

J. HILLIS MILLER

Sovereignty Death Literature Unconditionality Democracy University

... c'est aussi pour annoncer l'inconditionnel,
l'éventuel ou le possible événement de
l'inconditionnel impossible, le tout autre — que
nous devrions désormais ... dissocier de l'idée
théologique de souveraineté. (Jacques Derrida,
L'Université sans condition)

A decisive moment in my life was my first encounter with Jacques Derrida. I first met him at the famous Johns Hopkins University International Colloquium on “Critical Languages and the Sciences of Man” in October, 1966. I missed his lecture on “Structure, Sign, and Play in the Discourse of the Human Sciences” because I had a class to teach at that hour. I did hear, however, his interventions in the discussions of other papers. I met my colleague and friend Georges Poulet in the Hopkins quadrangle just after Derrida's own lecture. He told me that Derrida's lecture was opposed to everything to which his own work (that is, Poulet's) was committed. Poulet at that time was writing on circles and centers, whereas Derrida's talk was about decentering. Nevertheless, said Poulet, it was the most important lecture of the conference by far, even though Jacques Lacan and many other worthies were also giving papers. I have always remembered Poulet's intellectual insight and generosity in saying that. He was right. Derrida's lecture marked the moment of the entry of so-called deconstruction into United States intellectual life. I had already, however, begun to read Derrida:

the long two part essay published in *Critique* in December 1965 and January 1966 that was developed into the first part of *De la grammatologie*.

When Derrida came a couple of years later as a visiting professor to Hopkins I went to his first seminar. I went just to see whether I could understand his spoken French. It was the seminar contrasting Plato on mimesis and Mallarmè's "Mimique," part of "La double seance," in *La dissemination* (Derrida 1972). I thought, and still think, it was an absolutely brilliant seminar. I still have somewhere the sheet he passed out juxtaposing "Mimique" and a passage from Plato's *Philebus*. I have always faithfully attended Derrida's seminars first at Hopkins, then at Yale, and later at the University of California at Irvine. We began to have lunch together at Hopkins and we continued that practice for over forty years of unclouded friendship.

Derrida and his writings have been major intellectual influences on me. One of the strongest Derridean influences on my thinking has been his notion of the "wholly other." This became more and more a salient motif in Derrida's work. Just what he means by "the wholly other," "le tout autre," is not all that easy to grasp. For many people, it is even more difficult to accept or to endorse with a profession of faith or a pledge of allegiance. One way to approach the Derridean wholly other is by way of his distinction between sovereignty and unconditionality. Unconditionality is, for Derrida, a name for the research university's hypothetical freedom from outside interference. Derrida defines the university's unconditionality as the privilege without penalty to put everything in question, even to put in question the right to put everything in question. In the interview with Derek Attridge that forms the first essay in the volume of Derrida's essays on literature that Attridge gathered and called *Acts of Literature* (Derrida 1992), Derrida defines literature in much the same way as he defines the university in more recent lectures, for example in "L'Université sans condition" (originally a President's Lecture at Stanford, Derrida 2001b), and in a related essay, the speech he gave on receiving an honorary degree from the University of Pantion in Athens in 1999 (Derrida 2001a). That essay is entitled "Inconditionnalité ou souveraineté: L'Université aux frontières de l'Europe." Both lectures are based on a fundamental distinction between sovereignty and what Derrida calls (the word is a neologism in English) "unconditionality." What is the difference?

My title is a series of six nouns set side by side without any verb or other ligature. How can they all be related? Perhaps it is impossible. That is my

