How to read the Derridas: Indexing *moi et moi, Der und Der, me and me, this one and that one*

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> I would like to spare you the tedium, the waste of time [*Je voudrais vous épargner l'ennui, la perte de temps*], and the subservience that always accompany the classical pedagogical procedures of forging links, referring back to prior premises or arguments, justifying one's own trajectory [*l'auto-justification d'un trajet*], method, system, and more or less skillful transitions, reestablishing continuity, and so on. These are but some of the imperatives of classical pedagogy with which, to be sure, one can never break once and for all. Yet, if you were to submit to them rigorously, they would very soon reduce you to silence, tautology, and tiresome repetition. (Derrida 1985, 3–4; italicized French from French edition: Derrida 1984, 37)

This is the way Derrida's *Otobiographies* begins. It was the second of the two seminars Derrida gave in French at the University of Virginia in 1976. These opening sentences somewhat defiantly put what Derrida is about to say under the aegis of what a moment later he calls '*academic freedom* – I repeat: a-ca-dem-ic free-dom – you can take it or leave it' (Derrida 1985, 4). His opening is a somewhat violent and cheeky assault on the usual conventions of pedagogy. It tells the reader, as does the subtitle, 'The Teaching of Nietzsche . . . ', that his lecture is going to have, self-reflexively, something to do with teaching styles or methods.

Derrida Today 8.1 (2015): 2–17
DOI: 10.3366/drt.2015.0097

www.euppublishing.com/journal/drt

Derrida's teaching was certainly to a considerable degree idiosyncratic, not least in usually eschewing the rehearsal of previous scholarship and in eschewing logical or teleological development with a beginning, middle, and ending in a triumphant QED. You never knew where you were going to be next in a Derrida lecture, though you often found yourself, somewhat unexpectedly, in the midst of a Derridean (whatever that means!) 'deconstructive' (whatever that means!) reading of something by Heidegger. At this point I remember that Derrida's initial teaching position at the *École normale* was as a '*Répétiteur*', a repeater. That means I suppose, that he was just to repeat and pass on what the professor or others had already said by or about Kant, Hegel, Feuerbach, or whoever was the topic of the aggregation exam that year. '*Répétiteur: Personne qui explique à des élèves la leçon d'un professeur, les fait travailler*' (*Le Petit Robert* Dictionnaire). Ha! It is almost impossible to imagine Derrida ever doing any such thing.

An anecdote: Derrida writes in 'The time of a thesis: punctuations' (1980), that his teacher at the *École*, Jean Hyppolite, said to him after his lecture at the famous Hopkins Colloquium of 1966, 'I really do not see where you are going', to which Derrida replied, 'If I saw clearly ahead of time where I was going, I really don't believe that I should take another step to get there' (Derrida 1983, 36).

I would like to spare you the tedium of repeating once more anecdotes I have already told in print about my long friendship with Jacques Derrida. That includes the one about the time Harold Bloom and I interrupted Derrida in his rooms at Ezra Styles College at Yale to take him to lunch. We could hear his typewriter going like a machine gun on the other side of the door. (It was during his typewriter period, after the handwriting one and before the laptop one.) Who knows what brilliant sentences we caused him to lose forever? In yet another memory, Derrida, not long before his death, came by my office at Irvine to pick me up for our weekly lunch. I mentioned casually to him that I was beginning to think a little, now and then, about death. 'I think about it *every* day', responded Derrida, with solemn earnestness. Here are two emblems, one for Derrida's fantastic inventiveness, as if there were another Derrida writing through his fingers, the second for Derrida's concern for death, or '*la vie la mort*', as he called it in *Otobiographies* and elsewhere, as if the two were an inseparable unit, which for him they were.

Enough little anecdotes. My topic in this essay is rather the question of just how to read the brilliant sentences that one Derrida or another (*moi et moi*; *der und der*) did write down or that were recorded during

his seminars, all those sentences that have survived his death and have survived those interruptions of his élan such as Bloom and I performed. My example is the lecture, '*Logique de la vivante*', that I cite in my epigraph. Anything like an adequate reading of this lecture would be virtually interminable. In any case, my goal is not so much to present a reading as to raise some questions about how 'we' should or do go about 'reading Derrida', meaning his writing, not his '*mois*', if they can be separated, which they cannot. My example is the essay to which I have just referred.

I have lately realized that 'we' have mighty little evidence about what actually goes on in our minds, feelings, imaginations, and bodies when we try to make sense of a given text, whether poem, novel, play, or essay. The time-line for this is reading the words through one by one, line by line, page by page, moment by moment. Neuroscientists can tell us what part of my brain lights up when I am reading a given page of *Middlemarch* or of Derrida's *Otobiographies*. That is interesting, but I do not see that it tells us very much about our subjective and bodily experience of trying to make sense of a given text. It goes without saying that in thinking about what happens when we read it is important to distinguish between a first reading and subsequent readings. In the latter case we already more or less know what comes after a given sentence rather than, as during a first reading, voyaging into the blue of a more or less unpredictable future.

