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An Interview with Jonathan Culler

Thomas F. Bertonneau

I

Introduction

Beginning with his *Structuralist Poetics* (1975) Jonathan Culler injected himself where he remains today: in the center, willy-nilly, of the ongoing debate in the American academy over that dread bugbear, Post-Structuralism, and its relevance to literary studies. Although it had been preceded by a book length study of Flaubert, *Structuralist Poetics* put Culler ineradicably on the map. In a sense, *Structuralist Poetics* drew the map: encompassing the germination of modern theory in the linguistics of Saussure through its diverse and often recondite development in Jakobson, Greimas, Levi-Strauss, Barthes and others, it in effect established a supplementary curriculum which, ever since, scholars of literature have found increasingly difficult to avoid. *The Pursuit of Signs* (1981) confirmed the impression that Culler was no mere arrivist but a thoroughly informed spokesman for—and sometimes critic of—semiotics, structural analysis and deconstruction. *On Deconstruction* (1982) maintained him in this position and to some extent outstripped the two earlier works in its impact on the academic audience. All three books continue to provoke controversy, to win successive generations of graduate students to an understanding of what certainly are abstruse problems, and seem to belong to the category of stubborn books that refuse to go away.

This is not to say that his readers have only lauded Culler. Far from it. Animosity and even outrage have also figured in the reception of Culler's critical oeuvre. Thus while Frank Lentricchia would concede in his *After the New Criticism* (1980) that Culler is "arguably the most accessible and fullest [expositor] of a group of writers whose main intellectual preoccupations [make] them appear to be at once fascinating, difficult to approach, and yet somehow of marginal importance to scholars trained in conventional humanistic ways" (104), he would add with undeniable irritation that Culler seemed to him to have addressed "recent critical issues in ways, calculated or not, that go far toward softening the impact of the new French thought" (104), where "soft" cuts hard.

As Lentricchia rattled his swords from the left, Frederick Crewes came out swinging from the right. In a discussion of *The Pursuit of Signs* Crewes disparaged the fact, as he saw it, that Culler, in the period since *Structuralist Poetics* had "become even more adamantly 'theoretical'" (*Skeptical Engagements* [1987], 126). While Culler deserved "praise for [his] candor," he was "guilty of dependence on empirically dubious sources of authority" (127). John Searle's review of *On Deconstruction* in the *New York Review of Books* (Oct. 27, 1983), perhaps the most antipathetic statement ever written by a major scholar against contemporary theory, contained no praise. Crewes' offense was patent and it knew no bounds.

More recently Steven Knapp and Walter Benn Michaels have attacked Derrida's dismantling of Searle's notion of performatives not by critiquing Derrida directly but rather by finding fault with Culler's presentation of the issue in *On Deconstruction*. (See *Critical Inquiry*, Autumn, 1987.) Culler's role here seems to be one of offering a target of deferral, a kind of ideological lightning-rod, and this underscores what I have called his centrality in the contemporary critical debate.

Now this notion of centrality is not taken lightly by contemporary theorists and it might well be said that there is a measure of irony in Culler's having come to occupy what amounts to a center; but on the other hand he does not occupy it by his own design. In his self-presentation, Culler gives no index of wanting to be the cynosure of a public performance in which the opposed armies of some manichaeian conflict fight it out for dominion over the academy. On the contrary, he strikes his audience, or at least he struck this member of his audience, as someone whose interest is not at all himself

but, rather, the problem of making literary studies as diverse as possible and to use the critical apparatus that results to examine with renewed acuity the socio-cultural forces that generate what we call literature in the first place. One of the pleasures of talking with Culler is that he combines an almost encyclopedic knowledge of the contemporary critical situation and an ability to intuit the strengths and weaknesses of a given theory with a generosity toward all serious attempts to “make sense” of the matter at hand.

II

I began the interview by asking Culler whether or not the blindnesses (as De Man calls them) of contemporary theory really are the necessary complement of the insights. Or, to use a notion which figures prominently in Culler’s book about Flaubert, can *bêtise* ever be transformed into its opposite, a kind of *sagesse*?

BERTONNEAU: You note the crucial importance of *bêtise* in the Flaubert oeuvre, where it connotes the next-to-innumerable intellectual and moral failings that always seem to undermine the social good; more than once the individual instance of *bêtise* is the occasion for Flaubert’s greater critique of his culture. My question is, to what extent does contemporary theory share the novelist’s preoccupation with *bêtise*? And how effective has contemporary theory been as an ethical, as well as an esthetic, critique?