question here. Before trying to answer that question, let me begin by saying that it is difficult these days to talk dispassionately about sovereignty and death. We are living now in the United States in the midst of an unparalleled example of usurped or illegitimate sovereignty wantonly exercised. We have a President who was not elected and who is with his executive branch pursuing a policy of preemptive strikes, rejection of international treaties or of international law, destruction of the environment, the bankrupting the nation through running up gigantic deficits in order to benefit the rich, the establishment of a permanent state of emergency justifying the suspension of constitutional civil liberties, and the infliction of a constant state of terror on our citizens through the mass media and daily lies, such as the lies about Saddam Hussein's "weapons of mass destruction" and his ties to Al-Qaeda. The United States is being run in the same way that the administration's friends at Enron, Lay and Fastow, ran that company, that is, by lying to the shareholders (read: U. S. citizens, voters), running up huge debts; and bilking the company to satisfy their own limitless greed, as for example in the abrogation of EPA regulations about factory emission cleanups when plants are renovated or the attempt to develop the oil in the Arctic North Shore Wild Life Refuge. Meanwhile, though we are already armed to the teeth with weapons of mass destruction and have a larger military budget than those of all our "allies" combined, the administration is quietly going about developing and testing new "bunker-buster" nuclear weapons.

And talk about death! I mean the death of all those we killed and are killing in Iraq. I mean also the Americans being killed there every day in the exercise of the President's sovereignty over the life and death of United States citizens. This is exemplified in the power of the Commander in Chief to declare war and to send troops into combat or into occupation duty. So called "Ambassador" Paul Bremer, actually the imposed dictator of occupied Iraq, viceroy of George W. Bush, who is vicar or God, in a PBS interview on the Lehrer News Hour, when he was still running Iraq, asserted repeatedly that "we," meaning the United States, masquerading as a "coalition of the willing," are "sovereign" in Iraq. He appealed to international law for the claim that a sovereign occupying power has a responsibility to feed and shelter the conquered, to give them medical treatment and basic service. Bremer has no doubt been reading Carl Schmitt or Leo Strauss. The latter is the unacknowledged ideologue of the present administration, as embodied, for example, in Paul Wolfowitz. Two days later (9/26/03), on that day's Lehrer News Hour, a member of the Iraqi "Governing Council," which was

of course hand-picked by our government, said that Iraq is still a sovereign nation. Either he or Paul Bremer must be wrong. In this case, as in most others, surely might makes right. The true sovereign in Iraq is George W. Bush. In speaking of the connection of sovereignty and death in the United States today I mean also those who will be killed by uncontrolled factory pollutant emissions or by unchecked global warming or by tax breaks offered to those who buy monster SUVs. The United States is the only first-world country that still has the death penalty. George W. Bush was famous as Governor of Texas for the number of executions he authorized. He only rarely, as Governor, exercised his sovereign right to pardon. As I say, it is difficult these days to think dispassionately about the abstract question of the relation of sovereignty to death or to any of the other concepts named in my title. Nevertheless, I shall try to do so. It is impossible, for me at least, to think about sovereignty without having in mind Jacques Derrida's attention to the concept of sovereignty in *Échographies*, and in a whole series of recent seminars on sovereignty and the death penalty, and on "The Beast and the Sovereign." The seminars under the latter rubric juxtapose Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe* and Heidegger's theory of animality in *The Fundamental Concepts of Metaphysics*. As Derrida has patiently shown, through discussions of concepts about sovereignty from Aristotle and Plato on down to Hobbes, Rousseau, Beccaria, Schmidt, Heidegger, and many others, the essence of sovereignty lies in three features.

The first is the notion that the king, emperor, or chief executive is above the law, just as the animal, the supposedly ferocious lion or wolf or tiger, is outside the law because below the human, outside the human.

The second feature is the way the concept of sovereignty is theological through and through. Sovereignty cannot be detached from its theological roots. This is true even in democratic nations where the people are supposed to be sovereign. The revised version of our pledge of allegiance, now widely used, says we are "one nation, under God, with liberty and justice for all." The addition of "under God" is not only contrary to our constitutional separation of church and state. It also has a quite different meaning from Abraham Lincoln's appeal, in the Gettysburg Address, to "government of the people, by the people, and for the people." To say the concept of sovereignty is theological is to say, as the new version of the pledge of allegiance does, that all earthly sovereigns, even democratically elected ones, are representatives of the deity, vicars of God. They act in the name of God's divine omnipotent authority. This means that they are not so much

