

On the Ellipsis ... Reading, Violence, and a Plea for Evil

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ABSTRACT

In *Allegories of Reading*, Paul de Man quips, “not that the act of reading is innocent, far from it. It is the starting point of all evil” (194). This paper seeks to re-inscribe evil into reading, and evil in the precise sense of the eternal question of the serpent—“did God really ask you not to eat from any of the trees in the garden?”—the question that is never answered; and that perhaps does not have an answer. For only if the question remains as such do we manage to avoid reading as a phenomenological act, centred in the self, and which effaces all texts. By retaining the uncertainty, and unknowability of a pure question—and a reconstituting of reading as testing, testing everything including itself—reading can then be thought of as a pre-relational relationality between the text and the reader; illegitimate and violent, but responsible to the text, and in fidelity to the possibility of reading. In order to do so, this paper will negotiate reading as the ethical relation *par excellence* through the works of Werner Hamacher, Jean-François Lyotard, Jean-Loup Thébaud, Slavoj Žižek and Avital Ronell. As such, it will attempt to tread the boundaries of philosophy and literature; and in particular the notions of exteriority and finitude. This paper will posit that the ellipsis is not an aberrant punctuation of writing, but the very figure of writing, and reading, itself. For only when the ellipsis is acknowledged in each sentence—whether it is

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seen or not is irrelevant—is the terroristic gesture of totality, effacement, and non-response avoided. Hence what is usually seen as exterior to the sentence, and beyond its limit of knowledge, is what allows the sentence to be a continual question; by extension, the ellipsis is precisely what allows reading itself to occur, and to continually occur. Hence, this will be a thinking of reading that is not only a non-phenomenological act, but an event that undoes phenomenology itself: reading as an event that exposes itself to nothing but the possibility of reading.

KEY WORDS: reading, violence, evil, terror, post-structural philosophy, ellipsis

Perhaps we should begin with a reminder from *Allegories of Reading*, where Paul de Man quips, “not that the act of reading is innocent, far from it. It is the starting point of all evil” (194). And when we consider that de Man’s thinking is never far from the trajectory of Western Philosophy, one cannot ignore the echo of the serpent here, and the eternal question, “did God really ask you not to eat from any of the trees in the garden?”¹ One must never forget that this is the question that never is answered, for we never actually hear what Yahweh says to the woman; all we ever know is from her, through her. To compound matters, it is not as if the serpent was lying; after eating of the fruit from the tree of knowledge, man and woman do not die—as the woman claims would have happened according to Yahweh—but instead they were expelled from the garden, as they had gained the knowledge of the gods, just as the serpent said they would. Of course since we never actually hear Yahweh’s words—Her command—we can never constitute the question

¹ Genesis 3:1

within the realm of truth and falsity; without a referentiality, we are left with the question as potentially a performative question, or perhaps more radically, as a question that remains a primordial question, the first hermeneutical moment; the question of “did God really mean what (S)he said?”

But before we contend with the issue of hermeneutics—and interpretation—we should consider the very basis of their possibility: correspondence. This of course is the very basis of phenomenology itself, and hence a requirement if we attempt to constitute the possibility of reading as an act. However, if correspondence is required, this would also suggest that reading is an act that requires a minimum of response between the reader and the text; after all, one is merely interpreting with a pre-decided code, that is, language, and more precisely grammar.

However, if we are attempting to think of reading as a response between the reader and the text, then we have to also think the possibility of a reading without this *a priori* conception. And it is here that we will encounter an aporetic situation: if one is reading without any correspondence, one is strictly speaking unable to read; if one is reading with a set correspondence—referentiality through grammar—then one is not responding with the text. Hence if we are attempting to think reading as a response with the text, then we have to constitute reading as ‘reading as if reading for the first time.’

