Slang George Eliot: <i>Middlemarch</i>	147
8 The Tiger's Revenge Thomas Mann: <i>Death in Venice</i>	173
9 A Room without a View Franz Kafka: <i>The Trial</i>	189
10 The Perfect Crime Alain Robbe-Grillet: <i>Le Voyeur</i>	207
11 Making and Unmaking Gabriel García Márquez: <i>One Hundred Years of Solitude</i>	231
12 Withdrawal and Return Margaret Atwood: <i>Surfacing</i>	253
13 Taking the Gap Milan Kundera: <i>The Unbearable Lightness of Being</i>	269

14	Possessed by Language A. S. Byatt: <i>Possession</i>	288
15	The Pranks of Hermes Italo Calvino: <i>If on a Winter's Night a Traveller</i>	309
	<i>Notes</i>	330
	<i>References</i>	358
	<i>Index</i>	369

# Introduction: Languages of the Novel

---

## 1

The Age of Realism, in many ways the last great affirmation of the Enlightenment with its impressively self-confident faith in reason and in reason's access to the real, drew to an end as the nineteenth century began to spill into the twentieth. In a turmoil of uncertainty prefiguring Eliot's later wry conviction that 'human kind / Cannot bear very much reality', Modernism was born. A remarkable revolution swept through all the arts. The faith in representation, which for so long had shaped Western culture, was wavering; and, in Santayana's famous phrase, mankind started dreaming in a different key.

In the arts this new key was determined by a widespread discovery – or, in some cases, rediscovery – of the medium as the message. From Cézanne onwards, painting turns its back on a long tradition of 'truth to nature' as it begins to focus on the materiality of paint on canvas. The theatre renounces its earlier attempts to create the perfect illusion and in the plays of Pirandello and his contemporaries embraces the space of the stage as stage (which to Shakespeare would have been nothing new). In Stravinsky, and even more so in Schönberg, music is no longer to be enjoyed simply as a melodic system but turns its attention to the very processes which *produce* melody.

And so it is only to be expected that literature, too, begins to foreground its own medium, language, first in the poetry of Mallarmé and Rimbaud, and the fiction of Flaubert and Henry James. Soon, from the ranks of early Modernists, amplified by that time by what Kundera (1988:63) calls the 'polyhistoricism' of Broch and the conjuring acts of memory performed by Proust, rose the definitive figure of James Joyce. As McGee (1988:2) phrases it, 'At every phase in the development of recent literary theory, Joyce appears as an example and an authentic symptom of his and our historical moment.'

Starting with the early dissolution and reassembling of sentence structures to accompany the emotional ebb and flow in *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, moving with dizzying virtuosity through

the ever-changing languagescapes in *Ulysses*, Joyce finally pushes language to an extreme in *Finnegan's Wake*, perhaps the single greatest narrative monument of the twentieth century, comparable to Picasso's achievement in *Les Femmes d'Alger* or *Guernica*. As MacCabe, a pivotal critic in Joyce criticism, so convincingly demonstrated, Joyce's writing radically changes the entire relationship between text and reader, moving from one of passive consumption to active engagement and transformation. Reading becomes 'an active appropriation of the material of language' (MacCabe 1978:11). In opposition to the nineteenth-century manipulation of 'metalanguage' by Eliot and others, (that is, an authorial language through which the many languages of different characters in the text are ultimately controlled in order to guide the reader in establishing what is real or true and what not),<sup>1</sup> Joyce offers no correctives, no final truths, and forces the reader to become actively involved in the free play of language through the various discourses of the novel. Even if, as McGee and many others have since indicated, MacCabe underestimates the functions of interpretation, his watershed reading of Joyce firmly established the primacy of language *as* language in the Modernist (and later the Postmodernist) novel. In many respects the whole of the Postmodernist novel – from Beckett to Nabokov, from Robbe-Grillet to Márquez, from Calvino to Barth, from Pynchon to Kundera – may be said to be spinoffs from *Ulysses* and *Finnegan's Wake*. This is particularly important in the sense that '*Ulysses* and *Finnegan's Wake* are concerned *not with representing experience through language but with experiencing language through a destruction of representation*' (MacCabe 1978:4, my emphasis).