lawmakers as above any law that may have been made. The abrogation of the law in sovereign acts of pardon is a clear example of this. Though George W. Bush is not conspicuously given to acts of pardoning “evil doers,” it is highly significant and, to me at least, deeply disquieting, to know that he is, though this is kept rather quiet, a born-again Christian who probably believes in the Armageddon and apparently believes that he has been chosen by God to carry on the deity’s work of preparing for the Last Days. This may explain the administration’s reluctance to accept the evidence of global warming. They may look at the inundation of our coasts, the vanishing of most of Florida, and the transformation of California into a sterile desert as the judgment of God on a wicked people, leaving Bush, Cheney, Rumsfeld, Rice, and a few corporate friends standing on a mountain-top as the Saving Remnant, while the streets run in blood below.

The third feature of sovereignty is the way it cannot be dissociated, in the Western tradition, from the notion of the nation-state. All recent wars, for example in Kosovo or Rwanda, not to speak of our occupation of Iraq, have been carried out in the name of a given national sovereignty, established or to come. This ideal of a nation-state is made of a single ethnically pure people and, usually, is organized around a single national religion. Arabic terrorism differs from this in being not in the name of a single nation but in the name of a Pan-Arabic Muslim regime. As everyone knows, globalization is rapidly erasing the separate hegemony of nation-states and even the nation-states themselves, as, for example, the European Union gradually replaces in power and authority the countries within it. When something so politically important as the concept of the sovereign nation-state is on the way out, it is likely to be reaffirmed hyperbolically in its death-throes. We are witnessing that, to our sorrow, in the United States today. The reluctance of certain nations, Turkey, the People’s Republic of China, and the United States, to give up the death penalty is probably not so much a belief that the death penalty is a deterrent as it is an unwillingness to give up something historically essential to state sovereignty. To give up the death penalty is to give up the God-sanctioned right of life and death over the citizens of that state. The abolishment of the death penalty in the European Union is a sign of the weakening of State sovereignty among its member nations.

What is laughably absurd but also profoundly disquieting about the way each nation-state thinks it has God’s mandate for imperialist wars is exposed

in a passage in E. M. Forster's *Howards End*. Margaret and Helen Schlegel, the chief protagonists of that novel, are half English, half German:

It was a unique education for the little girls. The haughty nephew [a German relative] would be at Wickham Place one day, bringing with him an even haughtier wife, both convinced that Germany was appointed by God to govern the world. Aunt Juley [an English relative] would come the next day, convinced that Great Britain had been appointed to the same post by the same authority. Were both these loud-voiced parties right? On one occasion they had met, and Margaret with clasped hands had implored them to argue the subject out in her presence. Whereat they blushed and began to talk about the weather. "Papa," she cried — she was a most offensive child — "why will they not discuss this most clear question?" Her father, surveying the parties grimly, replied that he did not know. Putting her head on one side, Margaret then remarked: "To me one of two things is very clear; either God does not know his own mind about England and Germany, or else these do not know the mind of God." A hateful little girl, but at thirteen she had grasped a dilemma that most people travel through life without perceiving. (Forster 30-31)

George W. Bush has evidently traveled so far through his life without grasping this dilemma. If he had, he might be more hesitant about declaring nations that "harbor terrorists" "evil-doers." They clearly think God in the person of Allah is on their side and has appointed them to dominate the world. In a similar way Paul Bremer and the Iraqi Governing Council disagreed about who is sovereign in Iraq. It is hard to imagine George W. Bush, though he had the advantage of a Yale education, sitting down an evening to read *Howards End*. The theological basis of sovereignty has caused and will continue to cause much mischief and grief.

If one takes seriously the implications of what Forster, with such delicious irony, says, namely that the divine support of sovereignty and therefore sovereignty itself is, as Derrida repeatedly calls it, a "phantasm" (2001b, 78; "ce fantasme abstrait de souveraineté"), and if sovereignty is always above the law, it would follow that assertions of sovereignty, such as our self-proclaimed sovereignty in Iraq, but also including acts of pardon, such as those recently declared by the Governor of Illinois, are baseless. They are no more than groundless and unjustified performative assertions: "I declare that we are sovereign, under God." Derrida does not say theologically based sovereignty is a falsehood, or a lie, or an ideological aberration. He says, precisely, that it is a "phantasm." What is a phantasm?

