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# THE LAWS OF EXCURSIONISM: THE MUSE, THE MUSER, THE MÜSED AND THE MUSING

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(Death of Author/ Death of Text: no critical *glasnost*  
except with Death of 'Mediator-Dictator')

In the present paper, I intend to consider the twin issue of poetic text and authority from the points of view of the reader, of the critic and of the instructor of Literature (the latter both as a reader, or an individual 'musing' on the text, and as a teacher, or a public mediator of text(s)). By the terms 'muse', 'muser', 'mused' and 'musing', I am seeking to refer, respectively, to the 'pre-text' (the author's 'foetal project' for the delivery of which the Muse is often invoked), the author (the 'muser', the one who 'muses out' that 'pre-text' with acknowledgement of the help of some Muse, with apology that what has been delivered is hardly that which was expected (in both senses of 'carried in the womb'--of the brain--and of 'anticipated'), or with pretexts that whatever inadequacies may be noted are the result of constraints (time, space, energy, conditions, etc.)), the 'text' (the public version of the private 'pre-text'/ or the 'written text' as a version of the 'imagined text'), and the readers (the company of those 'musing' on that public version and who are naggingly referred by that given, public version to some 'ungiven', 'imagined version'). If the terms I am 'coining' here have no other merit than their highlighting the meshed mechanics of the creative and critical processes (hence the use of derivatives from the same root), then these terms will have done their duty.

A recent article by Dr. Abu-l-Fadhl Badraan entitled "Death of the Text: A Theoretical and Practical Approach to Text, Counter-Text and

Shadow-Text" (*published in Bulletin of the Faculty of Arts* (Egypt: Qena Faculty of Arts, South Valley University, 1995))<sup>1</sup> and Harold Bloom's *The Anxiety of Influence: A Theory of Poetry* (Oxford University Press, Inc., 1973) will form the background to my discussion. The theoretical side of my paper will consider such speculations on the issue as: If every public 'text' is a reaction (felicitous or less so) to a private 'pre-text', what are the limits of authority of the public 'text' that is given? How far is the public 'text' which I am handling that private 'pre-text' intended? Is that 'pre-text' the author's own business or does it fall within the province of my inquiry (my 'musing') as reader? How small or great is the gap between the text intended and the text given? What part is devolved upon me as an agent 'musing' on something 'mused', or as--to invoke Sartres--an agent bringing the 'text' from a state of potential existence to a state of actual existence? (See Habib Chebil's article entitled "Creative Reading", in *al-Hayaat at-Thaqaafiyyah*, N° 90, Dec. 1997) [Tunis, Ministry of Culture].) How can I assume knowledge of the author's 'pre-text' of which the 'text' I am receiving is supposedly an identical twin, and how does my 'post-text' relate to these? What laws govern my reader's **post-text's** running *abreast of, through, counter to, or in and out of* the author's **text** as I proceed in my excursionist construal? In view of the only too common repudiation of "sonship" --to borrow a term from Bloom (p. 26)-- on the part of the progenitor of the text, what are the limits of genealogy?

The practical, pedagogical side of my discussion (based on examination of a poetic text) will consider such implications of the issue as: What weights to give to pre-text, text and post-text in my teaching? What are the limits of, and constraints to, extension to pre-text (or, to complement Badraan with Bloom, pre-textS as including not only misrepresentation of the initial impulse to create but also "misreading" of a prior strong, authentic poet (Bloom; p. 30)) and 'post-texts' or 'shadow-texts'; i.e., what are the limits of my excursionism? If my students-- themselves constituting a community of individual readers, i.e., individual members of a public 'musing'

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(1) Dr. Badraan's article is in Arabic; quotes from it in my present paper are my translation.