CULLER: I take it that you’re trying to get at some basic De Manian notions, but at the same time you want to put a kind of social spin on them. Now *bêtise* or idiocy or naivety was a productive theme for Flaubert, but I doubt that it has much of a role to play in contemporary criticism. In the first place our social situation is extraordinarily different from that of Flaubert’s in the mid-nineteenth century. Idiocy could be the occasion for positive development by Flaubert because his society was, so to speak, local enough for a significant community to be centered around the idiot who was at once outside the community and yet very much inside it, who perhaps by virtue of his naivety could be the focal point of meaning. Flaubert represents one of those periods when writers, or artists in general, could think of themselves as embodying a kind of productive naivety, or when they were ready to use figures of the strategically naive type—Candide figures—who, on the basis of their innocence,

would expose those aspects of society that were deficient and in need of replacement or repair.

It seems to me, however, that most contemporary criticism is correctly suspicious of naivety, or of innocence, even of common sense, as the point from which one can identify and criticize the aberrations or ideological structures of an age.

If this seems like an overly severe answer then it might help to look at it this way: it is all too easy to use a notion like idiocy as an ironic way of describing what one in fact is introjecting. One then gets enmeshed in a circle of self-delusion which can't answer the most pressing questions about social structures because it can't identify them. This notion of the "zero degree," the "privileged position"—the modern critical consciousness must bring them under its skepticism, it must disbelieve them. And it's the conclusion of almost every modern theory that I can think of that such positions are in fact the most artificially constructed and the most ideological of all positions. The idea of what counts as brute common sense or as a positive idiocy—that's undoubtedly an a priori dissimulated stance.

BERTONNEAU: There was quite a bit of discussion about this at the round-table today between you and Marjorie Perloff and François Rigolot.

CULLER: Yes, and there it was getting linked with its inevitable conceptual complement, a notion of the pure consciousness, the essential individual who by virtue of being uniquely himself or herself occupies that ideal locale from which it is possible to sum up society's defects.

BERTONNEAU: That's the romantic notion of the self, what one finds in the English poets or in Kierkegaard, where the individual gets positively qualified under the emblem of simplicity, and then from within that simplicity can render transparent the inauthenticity of the other. Surely modern criticism must reject that. And yet even the marxists deal in these tricky categories of authenticity and inauthenticity, whether they use those exact names or not.

CULLER: Obviously if you're making decisions about desirable and undesirable aspects of society you're going to give out good marks here and bad ones somewhere else, but modern theory is different from—shall we say—romantic theory in regard to its greater skepticism and reflexivity. Structuralism doesn't place much emphasis on

the individual. Indeed, the point of structuralism or of the structuralist approach is to get away from all these heavily sedimented categories that go back to the romantics. The romantic heritage in this century is, as you are well aware, an unhappily ambiguous one.

BERTONNEAU: Because the totalizing subject becomes the cult-object in a veneration of the individual, or he or she assumes a totalizing role in the political sense. Common sense and critical sophistication alike recognize this as an ethical deformation. They do so because they have some sense of ethos in common. I suppose the question is, does contemporary theory, which means structuralist thought and its progeny, have its own ethical a priori? And if not, then why not?

CULLER: That's a broad question and in some ways a puzzling one. I confess that I'm unsure how to go about answering it. Well, it's good that professors of literature and their students, who occupy a sensitive niche in the cultural order, have a sense of themselves as ethical creatures. As to theory itself: many of the theories that I write about in my books have an ethical component; they include a critique of the so-called ethical uses to which people have attempted to put literature. Not only literature but other forms of artistic activity—activities in general.

Of course, the question you've asked is a fairly natural one for graduate students in literature programs to ask. We all want to be ethically—not to mention politically—exemplary, and we'd therefore like to know whether this or that activity is likewise exemplary. But hardly any activities really measure up to that criterion.

What seems to happen is that the way people find to make their activities ethical is to criticize other theories for suffering from the deficiency that worries them in the first place. Today that seems to be the main way in which criticism is, or tries to be, ethical.