The American Heritage Dictionary defines a phantasm as “1. Something apparently seen but having no physical reality; a phantom. 2. An illusory mental image. 3. In Platonic philosophy, objective reality as perceived and distorted by the five senses.” The word comes from by way of Middle English and Old French “from Latin *phantasma*, apparition, specter, from Greek, from *phantazein*, to make visible, from *phainein*, to show.” A phantasm is a ghost, something seen with the eyes that is not there. In Derrida’s usage “phantasm” is more to be associated with Freud than with Carl Schmitt. Sovereignty is a ghost in broad daylight. It is there and not there. It is to be associated with uncanny apparitions, as Freud interprets them in “Das Unheimliche.” Sovereignty is something that has come back, that is strange in the sense of alien and yet strangely familiar. This ghost cannot easily be laid by any act demystifying or deconstructing ideology. The phantom of God-based sovereignty always comes back, keeps coming back, as a revenant. It is almost impossible to exorcise such a ghost.

I have related sovereignty and death easily enough, and have even related the two to democracy, but what about the other concepts in my title? They seem another kettle of fish. Here I appeal once more to Jacques Derrida as my sovereign authority. His *L’Université sans condition*, originally a President’s Lecture at Stanford, and a related essay, the speech he gave on receiving an honorary degree from the University of Pantion in Athens in 1999, entitled “Inconditionnalité ou souveraineté: L’Université aux frontières de l’Europe,” are based on a fundamental distinction between sovereignty and what he calls (the word is a neologism in English) “unconditionality.” What is the difference? Sovereignty, we now know, is a theologically based phantasm. Unconditionality has, apparently, no such basis. Derrida associates it with the weakness (in the might makes right sense) of the research university’s historical claim to be free of all external conditions and constraints and to have the right to put everything in question, even to put in question the right to put everything in question. Derrida recognizes as well as anyone else that the university has never actually been free of external conditions and constraints. Perhaps the university in the West has never been so conditioned as it is today by its obligation to corporate and government funding sources. Nevertheless, the horizon for the university is an unconditional freedom to question everything that Derrida associates especially with the humanities and within the humanities especially with literary studies as the place where engagement with a certain “comme si” or “as if” is especially institutionalized. That engagement with the virtual is

inherently dissident and inherently difficult to recuperate within instrumental concepts of the university, such as the one asserted several years ago by the then President of the nine campus University of California. He said that the goal of that university is “to make California competitive in the global economy.” Studying Shakespeare or Dickens or Mallarmé or Maurice Blanchot’s “Literature and the Right to Death” is not easily defensible as helping to achieve that goal.

Blanchot sees literature as having a special relation to death, but not death conceived of as a sovereign act that is the obliteration of an evil-doer by gunfire, precision bombing, or lethal injection. The argumentation of Blanchot’s essay is subtle, complex, and by no means easy to understand or to summarize. The essay might be defined as a virtually endless series of formulations that attempt once and for all to express the relation between literature and the right to death, but that never quite succeed in getting it right. They must therefore eternally begin again with another formulation, like literature itself in Blanchot’s conception of it. Blanchot’s notion of literature depends on a strange conception of “death as the impossibility of dying” (55). Death, for him, is not obliteration but a kind of endless empty wakefulness without content. Literary uses of language, for Blanchot, have a unique relation to death conceived of in this way. “When I speak,” says Blanchot, “death speaks in me” (43), or rather, in a characteristic Blanchotian reversal, speech silences the “infinite disquiet, formless and nameless vigilance” (45) which is death as what precedes the language of literature and persists after it stops. “The language of literature,” says Blanchot, “is a search for this moment which precedes literature” (46). Literature, for Blanchot, one can see, both speaks death and silences death. “In speech,” he says, “what dies is what gives life to speech; speech is the life of that death, it is ‘the life that endures death and maintains itself in it’” (46).