severally and jointly--are to be active/ critical/ creative readers (that is, to ideally produce their own individual post-texts), what are the limits of my authority (as both reader and teacher) and the authority of any individual reader among them, each of us affecting the text with, or inflicting upon it, our linguistic, social and subjective action? How can the teacher teach private post-texts? How in a context where the text is mediated by the Literature instructor (a context that is more often than not, as the situation in our classes stands, marked by one reading, one interpretation, one so-called 'consensual'--but actually 'teacherly'--meaning), how in such a context can a student take possession of the text as a multiplicity of texts and bring in his/her own 'Untutored' reading, his her own parallel text? What to make of such teacher's comments as the extravagant "far-fetched", the sweeping, hold-all "irrelevant", or the bedevilling "Is this your own idea?!" and its boggling elliptical sister version "What?!". How can the teacher teach Literature at all in this case? And how can the student of Literature develop non-inculcated, untutored, genuine 'musing opinion'? The student of Literature is supposed--and should normally be expected--to appropriate a text that is itself a shadow of an original which the author intended, a text upon which other texts (authoritative critical readings!) have been engrafted, a text that is now the teacher's text (intimidating critical reading!). The paper argues that in our teaching the act of appropriation of a text by the reader (learner/student of Literature) tends quite often to be usurped by the teacher as "Mediator-Dictator". Among the conditions for actual appropriation of a text by that type of reader, a major one is Death of the instructor as Mediator-Dictator.

In his article referred to above, Dr. Abu-l-Fadhl Badraan argues that it is a fallacy to seek to insist on the existence of a text we deal with, that the authority of the text no longer holds (p. 17), that every receiver of a text has a parallel text, and that the written text turns into a stimulus text arousing in the reader a desire to create (p. 20). His set of definitions includes the "written texte as the actual text (written or read); the "non-text" or "pre-text" as the latency of the activity begetting the "written text" (the relationship between "text" and "non-text" being often oppositional, the actual text emerges as a challenge to the

non-text); the "shadow text" as the text being constructed by the reader (there are as many shadow-texts as there are readers); the "missing text" as that text which continues to elude the author's lifetime endeavour (he--of all others--is most surprised at the gap between what he had fancied and what he had actually produced; p. 14). Thus, the 'non-text' is équivalent to the text 'intended' and is more or less the 'written text'; the 'written text' is used by the 'musing' individual (reader) to construe the non-text and construct a shadow text; and the 'missing text' is that text never written (and which, I believe, is what the whole 'musing' endeavour aims to construe and construct). The "pre-text phase is crucial to understanding the actuality of the text and the post-text," writes Badraan, "so a text should not be received in isolation from what is before it and what is after it" (p. 15). Every reader constructs a shadow text based on the written text; and all other critical texts that are not the author's constitute shadow-texts running abreast of the original text without coming into actual contact with it. These shadow-texts turn each into an existing text around which other shadow-texts are created, hence the infinite nature of the text (p. 17). This implies that not only is the given text always on the move and is capable of producing texts that are themselves capable of producing parallel texts and so on and so forth (Badraan, p. 26), but also that generations of readers complement one another, so that the critical text, too, is plural-- that it goes on multiplying and that it never reaches a resting place.

The first major implication of the above is that the relationship between the text and the non-text or pre-text is oppositional, which makes the written text hardly an acceptable substitute for a non-text or a pre-text (from the point of view of the author, 'the musier') and constantly-in-the-making (from the point of view of the reader, the 'musing' individual). Thus, T. S. Eliot's *personae*, for instance, hammer out "That is not what I meant at all" ("The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock"), "These are only hints and guesses,/ Hints followed by guesses" ("The Dry Salvages"), "I see more than this,/ More than I can tell you, more than there are words for" (*The Family Reunion*). This, again, implies that the province of our inquiry as readers involves speculation about the project for which the Muse was invoked. At this juncture, one might ask, candidly--but quite justifiably in the light of

the argument in favour of speculation about the 'pre-text'--who other than the author can provide reliable information, if at all, on the gestation phase? Who other than the creator can tell us the tale of conceiving, the tale of the seed and foetal formation? ('Creator' is itself, as we shall see in the context of our discussion of some of the issues relating to authority, contextuality, lineage, influence and originality, a relative concept indeed.) But soon one realizes that the same question has been asked before, and that autobiography, biography and authorial self-criticism are themselves none other than proposed texts for intended pre-texts, if not deliberately misleading.