One then tries to write articles and books about the ethical deficiencies of other critics, which, by itself, seems a rather vain endeavor. It would be nice if some critics who want to take up this problem would themselves explain how criticism can be ethical, how theory should become properly ethical. But I suspect that many of us would immediately find it easy to dismantle those particular claims. The problem has to do partly with the fact that ethical and political questions are highly particular. They deal with concrete situations where there are different overlapping configurations of forces. They require us to analyze that situation to decide whether,

if there are two sides, we should join one or the other or try to mediate between them. Political questions usually involve some degree of difficulty: if not difficulty in deciding which side one should join, then difficulty in working out the manner in which one should join. In other words, which actions will actually do some good?

Today in America we have this rather odd situation in which critics are attempting to discover how criticism and theory can be political at a time when the actual political discourse has become so incredibly narrow that, after the Black Monday we had a few months ago, lots of economists were telling stories about what happened, but you couldn't find a single one who would dare suggest that there might be something wrong with the capitalist system itself—the system that produces these huge swings in the market. It seems to me that if you want political discourse then there's a big world out there that is greatly in need of it, in need of radical political discourse. In some ways the effort is displaced if one spends too much of one's time attacking literary theories on the basis of their political insufficiencies.

BERTONNEAU: Perhaps I've been remiss in using the term "ethics" without defining it carefully enough. Let me put a praxiological emphasis on it. In *Structuralist Poetics*, for example, you conclude with a chapter in which you discuss the impact which you then felt that structuralism was bound to have in the classroom. The question of ethics could be specified by making it a question of pedagogics. Does modern critical theory in fact change what teachers of literature do in the classroom?

CULLER: This version of your question is easier to address. Not that what we call modern critical theory has any one position on, for instance, what the curriculum in literature programs should be. Certainly the different approaches both depend upon and suggest a different canon. But these theories that come under the title of modern or post-modern tend to be fairly diverse in their selection of texts. The most obvious example is feminist criticism, although again there isn't any single overarching feminist line on the curriculum. Yet all the versions are, I think, agreed on the necessity of posing this question: is an alternative canon necessary? That's a significant and far-reaching question. But even in feminist critical circles there's a great argument about the notion of literature itself, whether "high literature" (however you want to define it) is a concept that ought to be preserved or whether it's so complicitous with a cultural sys-

tem imbued with patriarchy that it ought to be rejected. It's a possibility that under the criteria of what has passed for over a century as "high literature" many worthy documents written by women would be excluded. Perhaps then we should redefine what we study not as literature in the troubled sense but as writings, a collection of texts. Or again, for people who are interested in semiotics, or in literature as a mode of cultural representation, it's imperative to break down the barriers that separate literature, again in its received form, from other forms of discourse—films, popular novels, and so on. They would want to make the category of focus narrative or something like it. They would study literary works in relation to other kinds of narrative.

So there are a lot of different positions in contention today, each requiring some adjustment of the curriculum. Certainly then most new critical theories do lead people to choose somewhat different syllabi from those that have traditionally been represented in seminar classrooms. And the question that then comes out of this is how far the institution should determine the curriculum. Or should we be content with the anything-goes model? For the most part people associated with or influenced by the post-structuralist movement favor a model of dispersal. The alternative of a centralizing or unified model yields an awful lot in advance to the very forces of traditionalism which have come into question. There is already a reaction against liberal reforms. I mean, the people who are today pressuring institutions for curricular reform are those who favor a more traditional syllabus.

But you're posing this question in relation to ethics. I didn't mean by my response to your first question that people who want their literary studies to be ethical should look elsewhere, but I do think that for almost all the contemporary critical approaches there's an assumption that the major ethical activity is that of analyzing forms of cultural power. Look at the prominence of Nietzschean-type genealogical questions in contemporary criticism, and notice how self-reflexive they tend to be.

Now since it's the nature of assumptions both to permit the asking of some questions and to prohibit the asking of others, whatever theory one espouses will exert this double-edged effect in the classroom. And yet there are some critical approaches which seem to be more conducive than others to self correction. Genealogical questions, for example, have the power to dismantle superstructural formations which may have exerted a repressive effect on large

segments of a given society. This surely is an ethical effect. And perhaps, not always but perhaps, the result is a new ethical system for which one can say: here are some indications about how we ought to behave. This has been characteristic of the best modern thought.

BERTONNEAU: Could you give a specific example?

CULLER: Sartre's thought was ethical through and through. He always said that it was aimed at the formation of a new ethic. Now Sartre was never able to produce the—so to speak—final volume of his work, the synthetic statement which would rigorously unite the esthetic, ethical and political elements, but the supposition was—and I think the existing work supports it—that *L'Être et le néant* and *La Critique de la raison dialectique* and also the novels, plays and literary critical work—all this was converging toward the goal of transforming social conditions, ethical conditions, for the better. And the first step was the critique of cognition. Insofar as the ethical is about seeing as clearly as possible what one is doing and what one is being made to do, then certainly these critical activities that concern us as theoreticians of literature are ethical.