One of the few critics who have addressed this issue is Kenneth Burke. He did this in his many essays and comments about what he called 'indexing'. That term has behind it the image of a pointing finger, not the ear about which Nietzsche and, after him, Derrida in *Otobiographies* make so much. When I was a graduate student at Harvard, around 1950, I heard a lecture there by Burke on indexing. Indexing is a complex procedure for Burke. Burke is not only always brilliant but also characteristically American in the way he puts together with chewing gum and baling wire all sorts of apparently incongruent things. Very roughly speaking, Burke means by indexing that we make sense of texts by a process of noticing and perhaps noting down or highlighting motifs that recur and that gradually fall into a pattern. A good reader indexes these, writes them down, as the reading proceeds. They come to constitute titles, like that mysterious '*Otobiographies*' Derrida concocts as a title for his book on 'the teaching of Nietzsche' (which can mean both what Nietzsche taught and teaching Nietzsche's writings).

Here is one late statement by Burke about how he taught indexing to his Bennington College students. I cite this one because it has to do with

Burke's own teaching procedures, just as Derrida's *Otobiographies* has to do with teaching, Nietzsche's and Derrida's, among other things, to put its diversity mildly[1]. One not insignificant difference between Burke and Derrida, by the way, is that Derrida's recorded speech in interviews and the like tends to be in perfect sentences, whereas Burke's speech was a very colloquial-American syntactical muddle as he felt his way along:

> The way I taught my course up at Bennington, I realized – I found out that I was really teaching them what is called 'Deconstruction' I told them, 'Anything could come out of your note-taking'. Anything went. The first half of the year they'd take notes while I was talking – take anything out of it – each would be making it – analyzing – making it – the terminology of a book. The usual thing that would happen, they'd got to a – and some word – they'd write that down in the book. They'd get certain words that fit their scheme. They could even do that, you see. Quite possible – somewhere it fits in that – the two books overlap. Anything goes in your first draft, that way. Then we had this term off – an administrative problem up there, Bennington was too damn cold to heat in the winter. The winter term off, they would get jobs or something. The first half of the term, they'd take notes on the book. And then I would have a discussion with them and they'd show me their notes to show me what they got out of it. The midterm [they would] show me a copy of all the material. And when they got back [he would ask them], 'Now what could you prove out of all this? Just use what you've got proof of, how it develops, and work out this theory. That's the way I taught, started out, to take notes. And this example, this story of Hawthorne's, the story of 'Ethan Brand' – I used to take notes on 'Ethan Brand'[2]. I've got all kinds of notes in there. To give a good example of what I meant by note-taking: for instance, if I started writing a review, the first thing I'd get would be – after I'd read a few pages I'd get the title I wanted for it. At first I wouldn't even know what the title was for it. For instance, one thing you can try to do with titles: If the title is formal, then you could look for individuating terms for it. For instance, *Joyce's Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*: I would say the first section is the introduction; the introduction is preparation, building of the terms; and I say that the name for that is 'The Pandybat', because the pandybat starts it all going there. The priest takes his hand' [here Burke made a slapping gesture on his own hand to illustrate]. Then the last chapter, which could be the completion of the thing, I would use some word like 'The Refusal', something like that. The idea would be this: in that chapter, when he'd been asked to become a priest and the priest holds – takes his hand and starts asking him to become a priest, he pulls his hand away, no violence, but he pulls away. And then he crosses a little stream, a little bridge over the stream, and he goes this way, and four priests are going this way. He's going out, going in, like that. I use terms – imagistic terms, like that. In that case I would tentatively – if he'd called it 'The Pandybat', I would have called it something else; I would have taken a formal name for it. That's

> the idea. It's a tentative way. You see, what I figure is that everything you do, you keep looking for titles for your work and for what titles are going on in the meantime. You get the idea? You always keep watching for terms. That's why I keep watching out all the time. You find out – but I find out I gotta put in one place, sometime soon, all my definitions I've given. Each one of those definitions has been a stepping forward in my way of working things out. And what I find out when I said, 'We are bodies that learn language', the last step I got in that definition of 'the symbol-using animal': 'that learn language' – it brought out certain things I hadn't thought of before. Things that you do as a body and things that you do with language. (Burke 2011)

Burke indexes Joyce's *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, somewhat arbitrarily it seems to me, around the motif of the Pandybat. But are not all indexing terms or all titles somewhat arbitrary? Though things are never simple with Burke, his theory of indexing was more or less for the sake of making, as much as possible, unified sense of a given text. I say 'more or less' because Burke's writing is so abundant, so complex and diverse, even the part on indexing, that it cannot be summarized in a few phrases. You never know where you are going to be next with Burke, though Aristotle keeps returning for him, just as Heidegger does for Derrida, but a single essay by Burke like 'Three Definitions' (Burke 1951) has an immense number of references to this or that writer, Joyce, Aquinas, Aristotle, Shakespeare, Raglan, Croce, Plato, McKeon, Demetrius, Xenophon, Kierkegaard, Gide-Stein, etc., etc. That essay has a longish section ostensibly on Joyce's *Portrait*, but that section ends with a long reading not of Joyce's *Portrait* but of Joyce's story, 'The Dead', in *Dubliners*. A title that comes to mind as I try to 'index' Burke is 'Kenneth Burke: The Inveterate Digresser'.