Not that one should underestimate the 'story' level in these two novels: there are magnificent narrative impulses throughout both of them, and purely in terms of an old-fashioned 'plot' they are among the richest texts in the genre. But ultimately all these various stories collapse, like old stars into a Black Hole, within the language in which they are told. Language becomes its own greatest story. In *Ulysses*, among so many other things, 'the story of language' is told in the hospital chapter, where the reader witnesses, and is drawn into, the evolution of the English language from Anglo-Saxon to American jazz-speak; and in *Finnegan's Wake* the whole history of Ireland, telescoped into that of a hod-carrier, assumes the form of language. This must be understood quite

literally: the text does not 'tell the story in language' but *transforms the story into language*. Language becomes the condition of story.

At the same time these novels are amazingly dense *intertexts*, subsuming within them something of the history of the novel as a genre – reaching back across the centuries to the epics of Homer and the sagas of Iceland and the myths and folktales of Ireland; but also, and very specifically, to Joyce's predecessors in English fiction and drama. In the process the two novels prepare the soil for a further flowering of texts that will draw on *them*. Writing produces more writing, stories prompt more stories, and each of these erupts in versions of the other.

This becomes the hallmark of the Postmodernist novel during the closing decades of the twentieth century, a development so spectacular, so widespread, and so charged with diverse energies that it brought in its wake a frenzy of critical and theoretical activity and an increasing polarisation of *aficionados* and detractors. But whatever the merits and demerits of the phenomenon (and it is prudent to remind oneself that the label 'Postmodernism' has been, since its inception, no more than an umbrella term for a staggering variety of forms, styles, experiments and manifestations),<sup>2</sup> there is one crucial aspect on which there appears to be consensus: the foregrounding of *language* – language as language, language in its implication with narrative.

This preoccupation concerns what Lodge (1966) reads as the 'language of fiction', but also goes far beyond it: it involves, paradoxically, both the celebration and the radical subversion of language. It is a celebration in its often over-the-top demonstration of the spectacular properties of language; and simultaneously a subversion in the way in which, increasingly, language spectacularises its own opacities, and attempts to erase itself in the process of writing. Looking back from the end of the twentieth century, it seems inevitable that the great adventure of Modernism and Postmodernism in the novel should eventually produce the kind of text exemplified by Salvador Elizondo's *The Graphographer*, a passage from which serves as epigraph to Mario Vargas Llosa's *Aunt Julia and the Scriptwriter* (1983):

I write. I write that I am writing. Mentally I see myself writing that I am writing and I can also see myself seeing that I am writing. I remember writing and also seeing myself writing. And I see myself remembering that I see myself writing and I



remember seeing myself remembering that I was writing and I write seeing myself write that I remember having seen myself write that I saw myself writing that I was writing and that I was writing that I was writing that I was writing. I can also imagine myself writing that I had already written that I would imagine myself writing that I had written that I was imagining myself writing that I see myself writing that I am writing.

There are many philosophical aspects of this passage that invite comment – not least of which would be an insight illustrated by a child's description of remembering quoted in a recent psychological study (Loftus & Ketcham 1994:38): 'My memory is the thing I forget with.' But for the moment our concern is with the focus on language as, itself, a narrative activity.

But what does this mean for our reading of the novel? And is this really as new as it sounds?

## 2

Our response may borrow from the experience of painters and their public in the second half of the nineteenth century when the rise of photography caused great turmoil in the field of art: there were painters who renounced their *métier* because photography appeared to have taken over what many artists, for a very long time, had come to regard as the prerogative of *their* art: the faithful visual representation of nature (or of history; or of dreams, or whatever). But there were others to whom the experience was truly liberating, as they discovered – or rediscovered – that the primary business of painting had *never* been visual representation as such but, instead, the exploitation of all the possibilities available in the process of bringing paint and canvas together. From the passionate immersion of the Impressionists in the here-and-now of the fleeting instant which they attempted to translate into brush-strokes and daubs of paint, arose the acknowledgement that even in the most 'realistic' periods of painting the artist's true vocation had always been the processes of interaction with his/her material. Retrospectively this was acknowledged to have been as true of Corot as of Rembrandt, as true of Jan Steen as of Bosch, as true, in fact, of Leonardo as of Zeuxis (whose painting of grapes, it is said, was so true to life that birds came to peck at it).