Here it might be helpful to temporarily take a detour into the notion of revolutions; for what is a revolution in its most basic sense, but an attempt to approach a situation in a new way, “as if” for the first time. And as Slavoj Žižek reminds us,

in a proper revolutionary breakthrough, the utopian future is neither simply fully realized, present, nor simply evoked as a distant promise that justifies present violence. It is rather as if,

in a unique suspension of temporality, in the short circuit between the present and the future, we are—as if by Grace—for a brief time allowed to act as if the utopian future were (not yet fully here, but) already at hand, just there to be grabbed. Revolution is not experienced as a present hardship we have to endure for the happiness and freedom of the future generations but as the present hardship over which this future happiness and freedom already cast their shadow—in it, we already are free while fighting for freedom, we already are happy while fighting for happiness, no matter how difficult the circumstances. Revolution is not a Merleau-Pontyan wager, an act suspended in the *futur antérieur*, to be legitimized or delegitimized by the long term outcome of the present acts; it is as it were its own ontological proof, an immediate index of its own truth.

It is this “as if” that remains crucial to us; we must act “as if” we are able to do so. Each time we read, we are reading “as if” we are able to do so. This suggests that each reading is “as it were its own ontological proof, an immediate index of its own truth,” which by extension also suggests that each time we read, there is the echo of Friedrich Nietzsche who reminds us that we will never have the “metaphysical comfort” of a single correct reading; reading is always already in the realm of the *doxa* and never in the *logos*.

Here we have to momentarily slow down, so that we can examine the very nature of the Beckettian paradox we are facing; in terms of reading, we cannot read, but at the same time we must read. It would be too simple to attribute the possibility of reading to just one’s will, and disposition. For if one can respond with a text—albeit only momentarily, and perhaps even whilst being utterly irresponsible to all the other possibilities in the text—then

surely there is something within the text, within reading itself, that allows one to do so. In order to think this possibility, we have to first take a glance at what allows us to read.

Even if we want to posit that the relationality between the signifier and signified is an arbitrary one, we cannot ignore the fact that there is a momentary relationality when we attribute a resonance—or dare I say meaning—to a mental image, to a word. In order for this to be so, there has to be a correspondence between the signifier and the signified: whether this correspondence is real, or imaginary, is an altogether different question, and one that I have to remain irresponsible to, if anything due to space, and perhaps my inability to respond adequately to its call. In order for there to be a correspondence between one thing and another, an act of recognition is required; this is also an act of memory. In other words, what enables us to read in the first place is a memory of this very relationality between the signifier and signified; one could extend this and say that this is a memory that is governed by rules, by laws, by grammar.

A consideration of memory would not be complete—as far as this is even possible—without an accompanying meditation on the status of forgetting. In order to do so, we should momentarily stop and consider what it means to say “I forgot.” One can always posit that “I forgot” is a performative statement—anyone who has been through a school system has used this umpteen times when faced with an assignment, and in particular when one has crossed the deadline. What is more interesting is to consider the possibility that “I forgot” is a constative statement: in this case, for the statement to be true, there cannot be an object to it; the moment there is an object to “I forgot,” then strictly speaking one has remembered what one has forgotten. Hence the utterance “I forgot” is one in which there is no referent; at best the subject is uttering the very fact that (s)he has forgotten and nothing more.

And if there is no referent to forgetting, this suggests that there is always already an element of unknowability—an unknowable element—in forgetting. In other words, there is an element that lies beyond the cognition of the subject, that lies beyond the subject herself. The implication is, one cannot choose forgetting, one cannot choose what one forgets—after all, there is no object to forgetting. Hence forgetting happens to one: it is something other to the subject that then has an effect on her. And if this is so, there is then absolutely no reason that each time one remembers something—each act of memory—might not also bring with it the potentiality of forgetting. In other words, forgetting is not an antonym to memory, but rather is potentially part of memory itself.

By extension, if all we know—if knowledge itself—is composed of memory, this would then suggest that we can never be sure if what we know is complete; we can never be secure of our understanding.

If we translate the problematics of understanding—and knowledge—into the graphical system we use to denote—and perhaps connote—knowing, then we would have to question the very possibility of a full sentence, a complete sentence. Here we might want to consider the trope of death that haunts sentences: after all, every sentence begins with a capital letter; sentences end with a full-stop, a finality, an end to the idea. The graphical system suggests a certain completeness, a certain totality, within each sentence; as if an idea can be captured, locked-in, contained in a sentence. In fact, this seems to be the fantasy of linguistics: that if we cut out all the clutter, in other words ambiguities—metaphors—we can reach a full understanding with each other. Here we might momentarily return to Paul de Man, who teaches us that grammar is what allows language to function, that

the system of relationships that generate the text and that functions independently of its referential meaning is its grammar.