Nevertheless, similarities exist between Burke and Derrida, which may explain my strong attraction to the work by both, Burke first, when I was in graduate school, and Derrida many years later when I first read his work while teaching at Johns Hopkins. Just what Burke meant by claiming that he was teaching 'what is called 'Deconstruction' is hard to tell, but both Burke and Derrida were wild men, mavericks who taught against the normal academic protocols of their countries, and both 'started', so to speak, with an extraordinary sense of everyday language's complexity and of the complexity of philosophical and literary texts in the Western tradition.

The difference between them is nevertheless crucial. Burke's model is in the end a version of Western metaphysics, with the assumption that a given text has a dialectical hierarchy of terms leading up to what he called a 'God term' at the top. That term is not necessarily theological.

It might be 'gentleman' for Anthony Trollope or 'ideology' for Marx. Derrida's fundamental goal, on the contrary, is the 'deconstruction' of Western metaphysics, or rather a demonstration that all Western texts, both philosophical and literary, from Plato and Aristotle on down, deconstruct themselves. They do this by having woven into their linguistic texture some incoherence or contradictory element that unravels the whole and makes it 'aporetic', certainly not a hierarchy of terms leading up to some 'God term'. That is why Burke, whatever he may have thought, was not teaching or practicing so-called 'Deconstruction'. Burke's desire for a neat dialectical hierarchy was at war, however, with his empirical experience of the more or less ungovernable profusion of a given text. He kept coming back, for example, to Joyce's *Portrait*, but he never read it the same way twice.

I thought the lecture I heard at Harvard over sixty years ago was wonderful. I had never heard anything like it in all my courses at Oberlin or Harvard. No one had ever asked me to reflect on the process of reading as sense-making, nor suggested I make notes on that process while it was happening. My professors just said things like 'Please read *Paradise Lost* [or *The Great Gatsby*, or whatever] by next Tuesday'. They seemed to take for granted that if you just pass the words through your mind you will make sense of them and make the same sense that other readers make. Those are two exceedingly dubious assumptions.

Let me now briefly begin an exploration of what happens when I try to apply Burke's technique of indexing to my attempts to make sense of Derrida's *Otobiographies*. What happens, in my case at least, to put it simply, is that it doesn't work, not even so well as Burke's own inconsistent attempt's to index Joyce's *Portrait*. Indexing doesn't work for Derrida's writing because the number of contradictory recurrent motifs to be indexed vastly exceeds my attempts to collect them and put them in coherent order.

It doesn't work because each of the 'motifs' turns out to be not a literal, referential term like 'pandybat', but a linguistic concoction, often a neologism that is typically a complex pun or play on words, like '*otobiographies*'. That is one reason one must refer to the French originals for Derrida, the German for Nietzsche. Nietzsche's '*sich preisgeben*' does not mean the same thing as the French '*sacrifier*', '*céder*', nor the same as the English 'sacrificed', or given up 'dirt-cheap', as the translation, appropriately enough, has it. '*Oto*' is the Greek word for 'ear'. What then is an 'Otobiography'? To give Burke his due, however, 'pandybat' is not just a referential term for Burke. He sees it as

an 'imagistic' 'symbol' for the whole oppressive Irish culture, including especially, Irish Catholicism, against which Stephen Daedalus struggles to make good on his *Non serviam*.

Burke's indexing doesn't work with Derrida, moreover, because a given term opens out to connect in contradictory non-hierarchical, lateral ways with every other word, just as Derrida's focus on Nietzsche's *Ecce Homo* leads him to cite and discuss many other works by Nietzsche, especially *Also Sprache Zarathustra* and *Ueber die Zukunft unserer Bildungsanstalten* (*On the Future of Our Educational Institutions*). Or rather (since he says firmly, 'I shall not read *Ecce Homo* with you' [Derrida 1988, 15]), his actual focus is on the one paragraph *Exergue*, as Derrida calls it, near the beginning of *Ecce Homo*. The *Exergue* comes between the Preface and the work proper. Derrida calls it 'an outwork, an *hors d'oeuvre,* an exergue or a flysheet whose *topos*, like (its) temporality, strangely dislocates the very thing that we, with our untroubled assurance, would like to think of as the time of life and the time of life's *récit*, of the writing of life by the living – in short, the time of autobiography' (Derrida 1988, 11). It is characteristic of Derrida that he would seize on an apparently peripheral segment of a given text and make it a key to unraveling the whole. In Derrida's work, one word leads everywhere into what one might call 'unindexable' and non-hierarchical profusion or into that labyrinth of the ear, with all its walls, corridors, and forking paths, of which both Nietzsche and Derrida make so much. Dialectical thinking is one of his explicit targets in *Otobiographies*. The practice of indexing breaks down when you try to read Derrida, though that does not mean you should not try to index his work. The experience of that breaking down is crucial to 'reading' Derrida.