This does not imply that these artists as individuals were necessarily conscious of it: but *painting* was aware of it, as it pursued the never-ending dialogue between pigments of different kinds on surfaces of different kinds. The final confirmation of the discovery, if confirmation was still required, came with the shock provided by Mondrian, Malevitch and Kandinsky in their 'abstract art' – which was arguably the most 'concrete' form of painting the world had seen up to that point, confronting the viewer with the unmediated reality of paint as paint, the whole of paint, and nothing but paint.

And it is my argument that the same may be said of language and the novel. It is in narrative language, I believe, that one should look for the key to the full experience of engaging with the genre. 'It is the world of words', says Lacan (1977:65), 'which creates the world of things.' One is reminded of Magritte's famous painting of a pipe bearing the title *Ceci n'est pas une pipe* – *This is not a pipe*, which is, of course, strictly true: what we have before us is not a pipe but a painting of a pipe. This can be confirmed, in the domain of literature, by any reader who takes up a book to make the simple and basic, but immensely significant, discovery that there are no people or houses or trees or dogs between the pages, but only words, words, words.

Of course this holds for any literary artefact from any period, not just for the novel; but it makes sense to acknowledge, in narrative, the radical shift brought about by the invention of printing. As Bakhtin, among others, argued, the displacement of the epic poet's voice by the written narrative of the novelist, also meant that the reader, previously a listener, entered into a completely different relationship with language – and with narrative. *Here lie*, already, the roots of what Joyce rediscovered at the beginning of the twentieth century. This, it seems to me, provides the key to what may justifiably be called the novel experience.<sup>3</sup>

Language, as Bakhtin also notes (in Shukman 1983:94), remained the 'raw material' of the narrator, but because of the uniqueness of the signifying system embodied in language (unlike 'a piece of clay [which] on its own *has no meaning*': Bakhtin: loc. cit.), the interaction between *what* was said and *how* it was said, between medium and message, between what was traditionally and artificially separated as form and content, was altered decisively. More than had ever been the case in oral/aural literature, language in the novel became important, not as 'the embodiment of some kind of cultural essence, but the use of language in a particular place and time'

(Ashcroft et al. 1989:71–2). And the significance of language lies in the perception that it exists ‘neither before the fact nor after the fact but in the fact [...] It provides some terms and not others with which to talk about the world’ (ibid.:44). Even more radically, language in the novel did not only tell a story, but reflected on itself in the act of telling.

If this is true of those great fanfares and fun-fairs of novels written by Rabelais, Cervantes or Sterne, finally to erupt in Joyce and his successors, it is my argument that this is *no less true* of the most ‘classical’ or ‘traditional’ or ‘realistic’ of novels, whether by Defoe, or Marivaux, or Jane Austen, or Stendhal, or Manzoni, or Zola.

## 3

The question is whether there has ever been anything like ‘the’ traditional or classical novel. I tend to share Bakhtin’s belief that for a genre in an unceasing process of becoming, there is no singular Great Tradition, no Ideal Form, no Definitive Shape. Or, if tradition there be, it may just as well be approached, as Kundera does with such panache in *The Art of the Novel* and *Testaments Betrayed*, as a series of texts rich in invention, humour and imaginative eruption, a legacy of ‘testaments’ to which authors like Gombrowicz, Broch and Musil restored the novel of the twentieth century.