To the extent that a text is grammatical, it is a logical code or a machine. And there can be no agrammatical text, as the most nongrammatical of poets, Mallarme, was the first to acknowledge. Any nongrammatical text will always be read as a deviation from an assumed grammatical norm. (268)

However, de Man continues, in order for grammar to be conceived of in the first place, all referentiality has to be suspended; for “just as no law can ever be written unless one suspends any consideration of applicability to a particular entity including, of course, oneself, grammatical logic can function only if its referential consequences are disregarded” (269). But of course, for any law to make sense it has to have a certain applicability; it has to be applied to specific situations. Hence,

it cannot be left hanging in the air, in the abstraction of its generality. Only by thus referring back to particular praxis can the justice of the law be tested, exactly as the justesse of any statement can only be tested by its referential verifiability, or by deviation from its verification. (269)

This suggests that a text is both the result of grammar and is also its undoing; a text can only come into being by adherence to grammar, but each time one attempts to respond to a text, each time one attempts to read, all grammar is undone.²

Perhaps here, we can turn to a particular punctuation mark that is often

² Here, if we back-track for a moment, and allow ourselves to indulge in the fantasy of linguistics, and consider the notion that removal of clutter—doing away of metaphor, figural language—was actually achievable, then after a single sentence, we would no longer have anything to say to the other. In some way, there seems to be a perverse desire in linguistics to bring an end, a death, to language itself.

considered an aberration to writing: the ellipsis. An ellipsis suggests that there is either something more, or something less, in that sentence—one can use it to suggest more to be added, or a retraction, to the sentence. In other words, it is the mark of an absent part of the sentence, but one that affects the sentence; and more precisely has an unknown—and perhaps even unknowable—effect. However if we consider the fact that forgetting can occur at any time, any place, there is then no reason why each act of remembering (that is demonstrated in the sentence) might not bring with it the possibility of forgetting as well. In other words, each sentence always already brings with it the possibility of an ellipsis; whether we see it or not, is perhaps irrelevant.

Here I call upon the echo of Werner Hamacher's elegant thinking when he posits that the

ellipsis is the rhetorical equivalent of writing: it depletes, or de-completes, the whole so as to make conceptual totalities possible. And yet every conceivable whole achieved on the basis of ellipsis is stamped with the mark of the original loss. Like writing, it withdraws from the alternatives of presence and absence, whole and part, proper and foreign, because only on its ever eroding foundation can conceptual oppositions develop: it withdraws from its own concept. Ellipsis eclipses (itself). It is the “figure” of figuration: the area no figure contains. (74)

The ellipsis, rather than being a marginalized figure of writing, an aberration to the conceptual totality of writing, is the very figure of writing itself. And it is the very figure of forgetting that allows one to write in the first place; for if everything has already been said, there is nothing left to write. It is only the fact that one can never be sure if one has forgotten—that there is the

possibility of forgetting happening to us—that leaves us the space to continue thinking, to continue negotiating, to continue writing. It is this inability to know if we know, to be sure that we have understood, that allows us to continue reading, to continue negotiating with the text; that ensures that we have possibly never quite read the text.

However, it is not as if each reading does not come with its moment of violence; after all, each reading is a response to a particularity of the text, to a particular reading, whilst always already being blind to the other readings, the other possibilities, within that same text.