Indeed, even if we were to have access--through the author's 'all-knowingness' and 'all-tellingness'--to the tale of the pre-text, we would still be dealing with a text, a text that is itself plagued with possible over/under/misrepresentation of an intended text. On the other hand, Badraan tells us, the written text--though it is the basis of parallel texts-- still is stranger to them. Thus, when the artist criticizes his own work, we are surprised to see that, rather than proceeding from the criticized text, his critical text proceeds from the non-text text/ the imagined text (p. 16). Badraan undertook an interesting experiment in this regard, asking sixteen leading contemporary Arab poets to choose one or two of their poems and propose a critical reading of them. Five of the poets complied with the request; five refused to criticize their own work; one wrote on the difficulty of the self-critical task; and five did not reply (p. 22). When he submitted the pieces chosen and the comments on them by their own authors to his students in the Department of Orientalism (Faculty of Letters of Bonn, Germany), they noticed that some of the texts, as they themselves reacted to them, bore no relation whatsoever to the author's criticism (p. 24). One such poet, Darwish al-Asyuuti, justified the difficulty of the self-critical task in three points: a) the creative act is not a fully-conscious act; b) there are matters too private for the author to declare, even as he endeavours to express them in his creative work; and c) the author may not have the critical appreciation necessary to make of the act of critical reading an addition to creativity in a way that matches the creative act, and the author does not want to be unfair towards himself (p. 24).

What assumptions can I 'legitimately' have, then, as to the truth-value of what the author has said, or is saying, knowing that one is never entirely happy about what one has written, and seeing that authors often deny that the text they have begotten is any longer recognizable to them as their offspring daughter or that it is so much their own daughter that they can never speak of it in any impartial, unbiased, objective way? If I cannot take the author for his/her own word, who to turn to for 'reliable' information on the underlying text? The telling issuing from the author's so-called 'all-knowingness' and 'all-tellingness' is thus none other than a tentative retrospective excursion seeking to recover, conjure, recall or construe a situation that is no longer there and is nowhere. Since there is much truth in the statement that--following the common philosophical precept--no one can 'step into the same situation twice', this retrospective excursion is also made from a present actuality that necessarily affects its evolvment and its outcome. Indeed, the relationship teller-tale is affected by a necessarily changed teller and a necessarily changed tale. Since he/she told his/her tale, the teller has lived. Since it was told, the tale has lived. And to live, is to change. The excursionism undertaken by the author into the background and to the genesis of his/her tale yields a critical text that is a shadow of the given and an approximation of a recollection of a state of mind or condition the author senses was there at the time of the creative act. What the telling yields, therefore, is a parallel to the given text which, in terms of objective authority, is just like any other parallel produced by any reader. The tale had ancestors and the offspring has itself come to have offspring, progeny, descendents. The author now reads the tale he/she has told among other readers, and the author cannot read without consciousness of the metamorphosis affecting the offspring and him/herself. It is not strange that Badraan should find himself faced with the inevitable question: "In the end, I wonder: Is it possible to propose a definition of what the text is?" And, he soon admits: "I think that is impossible, for there is no text!". Then, he concludes: "The text has died to get resurrected in the mind of the receiver who rewrites parallel texts that are imitative recreations of the written text without being that text" (p. 28). Our current text--which is itself intertext--, therefore, is a multiplicity of recreations to which our reading brings yet another addition.

How, in the light of this, can we assume knowledge of the pre-birth phase? *The* text does not exist; all we have is a series of parallel versions, or parallel tales. The author only tells one of the tales. If we consider the latest tale told as the receiver's text, then this tale is the reader's only teller. That latest tale told is the only tale we have for sure; and it is not only a tale told by several tongues but also a tale on which our own tongue will exercise itself. The tale that has come to us is an offspring that the 'muser' denies as the true image of his conceiving. Questioned closely, that offspring--approximated at several removes--should provide items of relevance to the quest whose subject is the progenitor (with the caution that one progenitor hides another), the non-text (pre-text/ intended text/ father-text), the intertext (a composite artefact), and the brother-and-sister texts (parallel/ shadow texts). Then, we soon realize that the genealogy file we are in quest of may be held--if at all--only in part by the declared progenitor and that a fuller quest may take us to the chapel of some progenitor to the progenitor. Indeed, a text extends into the past beyond the author's pre-text to other texts, and we are thus referred to Muses and musers upon Muses and musers.