By 'academic freedom', yet another recurrent non-motif in *Otobiographies*, Derrida means freedom from those boring academic protocols he mentions in my initial citation. Derrida gives the reader in the word 'aphoristic' one name for the wide realm that is opened up by academic freedom. His work will be aphoristic through and through: 'I shall proceed in a manner that some will find aphoristic or inadmissible, that others will accept as law, and that still others will judge to be not aphoristic enough' (Derrida 1988, 4). Well, there you have the definition of a work that cannot be indexed. An aphorism is a pithy formulation, usually involving some figure of speech or play on words. An aphorism is closed in on itself. It glimpses some intellectual terrain 'from the horizon', as the etymology of the word asserts. A series of aphorisms is a discontinuous sequence that constantly starts and stops and then starts again from somewhere else.

Let me turn now to *Otobiographies*. What actually happens in my mind when I try to make sense of it? Turning this happening into words is extremely difficult, partly because it is not something literary critics are supposed to do. We are told by academic conventions not to say how we got to a reading, but just to present the results of a reading in as clear and coherent a fashion as possible. 'Don't tell us the details of how you got there, just give us the results'.

Some models for reporting what actually goes on in a given mind while reading exist in stream of consciousness in novels or even in poetry, Proust's *À la recherché du temps perdu*, Woolf's *The Waves*, or A. R. Ammons' *Tape for the Turn of the Year*. These, however, rarely focus on what happens in reading, as opposed to just recording consciousness from moment to moment (though Proust sometimes does record the act of reading). Moreover, no way exists to be sure, even for *moi et moi,* that what I say is what really happens in my mind, feelings, and imagination when I read Derrida's *Otobiographies*. You must take what I say on faith. You can believe me or not, as you wish. To put this another way, I create my own credit. Derrida makes quite a bit of this performative gesture of lifting oneself by one's own bootstraps in *Otobiographies*: first in his brilliant analysis in the first lecture of the way the American *Declaration of Independence* creates, by way of a performative speech act, a unified 'we the people' that did not exist before the words were written and signed, and seond in a lengthy analysis of Nietzsche's words in *Ecce Homo: 'Ich lebe auf meinen eigenen Kredit hin*'. ('I live on my own credit') (Derrida 1984, 46 ff.; Derrida 1988, 8 ff.). When I read the first lecture, *Déclarations d'Indépendance*, given in Charlottesville, Virginia, in 1976, the two hundredth anniversary of the *Declaration*, and at the request of his hosts at the University of Virginia, I think not only of facsimiles of the *Declaration* every American school child has seen, with the shaky signature at the bottom right of my direct ancestor, Stephen Hopkins, of Rhode Island, but also of my memories of the University of Virginia, where I have frequently lectured over the years, and of its associations with Thomas Jefferson, one of the 'fathers of our country' and 'author' of the Declaration. Derrida abundantly analyzes in all the complexity of that authorship. I also think of the way my father and mother are buried in a country churchyard just twenty miles from Charlottesville. This is a swarm of 'irrelevant' associations in the form of mental images that come into my mind unbidden. My memory of my father and mother's tombstones reminds me of what Nietzsche and Derrida after him say about fathers (dead even before they are dead) and mothers (the eternal living, *la vivante*).

I return to my account by testifying that I am not just any reader. I have been reading for many years. I heard Derrida's seminars from year to year over many years. I have published a whole book on Derrida, *For Derrida*. My métier, moreover, is teaching and writing about literature and literary theory. I am not at all an innocent reader who just happens to open *Otobiographies* and begin reading. Nor am I reading *Otobiographies* for the first time. I have always been primarily concerned, however, with teaching or writing about the *results* of making the best sense I can of Derrida's work. I have never asked myself just what happens in the process of that making sense. Reporting on that, as an expert witness of what goes on in my consciousness and body when I read, is extremely difficult, since it happens with extreme rapidity and is by no means entirely verbal. To turn it into words makes it happen with excruciating slowness, whereas it actually happens in the blink of an eye. My basic testimony is that what goes on in reading, at least for me, is to a considerable degree a sequence of imaginary visual images accompanied by an internal voice that speaks and goes on speaking.