I have now succeeded by way of Blanchot in relating literature to death, but to a radically different conception of death from that implicit in most ideas of state sovereignty as unwilling to abandon the death penalty. Derrida’s concept of literature appears to be quite different from Blanchot’s. My final task will be to try to relate them to one another and to Derrida’s idea of unconditionality as the basis of the university. I have said that Derrida defines the university’s unconditionality as the privilege without penalty to put everything in question, even put in question the right to put everything in question. In the interview with Derek Attridge that forms the first essay in the volume of Derrida’s essays on literature that Attridge

gathered and called *Acts of Literature*, Derrida defines literature in much the same way as he defines the university in the more recent speech. Literature is dependent in its modern form on the rise of constitutional democracies in the West from the seventeenth century on and on the radical freedom to say anything, that is, precisely, to put everything in question:

“What is literature?”; literature as historical institution with its conventions, rules, etc., but also this institution of fiction which gives in principle the power to say everything, to break free of the rules, to displace them, and thereby to institute, to invent and even to suspect the traditional difference between nature and institution, nature and conventional law, nature and history. Here we should ask juridical and political questions. The institution of literature in the West, in its relatively modern form, is linked to the authorization to say everything, and doubtless too to the coming about of the modern idea of democracy. Not that it depends on a democracy in place, but it seems inseparable to me from what calls forth a democracy, in the most open (and doubtless itself to come) sense of democracy. (1992, 37)

Now we can understand better the role of the “comme si” or “as if” in *L’Université sans condition*. Literature, or what Derrida here calls “fiction,” can always respond (or refuse to respond) by saying that was not me speaking as myself, but as an imaginary personage speaking in a work of fiction, by way of a “comme si.” You cannot hold me responsible for my “as ifs.” Derrida says just this in passages that follow the one just quoted:

What we call literature (not belles-lettres or poetry) implies that license is given to the writer to say everything he wants or everything he can, while remaining shielded, safe from all censorship, be it religious or political... This duty of irresponsibility, of refusing to answer for one’s thought or writing to constituted powers, is perhaps the highest form of responsibility. To whom, to what? That’s the whole question of the future or the event promised by or to such an experience, what I was just calling the democracy to come. Not the democracy of tomorrow, not a future democracy which will be present tomorrow but one whose concept is linked to the to-come [à-venir, cf. avenir, future], to the experience of a promise engaged, that is always an endless promise. (37, 38)

Crucial in the passage just cited is the “To whom, to what?” How can a refusal to take responsibility, a refusal addressed to sovereign state powers, be defined as “perhaps the highest form of responsibility”? To whom or to what else can it have a higher obligation? Derrida’s answer to this question

goes by way of the new concept of performative language that he proposes in “Psyché, ou l’invention de l’autre” and again as the climax of *L’université sans condition*. It might seem that literature as conceived by Derrida as an “as if,” a free, unconditioned fiction, would correspond to a concept of literature as unconditioned performative speech acts, speech acts not based on previously existing institutionalized sanctions. The title of the honorary degree lecture in Athens is “Inconditionnalité ou souveraineté” and *L’Université sans condition* distinguishes sharply between the phantasm of the theologically based state sovereignty and the wholly free and unfettered, “unconditioned,” liberty to put everything in question in the ideal university, the university without condition. Derrida seems to pledge allegiance to, or, to use his own expression, make a “profession of faith in,” a stark either/or. Either always-illegitimate sovereignty or unconditional freedom. This unconditionality, it might seem, is especially manifested in literary study, since literature, as institutionalized in the West in the last three centuries, is, according to Derrida, itself unconditioned, irresponsible, free to say anything, in an extreme expression of the right to free speech. Literature conceived of in this way seems, however, to have little or nothing to do with death, at least with the kind of death that is, for Blanchot, fundamentally expressed and at the same time covered over by all literary uses of language.