To take an example. E. E. Cummings's poem "if I have made, my lady, intricate" (given in Appendix) seems to have grown from a project to render justice to the lady's exceptional graces. As the poet qualifies his metaphors as "intricate various imperfect things", we realize that he is comparing himself--albeit implicitly, but apparently to his own disfavour--with the traditional sonneteers who excelled in the eternizing conceit, who never questioned their skill to describe their lady's beauty in full and render her justice and who, presumably, said the best that could be said about the subject. His pre-text emerges, therefore, as being not only his project to confer immortality on his lady (an internal challenge) but also his project to say something new and, perhaps, more apt on a subject on which almost everything has been said: to outdo his predecessors--some would say 'ancestors'--whose "things" (see opening of the poem) were neither intricate, nor various, nor imperfect (an external challenge). His project is, to borrow Bloomian terminology, an act of "revisionism", of "creative correction" (p. 29) by which he hopes to "clear a ... space for himself" (p. 66). Therefore, his text is not only to be compared with his own pre-text (internal challenge) but also to be



assessed against the text of a father (external challenge). Of this father, he is fully aware. He writes: "if I have failed... /--let the world say 'his most wise music stole/ nothing from death'". Yet, though we sense that Cummings's sonnet is intended basically to challenge its father and that, in fact, it outranges its ancestor--undoing and outdoing the old sonnet--, we realize that it is an offshoot of the traditional sonneteer's eternizing conceit, that it entertains with the latter an imitative relationship, for--as Bloom points out, quoting Lichtenberg--: "To do just the opposite is also a form of imitation, and the definition of imitation ought by rights to include both" (p. 31).

In reading Cummings's modern sonnet, with the "misreading" of the traditional sonneteer that it displays and, hence, with the extension into the past that it calls for, we realize the road not taken by the traditional sonneteer and, as we set on the excursion that the modern sonnet calls upon us to do, we see how filial disobedience brings gain even as it inflicts loss. Cummings is aware that there is an imposing ancestor, based on a comparison with whose authority Cummings's detractors--upon reading Cummings's "intricate imperfect various things"--will say that "his most wise music stole/ nothing from death" (see poem in Appendix). And the road not taken leads Cummings somewhere: the reader picks on that apparent admission of failure--"let the world say..." --to set on an excursionism that takes to predecessor, successor and revisionist and seeks to hold them in the same act of vision. This allows the reader to measure/weigh not only E. E. Cummings's text against E. E. Cummings's own pre-text but also E. E. Cummings's text against an ancestor's text. Indeed, rather than conferring on his lady an immortality of ink and paper (the type of immortality conferred by his predecessor), he confers on her an immortality that is lived, the immortality of artistic creation (crediting her with the original of perfection that she holds and which is inimitable, he addresses her thus: "you only will create/ (who are so perfectly alive) my shame"), as well as the immortality of being the inspirer of a state of mind in him and of being--instead of a created "thing"--herself a procreator ("lady through whose profound and fragile lips/ the sweet small clumsy feet of April came/ into the ragged meadow of my soul").

Unlike the traditional sonneteer's lady who is the object acted upon, created and confined in conceits, Cummings's lady is an emancipated subject acting, creating and eluding containment in abstraction. Unlike the traditional sonneteer's lady who is a copy of other sonneteers' ladies, Cummings's lady holds an inimitable original. Unlike the sonneteer's poem which **echoes**, Cummings's poem **speaks**. While the traditional sonneteer seeks to 'steal the lady's graces from death', Cummings asserts abiding beauty that is a 'joy for ever'. This is, following Bloom's argument on the anxiety of influence, vitalizing influence, influence operating as "misprision, as deliberate, even perverse revisionism" (p. 51). Cummings's reiteration of "if I have failed" in his sonnet betrays his awareness of the intimidating presence of a 'flooding' (Bloom, p. 51) ancestor, the "chill of being darkened by a precursor's shadow" (p. 50). As a reaction, he "provides what his imagination tells him would complete the otherwise 'truncated' precursor poem and poet", thus "clearing a mental space for himself" (p. 66). Indeed, by assuming he could make up perfect metaphors apt to eternize his lady, the traditional sonneteer was--in the light of Cummings's twist--admitting the fact that his lady's beauty is "reduceable" to words.