My focus in trying to report what happens when I read is on the second, third, and fourth sections of the French version of *Otobiographies* (Derrida 1984). Of course if you read the Galilée French version sequentially the first thing you encounter, after the name, Jacques Derrida, in the upper right hand corner, is the title on the cover, all but the first and second words and Nietzsche's name with first letters in lower case: *Otobiographies: L'enseignement de Nietzsche et la politque du nom proper*. The words sound themselves in my mind, in my awkward French, before I can begin making sense of them. What in the world, I ask myself, are 'otobiographies', and why is it plural? Clearly, my other interlocutor in this internal dialogue answers, it is a neologism, a pun on 'autobiographies', since 'auto' and 'oto' sound almost the same in spoken French or English. 'Oto', I tell myself, means 'ear' in Greek. When I remember that I recall immediately the epigraph about 'inverse cripples (*umgekehrte Krüppel*)' from *Thus Spake Zarathustra* that precedes *Otobiographies* in the Galilée edition. I cite Ronell's translation:

> 'An ear! An ear as big as a man!' I looked still more closely – and indeed, underneath the ear something was moving, something pitifully small and wretched and slender. And no doubt of it, the tremendous ear was attached to a small, thin stalk – but this stalk was a human being! If one used a magnifying glass one could even recognize a tiny envious face; also that a bloated little soul was dangling from the stalk'. (Derrida 1988, 3)

I also see spontaneously, when I think of the '*oto*' in *Otobiographies*, the image in my mind's eye of a large ear that resolves itself into the one made entirely of letters, signs, and numbers in labyrinthine design on the cover of the French version of *The Ear of the Other*, that is *l'oreille de l'autre* (Derrida 1982). That volume contains the version of

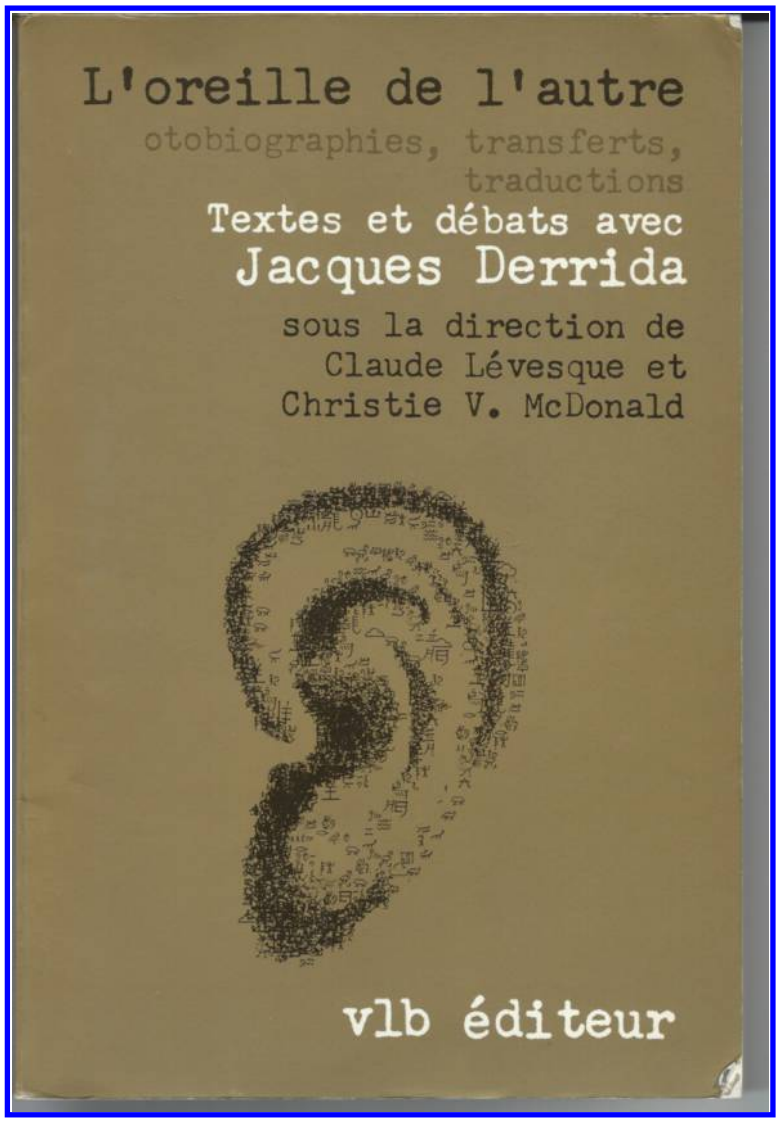

Figure 1. The original cover of *l'oreille de l'autre* (Derrida 1982). Reproduced by kind permission of Sylvie Brière of the Groupe Villemarie Littérature.