But here one must distinguish between violence and terror. We turn to Jean-François Lyotard and Jean-Loup Thébaud and their conversation in *Just Gaming* where they posit terror as a “blow that is not struck on the adversary but it is hoped that the blow will be borne by the third party, the witness, public opinion. In such a case, everyone is caught ‘without freedom’” (70). Violence, on the other hand, is a “two sided battle, [where] my opponent thinks that what I think and do is unjust, and I think that what he does and thinks is unjust. Well his freedom is complete and so is mine” (70). When it comes to terror, one is no longer free to think, one is no longer free to negotiate: in other words, terror is the situation where the signifier and signified are fused. One only has to consider 9/11 to see this: the fact that one no longer has to mention the year, suggests that 2001 has sucked all the other years in history into itself. The terror of the morning of September 11, 2001, lies not in the horror of many innocent deaths, but in the fact that we no longer can constitute the date as a referent to anything but the event of aeroplanes flying into buildings.³

³ One of the readers of this piece very kindly brought to my attention a register that I left out; that of the relationality between my conception of violence as an “ethical act rather than the indiscriminate skepticism in the guise of tolerance and moderation,” and that of the “radical left”—in particular Alain Badiou and Slavoj Žižek—for whom the concern is to “identify the third way beyond the polarity

The ignoring of the potential ellipsis in every sentence, in every reading, is a terroristic gesture as it aims at the perfect, totalizing, complete sentence. Whether this fantasy of linguistics is possible is irrelevant; the terroristic intent remains.

In each ellipsis, one finds an echo of Paul Celan's beautiful thought—"poetry does not impose, it exposes itself" (181). The ellipsis never lets us forget the fact that each reading is violent, but should not efface; that each reading is a response to a particular possibility in the text. Each reading is one amongst many possibilities; and one in which the reader is free to return to, is free to negotiate with any other possibility.

Somewhere along in history, it would seem that complete understanding, total knowledge, became, and is now seen, as something positive, something to be aimed for, something good. In many ways, the entire education system is based on this trope; in fact one is hard pressed to ignore the universalizing

between active nihilism (sovereign violence, the culmination of which is Nazi genocide) and reactive nihilism (the striking manifesto of which is the postmodern intolerance of grand narratives)." As (s)he very aptly points out, Badiou and Žižek seem to be gesturing towards a Benjamin-ian "divine violence." This however is clearly not what I am attempting to suggest in this paper: my conception of violence is one which attempts to respond to the singularity of the situation, whilst recognizing the fact that other(s) are marginalized by the very act of choosing. This is structural rather than an effect of one's will: so even though response is a subjective act, it is not as if one can choose to be absolutely responsible whilst responding. By choosing to respond, one inadvertently is always already irresponsible. Hence, this is a conception of ethics that acknowledges the irresponsibility in all response; one that recognizes the blindness in any response, and by extension reading itself. In this sense, I would constitute the gesture of Badiou and Žižek—as pointed out by my reader—as a terroristic gesture: this is especially true when one takes into consideration the notions of (in Badiou's terms) "opening a new world in an old world," and in Žižek-ian, "rupturing," that seem to call for a gesture that is the imposing of one's will. For instance, Žižek has pointed out, in an interview with *Soft Targets* entitled "Divine Violence and Liberated Territories," that an example Benjamin gives of divine violence is, "a mob lynching a corrupt ruler" (<http://www.softtargetsjournal.com/web/zizek.php>). Whilst this is an instance of group will, rather than that of a single individual, the concept remains the same: the imposition of one will over the other(s); the will of the other(s) is completely ignored. Hence, at the moment of "opening" and "rupturing," there is an effacement of all the others; even as there is a response to the situation (that of the corruption of the ruler) every other is made one's absolute other.

Unfortunately this paper is not the particular occasion to trace the differences between the notions of violence (and terror) opened. I would however like to offer my gratitude to the reader for bringing this to my attention; and also to apologize for my lack in responding to it. For a more comprehensive meditation on this, please see, Jeremy Fernando. *The Suicide Bomber; and her gift of death*. New York: Atropos Press, forthcoming, 2010.

echo in universities. If this is deemed good, then this is a plea for the return of evil into thinking, the return of the question that questions everything including itself as question. Here we hear once again the voice of Nietzsche, and in particular that of the gay scientist, who tests everything, including the test itself. In this way, all answers are provisional, situational, positing nothing but the fact that they are positing; in other words all answering—and in some way all reading—is naming, bringing with it all the illegitimacies of catachresis. In this manner, thinking and heresy are closely related, have an intimate relationality with each other: without one there is no other.