"[H]e who is willing to work gives birth to his own father"; thus spoke Kierkegaard (Bloom, p. 73). Thus, not only does a text extend into the past beyond the author's pre-text to a precursor's text, but also it rewrites a fuller version of an ancestor's text. T. S. Eliot's argument in "Tradition and the Individual Talent" - (*Selected Prose*, ed. by John Hayward (London: Penguin, 1953)) is that no artist can have his complete meaning alone. (Note that he says "complete meaning", not just "meaning", which is a way of insisting not only on necessary intertextuality but also on complementarity.) To illustrate locally, one may say that a Nizaar Qabbaani, while being the progenitor of his texts in reaction to his pre-texts, may be the father of Ibn Hazm even if (and while) he is Ibn Hazm's son. (One might even argue, with further excursionism, that Qabbaani complements the master of his own master, the *One Thousand and One Nights*, even as Ibn-Hazm could be said to have fathered the *One Thousand and One Nights*.) In other words, one might safely assert that Ibn Hazm--in whom the *One*

*Thousand and ne Nights* could be said to have reached adulthood--only reaches adulthood in Qabbaani, even if Ibn Hazm begot Qabbaani. To vulgarize, one can say that there are themes in the *One Thousand and One Nights* and in Ibn Hazm which, without Qabbaani's creative treatment and development, without Qabbaani's revisionism and completion, would not have achieved maturity and would not have been accorded a new lease of longevity--e.g., sensuality, jealousy, possessiveness and communion--through challenging and extensionist subjective and updating focus. Without Qabbaani, and surely other love poets, our understanding of Ibn Hazm would have been not only different but also less round than what it is now. Qabbaani is the maker of Ibn Hazm's fatherhood; thus, Qabbaani is needed for the (re)birth of Ibn Hazm, his ancestor.

So much for the teller who mis-tells his own tale, mis-tells another's tale, counter-tells or round-tells another's tale; we now turn to the tale given or, should we say, the latest tale told, the latest text proposed. This latest tale told I am now proposing to my students in class (a 'musing' public) who ideally should 'mis-read', 'counter-read', 'round-read' the tale and whose excursionism should ideally take **backward** to pre-text or non-text, take '**in-ward**' through the text and the criticized text, and take **forward** to their own post-text or shadow-text. Cummings proposes a poem that lays itself open to attack; his statement in the poem-- "if i have failed... /--let the world say 'his most wise music stole nothing from death"--and the comparatives to the author's own disfavour 'embolden' the reader into excursionism. If we add to these ingredients a) the speaker's reference to the lady as the better artist 'who creates his shame', b) an elicitation by the instructor of the traditional sonneteer's eternizing conceit (based, ideally, on the student's transferable knowledge gathered in the "Poetry Survey" course), and c) reading by the student of other critical readings of the text, then we may hope to have a recipe for an approach that considers 'precursor', 'pre-text', 'text' and 'post-texts' or 'shadow-texts' and that favours the constructing of other parallel texts<sup>2</sup>.

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(2) A poem that obviously requires similar excursionism is Shakespeare's "My mistress' eyes are nothing like the sun". (Sonnet CXXX, The Complete Works of William Shakespeare)

The question, though, that a student would tend to ask in the context that is ours, a context overwhelmingly marked by teacher-processed and dispensed reading of the literary text in the Literature course (a course that is in our teaching on the whole, unfortunately, more often than not "lecture-based", not "discussion-based") would go as follows: Who am I, as a commentator who is not an acknowledged commentator (no matter how active I may be), to pretend that my own reading of that text complements a body critic worthy of that appellation among acknowledged commentators, or that my reading is, in the wake of "authoritative"--and 'dictated'--readings, worth anything? (It goes without saying that such reasoning is itself indicative of a teaching procedure that defies the critic quoted and leaves no room for the student's 'misprision', 'revisionism', 'clearing a mental space for him/herself'.) It may seem--in theory, at least--, that the declared death of the text opens up the ground for any creative reader to 'write' a shadow-text; in practice, it is the 'confirmed', 'acknowledged', 'authoritative', 'teacherly' commentator's shadow-text that is credited with insight, that is looked upon as being credible, that is considered as being canonical, while the shadow-text of a nameless member of the 'musing' public, a student, is a faint shadow of the shadow.