Otobiographies given by Derrida at a conference at the Université de Montréal in October 1979:

What then are 'otobiographies'? Biographies of the ear as opposed to those self-generated biographies of the self that are called 'autobiographies'? That does not make sense. I guess this is another enigmatic Derridean punning title, of which there are so many. I guess, moreover, that I'll have to read the book to find out what in the world Derrida means by this title, in spite of the way Derrida, on the second page of '*Logique de la vivante*', with ironic and perhaps scornful reassurance, says to his auditors in Charlottesville, Virginia: 'All will be listening to me with one or the other sort of ear (everything comes down to the ear you are able to hear me with) to which the coherence and continuity of my trajectory will have seemed evident from my first words, even from my title' (Derrida 1988, 4). Hmmm. Clearly I have the wrong sort of ear, since the coherence and continuity of Derrida's trajectory are by no means evident to me from the title, nor from the first words.

Well, say I to myself, I had better look at the subtitle. I have spoken already of the double meaning of '*l'enseignement de Nietzsche*', turning on the double meaning of that '*de*', 'of', as possessive genitive and as objective genitive: 'Nietzsche's teaching' and 'teaching Nietzsche'. That calls up in my mind two images, one of Friedrich Nietzsche with his big mustache (did he have it already?) teaching there in Basel, and one of Derrida there in Charlottesville expounding Nietzsche in the lecture about which I am at this moment about to report my experience of reading.

The title and subtitle on the cover page is followed by a formal photograph of Nietzsche with his big mustache and with his mother holding his arm. The background, as well as the clothes worn by Nietzsche and his mother, suggests that it is a formal studio photograph. They have dressed up to have their photograph taken. Nietzsche's left ear is plainly visible, as is his mother's ear. Whether or not the photograph was taken before or after Nietzsche descent into impenetrable madness in 1889 the note on the back of the cover of the book does not say, but perhaps after, since the photo is followed by an autograph written by '*Nietzsche fou* (1891)' 'Nietzsche crazy'. The autograph is blotted and awkward, a scribble, such as a *Nietzsche fou* might well have written. He does not look crazy in the photo, however. I cannot read the first word or words of the autograph, but the rest seems to say '*Grüssen und Dank von deinen Freund Nietzsche*' (Greetings and Thanks from your Friend Nietzsche). The cover presents six items one below the other: the author

of the book, the title, the subtitle, the photograph, the reproduction of Nietzsche's handwriting during his madness, and the name of the publisher. Such metonymic juxtaposition of items implies some relation