BERTONNEAU: And in Foucault certainly there is another, more contemporary, figure whose work has an undeniable, sometimes implicit and sometimes explicit, ethical thrust. Even Derrida could be regarded as having an ethical component. But I'd like to ask about the movement for which the names of Foucault, Derrida and some others are metonyms. The post-structuralist movement has now had a life of almost two decades in the United States. To a large extent it has been assimilated by the academy. In there any danger in such an assimilation?

CULLER: I'm not sure that it's quite two decades old although if you were to trace it back to the appearance of the first translations of Barthes, maybe so. Derrida didn't get translated until the mid-seventies, and even then it took a while for *Voice and Phenomenon*, *Of Grammatology*, and *Writing and Difference* to be read and to sink in. Now as far as the effects of institutionalization go, it's no different in the case of post-structuralism than it was in the case, say, of the New Criticism. Institutionalization means that there comes to be a large group of people all doing more or less the same thing and using the same set of basic assumptions. First they might be relatively

small groups who seem exotic to traditionalists, but the very exoticism provokes interest, and inevitably the group swells. Suddenly many people are doing the same thing and there's an overall sameness; it isn't exotic any more. There's duplication and repetition. Obviously this can have a bad influence. In some sense it *has* had a bad influence. Post-structuralists never intended to be a bunch of people doing the same thing, an E.D. Hirsch-type of "cultural literacy" project. Even in the days of the New Criticism people could be heard to complain that this approach, which started off as a movement "against the professors," had become institutionalized, had become so to speak just one more seminar that graduate students had to take. But it didn't start out that way. The original New Critics were fairly anti-traditional: they wanted students to be able to read poetry rather than just write literary histories in the old style.

It's difficult in this area to figure what's "best." I used to think before France took a turn to the right that it was ironic that the USA, which prides itself on an individual-oriented educational system, turned out a rather conformist group of students, whereas France, which had a centralized educational system, turned out a diverse group of fairly brilliant thinkers—maybe by pure reaction against the stultification of the system.

But to come back to post-structuralism: yes, there are aspects of it that have been institutionalized. That seems to me to be unavoidable.

BERTONNEAU: Of course the question could be put much more bluntly: are post-structuralists in danger of becoming old fogeys?

CULLER: That's everyone's fate, and therefore it's everyone's duty to try to avoid it. Not that the attempt at avoidance can't itself have some pretty grotesque results . . . Ultimately though one has to accept old-fogeydom as gracefully as possible and try not to block the efforts of the young. On the other hand, the longer one can go on learning, the better. But there will probably come a moment in everyone's life when they dig in their heels and say, the way I've been doing things is better than the way these young upstarts are doing them. The sciences seem to have solved this problem better than the humanities. There it seems to be expected that people will make their discoveries when they're young. They'll get a Nobel Prize twenty years later and then they'll go on to become distinguished teachers or emeriti spokespeople for their field.

This isn't the case in the humanities for the most part. But I don't want to avoid your question by digressing into all this. Yes, there may well be a limit to an individual's intellectual progress, or to the progress of a "movement." It could be that the success of deconstruction at one level has been its decline at another. The most powerful thought at any given time is likely to be the most extreme thought. But the fact that extreme thought eventually becomes institutionalized doesn't mean that exponents of the most radical theories shouldn't bother about carrying out their projects. This is why Knapp and Michaels' articles in *Critical Inquiry* strike me as so ironic, or even futile. They and others have been saying recently that theory has loomed too large in the past fifteen years or so, that a kind of class structure has developed in the academy with professors of theory getting the lion's share of attention and benefits, while the composition teachers do the hard work and the ordinary literature teachers go merrily on their way. Okay—maybe there's some truth to that. But paradoxically the stance against theory is itself theoretical and leads to even more theoretical discourse. The *Critical Inquiry* articles themselves take the form of a theoretical argument. Now since Knapp and Michaels say that theory is inconsequential, then by their own criterion their own argument must be inconsequential.