Yet I differ most emphatically from Kundera when he argues that this is the only ‘real’ or ‘true’ history of the novel and that those early testaments were ‘betrayed’ by the Realism of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Not only did the older testaments persist in Sterne and Diderot and de Sade, in Kleist and Emily Brontë and much of Dostoevsky, but Realism itself opened up whole new landscapes to be explored by the novel in its inherence in language. Joyce is not only the heir of Sterne but also of Defoe and Fielding. Inasmuch as Realism came to be perceived as the ‘only’ Great Tradition of the novel, of course it had a pernicious influence. But it seems unfair to blame the *novel* for the restricted vision of a *critical* tradition endorsed by Ian Watt.

I should make it very clear from the outset that I am not proposing, in this book, to offer a new or ‘alternative’ History of the Novel (although much may be said for such a project). My argument is quite simply that what has so persistently been regarded as the

prerogative of the Modernist and Postmodernist novel (and of a few rare predecessors), namely an exploitation of the storytelling properties of language, *has in fact been a characteristic of the novel since its inception*.<sup>4</sup> It informs the great, 'obvious' texts (of which *Ulysses* must remain the prime example), but also the most 'conventional' ones, from Madame de Lafayette to George Eliot, or from Fielding to Trollope, or from Fanny Burney to Anthony Powell. And by the time language began to flaunt itself, through more and more spectacular devices, as the primary business of the novel in Modernism and Postmodernism, it is my contention that it had by then already established a remarkable tradition of proving just that, in less obtrusive ways.

But in order to illuminate this claim it is necessary to start with as simple and basic a view of language as possible.

## 4

Two small boys strike up a quarrel which turns into a fight. Their mother intervenes and demands to know what has happened. In the way we all, ceaselessly, transform our lives into language, into story, they offer her their versions of the event. Language *as* story, as invention, as accusation or excuse, as explanation or justification, as alibi or apology or attack. Each of the boys, knowing that his backside depends on it, does his utmost to persuade the mother; to persuade himself. Which version will she believe? Everything depends on that. And, given the framework of a patriarchal culture, how will she report the event to her husband when he comes home that evening? Pursuing it even further, if, at work the following day, he finds an occasion to tell an anecdote which might assert his authority, or ingratiate him with his superiors, or simply smooth over a boring or embarrassing situation, into what new narrative territory will his language take him, his wife, and his sons? Into what new territories are *we* (as readers, as observers, as participants) being enticed?

From the moment the event was first reported – or even more precisely, from the moment it had first been verbalised in order to be made reportable – it has existed exclusively in terms of language. This is the origin of history; it is also the origin of narrative.

It may be said that what we have dealt with so far essentially involves speech acts, as described *inter alia* by Austin (1962) or

Searle (1969 and 1974). In the process of communication, each of these acts involves a threefold process: it is a *locution*, which is the fact of utterance; it is an *illocution*, which denotes the act performed *in* saying something (this concerns the difference between a simple statement, a question, an exclamation, a warning, a threat, or whatever); it is also a *perlocution*, in which the anticipated or presumed result of the locution determines its interpretation. In schematic form, this is vested in the triangular relationship between speaker, speech and listener – or, in terms of the familiar model described by Jakobson (1960:350–77), sender, message and receiver.<sup>5</sup> Within this relationship, the locution is perceived only in its own terms, isolated from any specific context or situation (something which is literally unthinkable), while the illocution involves the relationship between the speaker and the speech, and the perlocution the full and complex relationship between all three of the impulses comprised in the act.

The starting point of the exercise is the conception of language as an act of communication: after all, 'Language, when it *means*, is somebody talking to somebody else, even when that someone else is one's own inner addressee', as Michael Holquist points out in his introduction to Bakhtin's seminal essays on the novel (Bakhtin 1981:xxi).

Now to be useful in the description of language in fiction, this notion of speech as an act has to be modified and complicated, in order for us to accept the locution or utterance (the 'facts' of the story) as 'real' while acknowledging the illocution as make-believe, that is as 'fiction'.<sup>6</sup> Or, in David Lodge's simpler terminology (1990:96), we must approach the literary text, 'not [as] a real speech act but an imitation of a speech act'. And, even more so in the case of a highly complex form of narrative like a novel, 'what is commonly called a "message" is in fact a *text* whose content is a multilevelled *discourse*' (Eco 1979:57).