As we attempt to hear the voice of the serpent in all reading, in the very possibility of reading itself, we might want to momentarily meditate on the notion of this hearing; for what are we hearing, and whom are we hearing from, whenever we attempt to hear. This problem is the very same problem that plagues us when we attempt to name; for even as something is named, as it is called into being, it is always already haunted by—called by—the ghosts of all the others that have been named the same, none of which were named with any reason except for the fact that they were named as such. In this sense, both naming, and the attempt to hear, are attempts to respond to voices from elsewhere, to spectres of some unknown other, an other that might always remain unknowable. Once again, we turn to Werner Hamacher, and his response to Peter Connor, where he meditates on what a call entails, on what it means to be called:

Why is the call thought of as something which, rather than taken, taken down, or taken in—be it from a specific agent, subject, principle, preferably a moral one—will be given? And if each call which issues is destined to make demands on the one who is called (but this is also questionable), is it already settled that I

will hear, that I will hear this call and hear it as one destined for me? Is it not rather the case that the minimal condition to be able to hear something as something lies in my comprehending it neither as destined for me nor as somehow oriented toward someone else? Because I would not need to hear it in the first place if the source and destination of the call, of the call as call, were already certain and determined. Following the logic of calling up, of the call ... and along with that the logic of demand, of obligation, of law, no call can reach its addressee simply as itself, and each hearing is consummated in the realm of the possibility not so much of hearing as being able to listen up by ceasing to hear. Hearing ceases. It listens to a noise, a sound, a call; and so hearing always ceases hearing, because it could not let itself be determined other than as hearing, to hearing any further. Hearing ceases. Always. Listen. . . . (37-42)

As Hamacher teaches us, listening is the openness to the possibility of the other, of the potentiality of being in communication—in communion even—with the other, an objectless other, an other that might be completely other to itself. It is this objectlessness of the other that ensures that this communion is one that is without consumption, without subsumption; the other remains wholly other to oneself even as we attempt to momentarily get in touch.

In this we find an echo of Lucretius, and in particular his notion of communication. In Lucretius' conception, communication is a process that occurs in the skin between, space between, two persons when they are attempting to communicate with each other.⁴ In other words, it is a

⁴ The name that Lucretius gives this space, this skin, is the "simulacra." Amongst other places, this argument can be found in Lucretius. *Sensation and Sex*, 2005: esp. 39-60.

negotiation between two persons that remain irreducible singularities: there is no conjoining of one to the other, no effacement of one by the other. Hence communication is potentially violent, but never terroristic. In this sense, the term mis-communication is a misnomer: for if it is always already a negotiated process, by definition the result of communication can never be known before it occurs. For something to be termed “mis-communication,” there has to be an *a priori* determination to which the result of the negotiation is then compared with; there has to be a measure of correspondence with a pre-determined outcome. If communication is the result of a negotiation, this suggests that it is akin to an emergent property of a chemical reaction; at best the result can be guessed in advance, but strictly speaking, one can never know what will emerge from this fusion, this coming together. Hence each act of communication—much like each act of reading—is singular.

Here it might be helpful if we momentarily draw upon a potentially strange figure when it comes to reading: the telephone. Whenever we pick up the telephone, we are attempting to answer a call; however the call is always already an objectless call. For even in this age of caller-identification, we never truly know who is on the other line—the only thing that we can be sure of is that someone else is attempting to get in touch with us. And it is in the act of picking up the telephone—in receiving the call—that we respond to the other, which till the moment we hear her voice (and in many cases even after (s)he speaks) remains an unknown other. There is an echo of the primordial agreement between Alexander Graham Bell and his brother Melville here: in Robert V. Bruce’s biography, *Alexander Graham Bell and the Conquest of Solitude*, he notes that both of them made a “solemn compact that whichever of us should die first would endeavor to communication with the other if it were possible to do so” (63). And since Melville was the one who passed on first, this contract put Alexander Graham Bell on the receiving end; in other