Now Knapp and Michaels may represent a self-undermining reactionism. But that their case against theory fails doesn't mean that modern theory has nothing to gain from a critique. The New Historicism is a case in point. It is specifically concerned with particularities of texts. It doesn't use general theoretical preambles or frameworks. It likes simply to juxtapose literary with non-literary texts from other fields of discourse. Now I say that this represents a critique of theory in that it shows, when it is done well, that productive results can be obtained without recourse to abstract principles. And yet for a large number of teachers of literature the New Historicism seems to be just another form of post-modern criticism because, I guess, it draws on the kinds of discourse that Foucault among others drew our attention to back in the sixties. It says that these are relevant to discursive space. But then there's the fact that even if the individual articles haven't yet theorized the nature of the relation between different types of discourse, most of us expect that soon they will have to do so. They've avoided that so far because they've wanted to avoid the

totalizing inherent in the old historicism, where you say that the Renaissance believed monolithically in the Great Chain of Being and that this Shakespeare play must therefore be about the Great Chain of Being. The New Historicism wants to say simply that here's this Shakespeare play and here's this document about witchcraft—let's put them together and see what happens. But at some point people are going to have to think about what enables us to do this. So it seems to me that even the New Historicism will ultimately be thought of as belonging to the orientation of contemporary critical thinking.

BERTONNEAU: Along these lines, it was the reaction of a number of people that your paper on Poe and Baudelaire was "less theoretical" than they'd expected.

CULLER: It's certainly not that I've abandoned theory or become less theoretical . . .

BERTONNEAU: I assumed that it was a kind of prolegomenon to a larger study which would be more theoretical.

CULLER: I don't know how much more theoretical the study will be. It might be that at a certain point theory becomes so assimilated that one can write a study of this or that text without prefacing it with the usual theoretical preamble.

BERTONNEAU: It has, as a matter of fact, struck me that, unlike the three "meta-theoretical" books, or four if we include the Barthes essay, your most recent work has concerned itself with literary texts, specifically with the lyric. Is this a case of the successful introjection of theoretical assumptions?

CULLER: The lyric seems to me to be a special case among the genres. Most of the work we have on the lyric makes its assumptions implicitly, and in fact this is not a successful introjection of theory. It's not at all the case that we have a lot of high powered theories about the lyric that we can choose from. Nor in the absence of well thought out theories is it easy to devise one's own. It's not even particularly clear that one *should* devise one's own theory. But one can start by asking questions. For example: is there such a thing as *the* lyric? So most of what I've published so far has taken the form of surveying the territory. What have people said up until now? What are the new developments? In some articles that haven't yet appeared I get a lot

more specific—a number of them have to do with Baudelaire and the lyric. There the project is to look at the tradition of criticism of the lyric.

I take a number of cues from Marjorie Perloff. One of Marjorie's great virtues is that she continually reminds us of the fact that new literature is being constantly created. One has the tendency to think that because there's already such a mountain of texts that one has, so to speak, enough literature and therefore doesn't have to read new texts, or the old ones that didn't happen to get canonized. She reminds us that many of the proponents of poetry in this country operate with a single conception of what poetry is and so don't read the strange and often exciting texts that she, on the other hand, deliberately seeks out. But we can also go to the old texts and read them in new ways.

In fact, the Baudelaire project may well turn out to be two projects, one about Baudelaire and the other about models of the lyric which to some extent have been drawn from Baudelaire and to some extent from the English romantics. Baudelaire has a great role to play here because he offers such a different model from that provided by what M.H. Abrams calls the greater romantic ode, meaning Wordsworth, Keats, Shelley and Coleridge. This has primarily to do with the dialectic of the self and nature. Now the generalizability of this paradigm is not all that obvious once we leave the region of English romanticism. Baudelaire gives us forms which to a considerable degree shape the modern lyric. His dialectic isn't of self and nature, but of self and culture, in the form of the modern urban landscape. The meaningfulness of the self's other cannot in this instance be taken for granted: meaninglessness and despair are even the more likely possibilities. Yet Baudelaire is still consciously trying to come to terms with experience.

BERTONNEAU: You are identified by yourself as well as by others as a post-structuralist. Now post-structuralism doesn't take much interest in diachronicity; yet the Poe-Baudelaire problem would seem inevitably to be a diachronic problem. How do you get over this glitch?