I do not propose to follow the processes involved in this cluster of theories through all their intricate meanderings; all I need at this stage to borrow from it is the notion of narrative itself as an act (or the imitation or imagining of an act): an act of language – taking due note of Derrida's concept of language, not as 'speech' but as *writing*, as *écriture*.<sup>7</sup> Of course, speech acts are involved every time characters in a novel enter into a dialogic situation (whether they actually converse or interact in other ways), but the important consideration is that the narrative as a whole may itself be read

as an extension and complication of such acts in its constantly shifting position somewhere between the narrator and the reader. In the transaction between narrator and reader, as Barthes so succinctly demonstrates in *S/Z* (1975:89), an act of *exchange* is involved: 'One narrates in order to obtain by exchanging; and it is this exchange that is represented in the narrative itself: narrative is both product and production, merchandise and commerce, a stake and the bearer of that stake.'

This does not mean that language and narrative are necessarily the same thing. Yet they are more than merely 'analogous'. In some respects language may be regarded as a *form* of narrative; but it would be just as admissible to see narrative as a form of language. As Lacan said of language and the unconscious, one may say of language and narrative that the one is shaped like the other. More specifically tuned in to our present purpose, it may be said that *language has a propensity for narrative*.

## 5

A host of theorists have been assiduously exploring the links between language and narrative. In *The Poetics of Prose* Todorov examines language as a *model* for narrative, and syntax for narrative grammar, bearing in mind the distinction between 'mediatized' and 'immediate' language (Todorov 1977:27). This is in line with the way in which Searle and other Speech Act theorists like Ohmann (1971), Fish (1976) or Pratt (1977) have bridged the gap. Todorov takes as his starting point the coincidence of parts of speech in grammar with specific narrative functions: nouns provide a model for one's reading of characters; predicates illuminate the concept of plot; in the same way narrative parallels are found for adjectives and verbs. From here, Todorov proceeds to the secondary categories of grammar, 'which are the properties of these parts: for instance, voice, aspects, mood, tense, and so forth' (Todorov 1977:113). And beyond the level of propositions, Todorov discusses the possible relations between such propositions – relations of time, of logic, or of space.

His conclusion is of particular relevance to the present discussion: 'Ultimately, language can be understood only if we learn to think of its essential manifestation – literature. The converse is also true: to combine a noun and a verb is to take the first step toward

narrative. In a sense, what the writer does, is to read language' (ibid.:119).

The exploration of such links between narrative and grammar have resulted in a whole school of 'narrative grammar' within narratology (for example Gerald Prince: 1982). In studies like Roger Fowler's *Linguistics and the Novel* (1977), aspects of such parallels are pursued further, for instance the correspondence between 'deep' and 'surface structure' proposed by Chomsky's transformational-generative grammar; and the kind of distinction narrative structuralists made between 'story' and 'plot' or, in Formalist parlance, between *fabula* and *sjuzet* (that is, roughly, between the story as it can be assembled or deduced from the narrative as a whole, and its specific emplotment within that narrative, where chronology may be disturbed, points of view shifted, narrative situations varied, and so on).

The details of each of these contributions to the debate need not detain us: what matters is the persistent concern of philosophers and theorists of language and literature to link the two processes. The relationship is summarised most imaginatively by Barthes (1975:127): 'The sentence is a *nature* whose function – or scope – is to justify the culture of the narrative.'

## 6

These perceptions come to a head in the remarkable developments in language theory in the twentieth century that accompany the radical shift in fiction-writing we have already noted. And in order to appreciate more amply the functioning of narrative language in the novel it would be illuminating to look briefly of some of these modern turns. They were signposted, initially, by Heidegger, Saussure and Wittgenstein, and subsequently pursued by (among several others) a quartet of French thinkers from various disciplines: Michel Foucault, Jacques Lacan, Roland Barthes and Jacques Derrida. Judging from the expanding library of studies on their writings, one could wander almost interminably through the labyrinth of forking paths they have charted. But for our present purpose it is not necessary to garner more than a few salient points from their writings.