Matters are, however, not quite so simple. In the last section of *L’Université sans condition*, in the seventh summarizing proposition, Derrida makes one further move that alters all he has said so far about the university’s unconditionality. He poses a “hypothesis” that he admits may not be “intelligible” (2011b, 79) to his Stanford audience. (This audience may have included Condelleeza Rice, then Provost of that university. Would that she had listened, understood, and given her allegiance.) What Derrida says is in any case, he admits in a quite unusual confession that what he asserts is not easy to understand, “extrêmement difficile et presque improbable, inaccessible a une preuve” (76). What he says is based on an hypothesis that is both almost improbable, *prima facie* highly unlikely, and almost impossible to prove. What he proposes, that is, is contrary to a true scientific hypothesis. A *bona fide* hypothesis can be proved to be false, if it is false. What is this strange hypothesis? It is the presupposition that the unconditional independence of thinking in the university depends on a strange kind of anomalous speech act that brings about what Derrida calls an “event” or “the eventful (*l’éventuel*)” (76). Such a speech act is anomalous both because it does not depend on pre-existing rules, authorities, and contexts, as a

felicitous Austinian speech act does, and because it does not posit freely, autonomously, lawlessly, outside all such pre-existing contexts, as, for example, de Manian speech acts seem to do or as judges do in Austin's surprising and even scandalous formula, "The judge makes the law."

No, the performative speech act Derrida has in mind, one that constitutes a genuine "event" breaking the pre-determined course of history, is a to some degree passive response to the call of what Derrida calls "le tout autre," the wholly other. Such an event is "impossible." It is always an uncertain matter of what, Derrida recalls, Nietzsche calls "this dangerous perhaps" (75). Nevertheless, says Derrida, "seul l'impossible peut arriver" (74). That is why Derrida speaks, in the passage I have cited as my epigraph, of "le possible événement de l'inconditionnel impossible, le tout autre" (76). Derrida is playing here on the root sense of "event" as something that comes, that arrives. It appears of its own accord and in its own good time. We can only say, "yes" or, perhaps, "no," to it. We cannot call it. It calls us.

What is "the wholly other"? Derrida works out in detail, in "Psyché, ou l'invention de l'autre," what he means by "invention" as discovery, uncovering, rather than making up, and by the wholly other. For my purposes here, however, the crucial text is *Donner la mort*, translated, in part, as *The Gift of Death*. There Derrida makes spectacular readings of the story of Abraham and Isaac in Genesis, of Kierkegaard's *Fear and Trembling*, and of Melville's *Bartleby the Scrivener*. In extended sections of this book Derrida defines the wholly other in ways that identify it with a certain conception of God, as "absent, hidden and silent, separate, secret" (1995, 57), with the secret in general, and with death, the gift of death, as always my own solitary death, and as wholly other to my knowledge. "Without knowing from whence the thing comes," says Derrida, "and what awaits us, we are given over to absolute solitude. No one can speak with us and no one can speak for us; we must take it upon ourselves, each of us must take it upon himself (*auf sich nehmen* as Heidegger says concerning death, our death, concerning what is always 'my death', and which no one can take on in place of me)" (57). The wholly other is also manifested, without manifesting itself, in the total inaccessibility of the secrets in the hearts of other people. "*Every other [one] is every [bit] other [tout autre est tout autre]*," says Derrida, "every one else is completely or wholly other. The simple concepts of alterity and of singularity constitute the concept of duty as much as that of responsibility. As a result, the concepts of responsibility, of decision, or of duty, are condemned a priori to paradox, scandal, and aporia.... As soon as I enter into a relation with the

other, with the gaze, look, request, love, command, or call of the other, I know that I can respond only by sacrificing ethics, that is, by sacrificing whatever obliges me to also respond, in the same way, in the same instant, to all the others. I offer a gift of death, I betray, I don't need to raise my knife over my son on Mount Moriah for that. Day and night, at every instant, on all the Mount Moriahs of this world, I am doing that, raising my knife over what I love and must love, over those to whom I owe absolute fidelity, incommensurably" (68).