words, he had to be constantly prepared to receive this call from beyond. In this sense—especially if you take into consideration the fact that until Melville’s death both brothers had been working on early prototypes of the telephone—the telephone can be read as an attempt for Aleck to maintain the possibility of keeping in touch with Melly. It is this trope both of hope, and of the openness to potentiality, that echoes in the telephone; after all, the instrument of distant sound allows us the possibility of touching the other, even and especially in the absence of that same other. However this is a connection that is not premised on knowing—of exchange, of performance—but an openness; the same openness that one who tries to respond to a text, any text, must attempt. And here perhaps it is best to allow the voice of Avital Ronell from *The Telephone Book* to resound, in particular her beautiful meditation that, “the connection to the other is a reading—not an interpretation, assimilation, or even a hermeneutic understanding, but a reading” (380). This suggests that the very connection between the receiver and the other is the point of connectivity itself; the point of communication is the possibility of this communion.

In order to meditate on the communion between oneself and the other, it might help to momentarily detour, and consider the very process of communion itself. Here one is hard pressed to ignore the trope of Catholicism, especially the accompanying utterance to the sacrament of communion: that of “do this in memory of me.” Once again we enter the realm of remembering and forgetting, and all of this is brought to bear in trans-substantiation; for this is a process where there is a change in substance of the bread and wine (into the body and blood of Christ) but a change in which the senses are not privy to. In other words, this is change in substance, but one in which there is no referentiality. And this unverifiable, and ultimately illegitimate, trans-substantiation, is only possible due to the potentiality of forgetting. For if memory was complete—if

one could know in certainty—then by extension, possibility is governed by correspondence: the fact that we can never be sure, that we can never control forgetting, suggests the possibility of changes that can occur which remain exterior to our cognition, to our scope of knowing.

But here we must go even further, and examine what occurs even when there is the possibility of referentiality. In order to do so, we have to consider what it means to say “_____ is like _____,” that “something is like something else;” for the statement of relationality is the very basis of all correspondence. Whenever one utters “_____ is like _____,” there is always already the echo of preference that haunts the statement; that this relationality is uttered only because the one who utters it wants it to be so. Whether it is a biased statement or not is irrelevant; what is crucial is the fact that this statement would not exist—this relationality would not be—if it was not called into being by that person. However, in order for the person to call this relationality into being, (s)he would first have to assume the possibility of this very relationality itself; for it is only retrospectively that the validity of the statement “_____ is like _____” can be tested. Hence this is a statement that is based on nothing but the assumption of the possibility of “_____ is like _____.” In other words, this statement of relationality is not a statement of reference, of correspondence, but the very naming of referentiality itself: in order to make the statement, one must first assume the possibility of referentiality; and the statement “_____ is like _____” is its very name.⁵

In terms of reading, each time one reads, one is opening “a connection to the other,” and more specifically naming the very possibility of this connection itself. Each naming of course brings with it an act of violence,

⁵ For a more comprehensive meditation on relationality, please see Jeremy Fernando. “Read Blindly or an Incredulity towards the Trans” *Journal of English and American Studies*: 53-67.

especially since there is no basis to the naming except for the naming; each time one names one is picking one name over every other name. Hence there is a privileging of one name whilst the other(s) are marginalized. However this is a violence that is not an effacement, that is not a terroristic gesture, as there is no claim to the validity of this naming; this is precisely because each act of naming is a tautological gesture, and one that makes no claim to reason, to logic, to truth, but remains in the realm of doxa, of opinion.

Here we make a return to the ellipsis, to our figure of both writing and reading, and attempt to think perhaps what is unthinkable: for how can one actually make a statement about a figure which says nothing, which at best denotes that there is potentially something that is said. For whenever one encounters an ellipsis one cannot say for sure whether there is an addition or subtraction; the only think that is sure is that there is the possibility of something. In other words, the ellipsis is nothing more, or less, than the figure of the openness to the potentiality of something exterior to the sentence, the openness to the possibility of the other.