CULLER: I don't see it as a glitch. The paper that you heard today was one that I wrote for this conference and I'm not sure exactly how it will fit into the larger project. As I said in response to a question from François Rigolot, while certain aspects of the Poe-Baudelaire

connection are temporal, what interests me primarily is a relationship between texts—between some of Poe's more psychopathic short-stories and Baudelaire's *Petits poèmes en prose*. I treat Baudelaire's poems as readings of Poe's texts. Now these may have been produced before Baudelaire produced his, but I can easily see doing the same thing if the temporal order were reversed. There are in fact pairs of Baudelaire poems that I want to relate to one another where it isn't certain which was written first.

The preliminary step in all this is pretty much what I did yesterday in my paper. People said that it was a rather traditional paper. As I see it, much of what I'm doing is not exactly old-fashioned, but I would like to be comprehensible and convincing not only to post-structuralists but to people interested in Poe and Baudelaire who aren't post-structuralists. Insofar as the perspective I have on Baudelaire is correct then I ought to be able to convince people who don't share my theoretical orientation. Whether this will in fact be possible I don't know. But in other words when I show how Baudelaire's poems outwit the models that have been proposed for them or imposed on them, I hope that my demonstration will be clear to everyone, the widest possible audience. So for me the project of writing about a single poet is different from the project of writing about poetry, lyric poetry, as a genre.

BERTONNEAU: Does your work on Poe and Baudelaire force us to reread Poe too?

CULLER: It's led me to reread Poe. I hadn't read him in a long time. The question I was asking myself was what it was that Baudelaire found in Poe. There are some bizarre moments in Baudelaire's critical account of Poe. At one point, for example, Baudelaire gets himself terribly worked up over a passage in "The Gold Bug" about some buried treasure and he spends several long paragraphs describing it. He's enthusiastic about the fact that Poe's character, LeGrand, was not dreaming and that there really is a treasure. Frankly I find it impossible to sympathize with Baudelaire's appreciation, except insofar as he was a debtor and liked the thought of serendipitous wealth. But the very fact that there are these moments of genuine opacity, where I simply can't understand why Baudelaire is getting so excited, indicates that I haven't yet fully understood Baudelaire's relation to Poe. There's more work to be done. What I'm doing is not reading Poe through Baudelaire's eyes but through Baudelaire's text's eyes.

I think of Baudelaire's texts as rewriting Poe in ways that bring out Poe's caricature of himself.

The other aspect of Poe that this brings out is the extent to which the supernatural or the fantastic may be derived from a linguistic mechanism. I'm not convinced that this is anything that Baudelaire got from Poe . . . but many of Poe's stories, and they're really his weakest stories, turn on themes that seem to me to be much better treated in the form of the prose-poem. In other words, Baudelaire got something from Poe that he could do better than Poe himself.

BERTONNEAU: The way you describe Baudelaire's appropriation of Poe seems to me to resemble the way Riffaterre describes the appropriation of the "matrix" by the lyric poet. Is it fair to call attention to this similarity?

CULLER: There are some cases that Riffaterre identifies that involve a kind of punning mechanism, or literalizations of figures. What's so often irritating about Riffaterre is that he starts off with a structural mechanism, a kind of generative moment in lyric discourse, but then proceeds to a sort of essentialist stasis. Riffaterre wants to assert that poets start with a thematic which is the core of their poem. This then gets developed according to clichés and descriptive conventions. Thus the "matrix" is the essence or meaning of the poem. That's not the claim I make for the *Petits poèmes en prose*. I want to resist the notion that one explains a poem by finding its "matrix" or essence.

So, while there might be some surface likenesses, the intention is quite different. It's curious—this just occurred to me—but Riffaterre calls himself a phenomenologist. I think you'll find a statement to that effect in the preface to *Textual Production*. Now phenomenology isn't the first description you'd think of for what Riffaterre does, but let's take him at his word. It seems to me that phenomenology is always exhausting itself just because of its habit of coming to rest in an identity. The advantage of post-modern theory, as I see it, is that it avoids setting terminal goals in advance. It remains—and maybe this is its "ethic"—open ended, productive, provocative, rather than fixed or closed.

(NOTE: I wish to thank Jonathan Culler for taking time out of a busy transcontinental weekend to submit to this interview, and for his patience during nearly an hour of questions and answers).

Thomas F. Bertonneau is a doctoral student in the UCLA Program in Comparative Literature.

PAROLES GELEES

UCLA French Studies



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PAROLES GELEES

UCLA French Studies

Ce serait le moment de philosopher et de
rechercher si, par hasard, se trouverait
ici l'endroit où de telles paroles déglent.

Rabelais, *Le Quart Livre*

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