Included, finally, in this concept of the wholly other is literature. Literature too hides impenetrable secrets. A work of literature too is a response to a wholly other that strongly recalls the relation of literature to death in Blanchot's thinking. This is made explicit in Derrida's reading of *Bartleby the Scrivener*, but also in the second, untranslated, part of *Donner la mort*, entitled "La littérature au secret: Une filiation impossible." In this section, by way of further discussion of Abraham and Isaac, of Kierkegaard, and of Kafka, Derrida reaches the surprising conclusion not only that literature hides unrevealable secrets, and is both irresponsible and at the same time works by "aggravant d'autant, jusqu'à l'infini sa responsabilité pour l'événement singulier que constitue chaque oeuvre (responsabilité nulle et infinie, comme celle de Abraham)" (206), but also that literature is the unfaithful inheritor of a theological legacy without which it could not exist:

... la littérature hérite, certes, d'une histoire sainte dont le moment abrahamique reste le secret essentiel (et qui niera que la littérature reste une reste de religion, un lien et un relais de sacro-sainteté dans une société sans Dieu?), mais elle renie aussi cette histoire, cette appartenance, cet héritage. Elle renie cette filiation. Elle la trahit au double sens du mot: elle lui est infidèle, elle rompt avec elle au moment même d'en manifester la "vérité" et d'en dévoiler le secret. À savoir sa propre filiation: possible impossible. (1999, 208)

It is only necessary to add to what Derrida says here that literary study, as institutionalized in the university, is especially the place where the responsibility / irresponsibility of literature, its unconditionality, is received by professors and passed on to students, for example the dissident notions of state sovereignty in Forster's *Howards End*. I have now linked, across the gulf separating sovereignty and unconditionality, all six of the motifs in my title: Sovereignty Death Literature Unconditionality Democracy University. I have done this, however, apparently at the cost of blurring the difference

between theologically based state sovereignty and the unconditional freedom of the university and of literary study there. Both, in the end, seem to be theological or quasi-theological concepts. What's the difference? That difference, I think, is easy to see, but perhaps not all that easy to accept. The distinction is "improbable" and "not provable," though it is essential to Derrida's thinking. For Derrida, and for me too, all claims by earthly sovereigns, such as those made implicitly by George W. Bush, to wield power by mandate from God, are phantasms. They claim to see and to respond to something that is not there. A work of literature, on the other hand, and therefore the teaching of that work in a "university without condition," if there ever is such a thing, is a response to a call or command from the wholly other that is both impossible and yet may perhaps arrive. Each work is entirely singular, "counter, original, spare, strange," as Gerard Manley Hopkins puts it ("Pied Beauty," 1.7, 1948, 74). Each work is as different from every other work as each person differs from all others, or as each leaf differs from all others. When I as reader or teacher respond to the wholly other as embodied in a literary work and try to mediate it to my students or to readers of what I write, I am, perhaps, just "perhaps," fulfilling my professional duty to put everything in question, and to help make or keep my university "without condition."

University of California at Irvine

Works Cited

- Blanchot, Maurice. "Literature and the right to death." *The Gaze of Orpheus*. Trans. Lydia Davis. Barrytown, New York: Station Hill Press, 1981.
- Derrida, Jacques. *Inconditionality ou souveraineté: L'Université aux frontières de l'Europe*. Bilingual edition in French and Greek; allocutions by Dimitris Dimiroulis and Georges Veltsos; annotations by Vangelis Bitsoris. Athens: Éditions Patakis, 2001a.
- _____. *L'Université sans condition*. Paris: Galilée, 2001b.
- _____. *Donner la mort*. Paris: Galilée, 1999.
- _____. *The Gift of Death*. Trans. David Wills. Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1995.
- _____. *Acts of Literature*. Ed. Derek Attridge. London: Routledge, 1992.
- _____. *La dissemination*. Paris: Seuil, 1972.
- Forster, E. M. *Howards End*. New York: Vintage International, 1989.
- Hopkins, G. M. *Poems*. 3rd ed. Ed. W. H. Gardner. New York: Oxford UP, 1948.