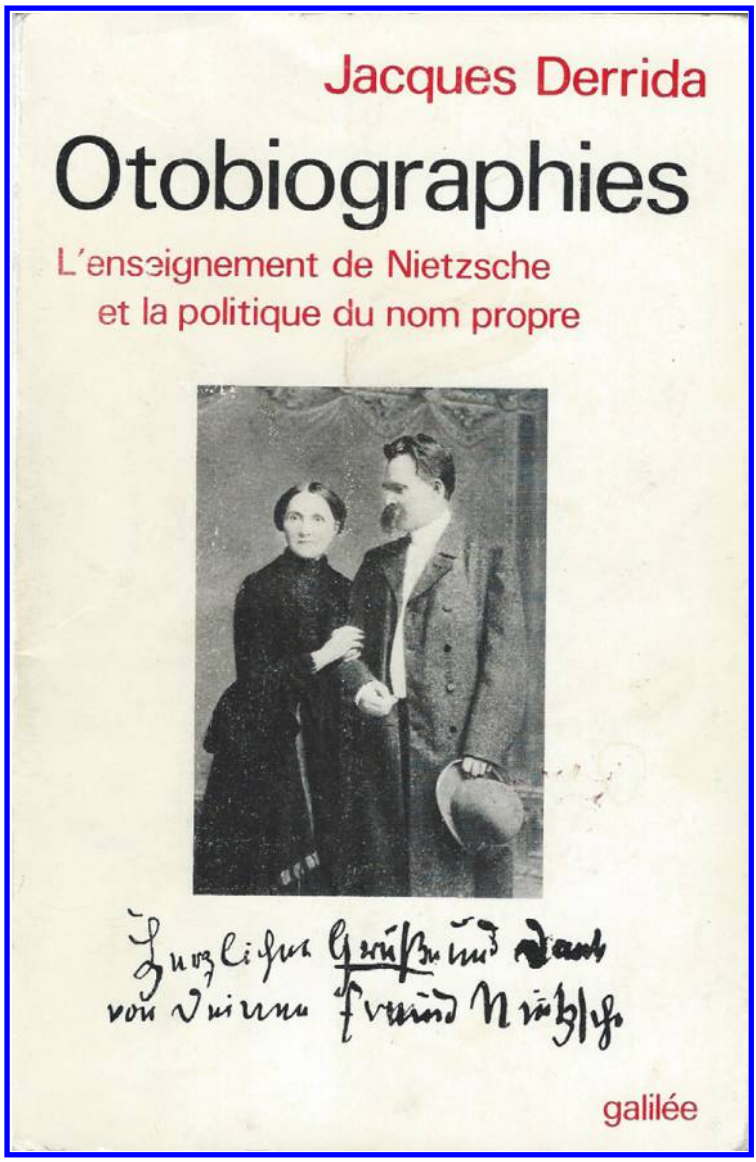

Figure 2. The original cover of *Otobiographies: l'enseignement de Nietzsche et la politique du nom proper (*Derrida *1984)*. Reproduced with the kind permission of Joanna Delorme and Editions Galilée.

among them, we have been taught to assume. Here is a scan of that cover:

Well, we are still not yet beyond the cover. Just what goes on in my mind when I have read the whole book and come back to look at the cover? I assume that its juxtapositions are meaningful and that I should read the cover from top to bottom. The photograph is so moving and so powerful, however, that I spontaneously make all the other items its labels, indexes, or titles, so to speak. A space is created in my mind that I enter and dwell within. It is made primarily of the space of the photo, with the linguistic items floating around at the edge of that space as unsuccessful attempts to control it and limit its significance. They are so to speak indexical items, to follow Burke's suggestion that titling and indexing are closely related. Each tries to take possession of the whole book, including its cover. I have written already here of the meanings of the title and subtitle, but I also remember at this point that the name of the author, 'Jacques Derrida', at the top right, cannot, by Derrida's own testimony, be exempt from the self-division into '*moi et moi*'. Which Derrida wrote this book?

My inward eye is drawn, in spite of itself, to apparently irrelevant items in the photo. Derrida or someone else chose it, no doubt, because so much is made in the book proper of what Nietzsche says about the mother tongue and about the mother-son relation generally, as well as about the ear. No reference to the photograph is made, however, in Derrida's text, so the photo was probably chosen later, when the book was being prepared for publication. The photo represents the mother-son relation in Nietzsche's inscrutable downward look toward his mother (he may just be turning his ear toward the viewer so we can be sure to notice it), while her face looks toward the camera with a wide-eyed stare and a slightly twisted mouth that is hard to read. Sadness, anxiety, defiance? Hard to tell. She is certainly not looking at her son. My eye is drawn by the composition of the photo down from the mother's face to her two hands gripping Nietzsche's upper arm to his right hand and so down to his hat. That hat suddenly assumes an undue prominence in my mental image and in that spontaneous meaning-giving by the eternal whispering voice that speaks within me. Why in the world is F.N., as Derrida repeatedly calls him (following his way of signing the Preface to *Ecce Homo*), wearing his overcoat and holding his hat with a tight grip for an indoor formal photograph. Why did he not put his hat aside to get his picture taken? What does that hat *mean*? Is it an assertion of Nietzsche's masculinity, a penis symbol, as Freud might possibly have said? ('You see, I have one!') Or does that tight grip mean rather that

Nietzsche fears he might lose it or has already lost it, and is left with only a substitute, the somewhat absurd hat? It might work both ways at once. None of the numerous photos of Nietzsche in the Wikipedia entry, for example, show him carrying a hat, much less wearing one.

Well, enough and more than enough about the cover. As you can see, I was right when I said what happens in the blink of an eye becomes something that is grotesquely decelerated when you try to turn it into language. In the few words remaining to me, already beyond my allotted 6,000 I turn now to a passage much later on in *Otobiographies* that is all in words. I shall attempt to report what goes on in my mind when I try to read it. My readers might say that 'reading' that photo is too easy, since there are abundant a-ca-dem-ic protocols already for the interpretation of visual images. More of a challenge is reading reading in the literal sense of following the process whereby sense is made of words on the page. The passage I have in mind begins in the third paragraph of the second Charlottesville lecture, '*Logique de la vivante*'. Derrida has turned, apropos of Nietzsche's *Ecce Homo*, to what he sees as the vexed question of the relation between a philosopher's life and his or her writings:

> Neither the 'immanent' readings of philosophical systems (whether such readings be structural or not) nor external, empirical-genetic readings have ever in themselves questioned the *dynamis* of that borderline between the 'work' and the 'life'. This borderline – I call it *dynamis* because of its force, its power, as well as its virtual and mobile potency – is neither active nor passive, neither outside nor inside. It is most especially not a thin line, an invisible or *indivisible* trait lying between the enclosure of philosophemes, on the one hand, and the life of an author already identifiable behind the name, on the other. This divisible borderline traverses two 'bodies', the corpus and the body, in accordance with laws that we are only beginning to catch sight of. (Derrida 1988, 5–6)