And yet, from a pedagogic point of view, this death of the text that induces a multiplicity of shadow-texts, which are in principle of equal claim to authority, opens an infinity of avenues to reading and commentary in the poetry class, for the death of the text is actually nothing but an appropriation of it by generations of readers from everywhere who rewrite it under various guises (or resurrect it and adjust its clothing) not only according to their construal of the pre-text that has given rise to it, their handling of it as a given text and their acquaintance with the post-texts with which their own post-text competes but also according to their own makeup (their culture,

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(London: Ramboro Books, 1993), p 893.) The excursionism presupposes knowledge of the sixteenth-century sonneteers' eternizing conceits whereby the lady is the epitome of beauty, which makes it possible to see in Shakespeare's treatment a mutant in tradition: his lady's immortality obtains from her being different.

beliefs, world outlook and *zeitgeist* (the age, or climate of the times)). The text received by the reader(s) is the gold coin that the awakened sleepers in the cave recast into the currency of the day of their awakening. They know it is a coin cast in a valuable metal (this is its genesis), that it was intended to have currency and that it has had currency (this is its past lease of life); they compare it with the currency of the day and realize that, though it may not have current currency as it is, it is still of value (this is its present lease of life); they recast it in an exchangeable shape and reintroduce it in the currency cycle (this is its abiding value, its future). (Bloom quotes Lacan who cites Mallarmé on comparing "the common use of Language to the exchange of a coin whose obverse and reverse no longer bear any but worn effigies, and which people pass from hand to hand 'in silence'. Applying this to the discourse, however reduced, of the analytic subject, Lacan says: "This metaphor is sufficient to remind us that the Word, even when almost completely worn out, retains its value as a *tessera*. Lacan's translator, Anthony Wilden, comments that this "allusion is to the function of the *tessera* as a token of recognition, or 'password'" (p. 67).) Thus, to extrapolate from Bloom's distinction, after Blake, between Individuals and States (pp. 30-31), coins as currency, texts as bequeathable bodies, and individuals, all pass through states of being, and while they remain coins, texts or individuals, the states are always in process, always shifting.

But a reading is as much willed as it is undergone. It is willed for me, as a student of Literature, insofar as I assume I have room to construct, free from any constraints, a reading of a text which is the result of a pre-text or pre-texts that I construe, of a text that I handle without prescriptive a priori, and of a shadow-text or shadow-texts that I endeavour to get acquainted with; it is undergone by me insofar as I get introduced to the text, and get acquainted with it, in a context that is so compulsive (so authoritative as to become intimidating; and so closed as to kill initiative) that I assume I cannot challenge it or that I have to assent to it. Indeed, the authoritative presence of the voice which spoke--the voice of author--and of the voice which had spoken first--the voice of ancestor--is here doubled by the presence of the voice which has commented--the voice of critic--and of the voice which is

mediating--the voice of instructor. Thus, I have to deal not only with the authoritative voice of author and influential voice of ancestor, but also to adjust to, contend with and/or measure up to such intimidating voices as the voice of acknowledged critic and the voice of authoritative mediator. The relationship precursor-revisionist is here matched and doubled by the relationship mediator-learner (or, in terms of the title of the present paper, "muser"- "musing"). Unless I am, as reader, a 'misreader' of my ancestor critic's text, I am not reader at all. Further, for the student of Literature, the pre-text and text of the author, the shadow of the precursor of the text and the voice of the authoritative reader (critic/ critics) are here 'quadrupled' with the shadow of yet another authoritative interpreter, the teacher of Literature.

Dr. Badraan writes, in his article above, that his students thought differently from the authors of the poems. Is this mere individual 'opinionatedness'? Or is it, rather, the natural outcome of a context that is congenial for research (good library, regular quality seminars), of an open and democratic teaching practice (discussion-based methodology, and approach that is tolerant of difference of opinion), and of a truly meritocratic examination and assessment system (exam questions favouring creativeness, appreciation, and critical treatment; and assessment rewarding a critical stance)? I tend to think that the latter is the more likely conjecture. Given the situation (poorly-provided libraries), the teaching practice (lecture- and dictation-based courses) and the examination and rewarding system (questions that favour regurgitation and a rewarding system that gives credit for conformity with the course dispensed and with the instructor's reading proposed), could my students differ with what the instructor has reported E. E. Cummings and Cummings's critics--or any other author and his/her critics, for that matter--to have said? Could they think differently from what their teacher of Literature says? Could they venture to produce their own shadow texts? As it stands, our teaching practice hardly allows for it. And even if we, here and there, do come upon a Literature instructor who is more a moderator than an omniscient, omnipotent teller of the true tale, and whose classroom is a true forum, this is but an exception that confirms the rule, and the rule--i.e., common practice--ends up prevailing.