The ellipsis as a telephone ... reading as an elliptical call. And here one might once again allow Werner Hamacher's response to Peter Connor resonate; reading as an attempt not to hear anything, as if we can hear, but to "listen." And like the primordial gesture of Aleck, perhaps we might even catch the sound of spectres, and keep in touch with what we were never expecting to in the first place. However if reading is an attempt to listen to the text, this also suggests that each time one reads, it is a singular act; one that is not only unrepeatable, but that potentially has no relation with any other reading, with any reading(s) of any other(s). Hence one's reading might not only never gain any legitimacy—for in order to validate a reading, it must be backed by others, have some consistency with others—but also never provide any comfort to the reader that (s)he is reading properly, accurately, or even well; each reading is

potentially literally “for your ears only.”

It is this personal, singular, and perhaps even secretive nature of reading that calls for a certain approach to reading; one that is constantly reading in search for dare one say answers, but at the same time realizing that these answers might either never be found, or even if momentarily glimpsed, heard, might be fleeting, and more than that, could possibly never be shared, articulated to others, perhaps not even to oneself. So, even as one continues to read, to search, one has to maintain a certain ironic distance; an ironic disposition that the answers are but a question in another form. Perhaps here one can posit that the reader who attempts to respond to and with the text, who reads carefully, with attention to detail, is akin to a scientist, but that this scientist—if one is allowed to call on the gay scientist one more time—is a scientist with a poetic sensibility; is one that approaches a poem, reads it closely, studies it even, but with an ironic smile; keeping in mind Jean Baudrillard’s reminder that “the poem ... lacks nothing: any commentary makes it worse. Not only does it lack nothing, but it makes any discourse appear superfluous. Poetry and thought are to be taken in their literalness, not in their truth: truth merely makes things worse” (211). In this way, all thinking is always already an approach, perhaps in fidelity to the possibility of knowing, but always already in acknowledgement that this knowing is but a glimpse, and that there is the possibility that something always already is unknown, incomplete; elliptical.

Hence whenever we attempt to read, the ellipsis remains for us the figure par excellence of reading itself; and more precisely, the ellipsis is the figure that reminds us that each reading exposes itself, to nothing but the possibility of reading.

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論刪節號…閱讀、暴力、 及邪惡的辯護

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摘 要

在《閱讀的寓言》中，保羅德曼嘲諷地說：「閱讀的行為絕非單純，遠遠不是。它是所有罪惡的起點」（194）。本文企圖將邪惡重新納入閱讀當中；邪惡，更精確地說，指的是蛇所提出來的永恆問題：上帝真的不准你吃花園裡任何一棵樹上的果實嗎？這個問題始終未被解答；或許，這個問題並沒有任何的答案。唯有這個問題保持著無解，我們才能避免讓閱讀成為一個以自我為中心、抹拭任何文本的現象學行為。經由保持問題的不確定性和未知性，並將閱讀重建為一種可以試驗任何事（包括閱讀本身）的試鍊，如此一來，閱讀可以被視為一種在文本和讀者之間一種先於關聯性的相關性；這也許是非法的、暴力的，但卻是對文本負責、對閱讀的可能性保持忠誠。為了達成以上所言，本文將透過 Werner Hamacher、Jean-François Lyotard、Jean-Loup Thébaud、Slavoj Žižek，及 Avital Ronell 的理論來辯證閱讀為一種卓越的倫理關係。本文將試圖踐越哲學和文學之間的界線，特別是有關外在和限度的觀念。本文指出刪節號並非寫作中異常的標點符號；它是寫作和閱讀行為的本質。唯有每個句子中的刪節號的存在被承認（無論它是否被明確標示），才能避免整體性

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(totality)、抹除 (effacement)、與無回應 (non-response) 的恐怖姿態。因此，通常被視為句子之外，且超出其知識限度的，方才是使句子變成一種不斷問句的關鍵。也因此，刪節號正是容許閱讀發生、並且持續發生的關鍵。所以，在這種概念之下，閱讀不僅是種非現象學的行為，也是推翻現象學的一種手段：閱讀唯一揭露的，就只有閱讀的可能性。

關鍵詞：閱讀、暴力、恐怖、後結構哲學、刪節號、邪惡