Every word in this brief citation would require a lengthy rhetorical and figurative analysis, for example analysis of the latent (well, not so latent) figure of a space with a line or 'trait' drawn across it, a line that is not a line, or the wordplay on the strangely incongruent two meanings of corpus: physical body and body of work. A hint about what actually happens inside my mind when I try to make sense of Derrida: in this case my mind struggles to imagine a space traversed by a line that is not a border in the usual sense. Another stylistic 'trait' is Derrida's extravagant use of a series of phrases in apposition that don't seem to be congruent. The passage is full of spatial terms that invite the reader to imagine a

spatial scene ('borderline', 'neither outside nor inside', 'thin line', 'trait', 'enclosure', even corpus and corpus), but every attempt you make to do this is forbidden by all those negatives Derrida uses: 'It is most especially not a thin line, an invisible or *indivisible* line' (Derrida 1988, 5). The reader is left struggling, unsuccessfully, to imagine in the mind's eye a force-field space that is not a space and that is traversed by a line or border that is not a line but is everywhere at once within the space of the dynamic relation between a philosopher's life and his or her work. The inner screen goes blank or scrambled. I have reached an impasse in reading. Hierarchical indexing does not work in this case. Generating a complex but coherent inner imaginary space does not work. Heaven forfend that I should fall back on an elimination of the figurative texture by saying something like, 'What Derrida really meant was . . . ' (followed by a construction made entirely of abstract conceptual words). Derrida explicitly forbids such a procedure in reading Nietzsche:

> If one has the right to read F.N'.s signature only at this instant – the instant in which he signs 'noon, yes, yes, I and I [*moi je et moi je*] who recite my life to myself' – well, you can see what an impossible protocol this implies for reading and especially for teaching, as well as what ridiculous naiveté, what sly, obscure, and shady business [*dérisoirement niais, mais aussi de ténébreux, d'obscure et sournoise affaire d'ombre*] are behind declarations of the type: Friedrich Nietzsche said this or that [*ceci ou cela*], he thought this or that about this or that subject – about life, for example, in the sense of human or biological existence – Friedrich Nietzsche or whoever [*ou quiconque*] after noon, such-and-such a person [*un tel ou un tel*]. Me, for example. (Derrida 1988, 14; italicized French from French edition: Derrida 1984, 59–60)

I conclude that Derrida's intention was to forbid any of these copouts and to leave the reader struggling to make sense of the complex conceptual/visual/force-field language he or she finds there on the page, from page to page, in inexhaustible creative abundance. I am willing to take the Derridas on faith, to give them credit, by believing that if they could say what they mean in simpler, entirely logical, language, they would.

My time is up, and then some. I end by recommending a very slow reading of the Derridas' *Otobiographies*, just as Nietzsche in the Preface to the lectures *On the Future of Our Educational Institutions* asks us, in the Derridas' paraphrase, 'to read slowly, like anachronistic readers who escape the law of their time by taking time to read – all the time it takes, without saying "for lack of time" as I have just done' (Derrida 1988, 26).

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Notes

1. I am deeply grateful to Steven Mailloux for this and other references to places where Burke discusses indexing. For example he has led me to an M.A. thesis on indexing in Burke (Isaksen 2012). Here is part of Isaksen's abstract: 'Kenneth Burke believed indexing could uncover the "pattern of experience" or "motivational structures" a text embodies, and thereby help people become aware of the persuasive power different texts have. The method of indexing has two parts: 1. Finding the implicit equations in a text, and 2. Tracking the hierarchies of terms and God-terms in those equations. Identifying equations in a text starts with finding "key terms" in a text, meaning terms which carry special significance as indicated by their intensity and frequency of usage. One then tracks the context of these terms throughout a text to find which other words frequently occur together with these words. The second step, tracking hierarchies of terms, is done by finding how the terms in the equations relate to each other in a hierarchy. We start with specific and move upward to more general terms. On the top of the pyramid we find the God-term, which is the driving motivation and ground of all possibility in the text. Kenneth Burke hoped his method of indexing could help us understand the power language and motivational structures have to drive human action, and that we could question our own motivational structure as well as that of others and of the communities we operate in'.
2. Burke published an essay on Hawthorne's 'Ethan Brand' in the Hopkins Review. That essay had always stuck in my mind. Many years later I gave a paper focusing on this essay at Seton Hall University as part of a conference in Burke's honour and in his presence. He sat in the front row. Though the then quite old and frail Burke looked to be sound asleep while I talked, he came suddenly to life when I finished and made an hour-long pointed set of comment on my remarks (a great honour for me), even though that took us well beyond lunchtime. One thing that fascinated me about Burke's 'Ethan Brand' essay was his indexing of that story around the theme of masturbation. That topic would never have occurred to me, in my innocence, when reading the story, nor would I have so blithely talked about it if it had, as did Burke both in his comments and later on that evening to a bunch of Burke specialists having drinks in his hotel room.