In one way or another all these thinkers challenge the tradition stigmatised by Derrida as logocentrism, prevalent in Western

thinking from Plato onwards, and based on a notion of essence, of a primordial Word which speaks the world into being ('And God said, Let there be light: and there was light'). In this view, the meaning embedded in language is prepackaged, and its dependability is guaranteed by two givens: the authority and the presence of the speaker. In the dawn of civilisation it was expressed in the animistic belief that every natural object, whether tree or rock or spring or mountain, literally encapsulated its 'meaning' in the form of a god or sprite or nymph or other supernatural being believed to inhabit it.

Heidegger still remains quite close to such a vision of language, on which much of his concept of Being depends; but at the same time he destabilises the received wisdom by introducing a separation between word and world:

When we go to the well, when we go through the woods, we are always already going through the word 'well', through the word 'woods', even if we do not speak the words and do not think of anything relating to language. (Heidegger 1971:52)<sup>8</sup>

With Ferdinand de Saussure we cross the threshold into the domain of language as part of a social and cultural contract by approaching it, not as a metaphysical truth but as a system of signs. This system definitively replaced all earlier beliefs in *essences* in language with the notion of *difference*: when a signifier and a signified are fused in a sign, a process which is characterised, at least at the time when it occurs, by pure randomness, 'their most precise characteristic is in being what the others are not' (Saussure 1959:117). These signs, as we all know by now, do not function by virtue of the 'presence' of a meaning trapped in them, but merely the absence of other meanings: *cat* 'means' 'cat' only because in a given linguistic situation it is *not* a hat or a mat, or a plucked green chicken.

Wittgenstein extends these indications of a shift in our perception of language to the quite radical view that reality itself, and our whole experience of it, is shaped and determined by the language in which we conceive it. It is summarised in perhaps the most famous statement of his *Tractatus*: 'That the world is *my* world, shows itself in the fact that the limits of the language [...] mean the limits of *my* world' (Wittgenstein 1983:151). In such a view the traditional notion of 'referentiality' falls away entirely: language



can no longer refer to something 'out there' but, at most, only to language itself.

Roland Barthes will figure prominently in many of the discussions to follow in this study. Suffice it to say at this stage that his notorious statement about 'the death of the author' (Barthes 1988) was another celebration of the demise of authority and presence in our reading of the text; while his inventive explorations of the orgasmic pleasures, the *jouissance*, of the text (in *The Pleasure of the Text*, 1976, *A Lover's Discourse*, 1979, and elsewhere) highlight both the physicality of language and its primacy in human experience, to the extent that experience becomes *equated* with language (Barthes 1975). For Barthes, meaning is never stable or given, but exists only as 'flickers' and possibilities (see for example Barthes 1975:19).

The most radical innovator, and of pervasive importance for the discussions to follow, has undoubtedly been Jacques Derrida. In his view of the endless intertextuality of our world an extreme in the twentieth century's perception of language is reached. One of the most widely known (and most misquoted) lines in his *oeuvre* must be: 'There is nothing outside of the text [there is no outside-text; *il n'y a pas de hors-texte*]' (Derrida 1976:158). And in *Writing and Difference* he phrases it most emphatically:

Everything that is exterior in relation to the book, everything that is negative as concerns the book, is produced *within the book*. The exit from the book, the other and the threshold, are all articulated *within the book*. The other and the threshold can only be written, can only affirm themselves in writing. One emerges from the book only within the book. (Derrida 1978:76)

What we encounter in Derrida is the exuberant subversion of a logocentric world, replacing the authority, the presence and the hierarchies of speech with the absences and *traces*<sup>9</sup> of writing (*écriture*): floating signifiers within a boundless process of dissemination, pointing towards endlessly displaced, deferred and different meanings. These are the attributes of continuous supplementation,<sup>10</sup> for which Derrida has coined the term *différance*. In language he perceives an absence of finality in meaning: there is, at most, an iterability (discussed with great flair in *Limited Inc.*<sup>11</sup>) – a world not only decentred and deconstructed, but permanently *sous rature*, that is, under provisional erasure, a