It seems to me that we now have all the ingredients of a 'theoretical' situation where the author has died and where the text--as *the one* text-- has died, but have we the conditions (decent library) and procedure (liberal and tolerant pedagogy and practice) that allow for speculating about pre-text and precursor? Have we the conditions and procedure that allow for reading the latest text and reaching out further to that text's prior texts? Have we the conditions and procedure that allow for reading the criticized text and developing an independent post-text or shadow-text? The fact is: we do not have as yet, in most Arab universities (and as a general rule), either the procedure or the conditions. The obstacle to turning to profitable use the 'death-of-the-author' and 'death-of-the-text' theories is, therefore, both material and pedagogical. It is material in the sense that a teaching of Literature that requires acquaintance with pre-text and post-text requires by the same token a 'good' library and a library-frequenting practice; it is pedagogical in the sense that unless a learner of Literature has developed a reading skill in a context that favours forming of personal opinion, expression of personal opinion, and backing up of personal opinion, there will not obtain literary study and appreciation but literary cramming and rumination.

What we need most urgently is: a decent library and a liberal and tolerant procedure. However, while the library gathers its holdings (and while such other supports as Internet and other information networks are getting generalized), we--teachers--(who tend to include in our ranks, unfortunately, a majority of inveterate mediators, if not dictators--pun intended--of ready-made on the texts we teach, thus stifling all possibilities of natural development of genuine, untutored, undisciplined 'musing opinion') could perhaps begin by opening up the range of contributions by the 'musing' individual to include the apparently far-fetched and irrelevant (as long as that is backed up by properly used evidence from whatever source that the 'musing' individual has access to). (Of course, "far-fetched" or "irrelevant" begs the question: with respect to what? If the "mediator-dictator" proposes (imposes!) his/her reading--or the reading of the critic that inspires him/her--as *the* tale to be told, then the "far-fetched" or "irrelevant" tag may well be the mark of fresh telling, indeed. After all, a goat that

browses where it is tied may not be eating the best of grass.) If the 'musing' individual reads differently from the instructor, or mediator of text, then all the better, for the death of the mediator (the instructor as dictator, as guru, or as dispenser) announces the birth of a learner who may be a free reader, hence a creative 'musing' individual. As for me, both teacher and examiner, I should enjoy more to muse on my three-digit figure of scripts (average correction load in our universities), expecting them to, and ideally finding out that they actually, part with the ordinary, differ from the given, and thus surprise (and possibly delight), than to read the same redundant lot. So as to make room for surprise, we need to adopt that liberal and tolerant teaching procedure referred to above. The text dies to be resurrected in exchange; and if there is an "anxiety of désertion" ("the fear that, in leaving you, your work will no longer contain the identity you recognise"), there is also a pleasurable curiosity about the destination it may arrive at"<sup>3</sup>. The author is dead. The text is dead. *Vivement* the death of the mediator-dictator, a necessary requirement for the advent of an era of readerly critical *glasnost*!

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(3) Neil Corcoran originally makes this statement in connection with the poetry of W. S. Graham in *English Poetry since 1940* (Harlow, Essex: Longman Group UK Ltd., 1993), p. 50. I am here interested in the broader relevance of his statement to the subject I address in the present paper, particularly as revealed in such pairings as "leaving/destination" and "anxiety of desertion/ pleasurable curiosity". It would be important to add, however, that--as has been the argument of the present paper--each new arrival is only a temporary halt on the way to a destination that is never to be reached as a final settling place. On the other hand, the version of the text leaving the teacher--just like the work leaving the author--should come, and should be looked upon by the learner as coming, with no strings attached. Filial disobedience is in this case far from being reprehensible; it is normal, and even commendable, conduct.



**APPENDIX**

if i have made, my lady, intricate  
imperfect various things chiefly which wrong  
your eyes (frailer than most deep dreams are frail)  
songs less firm than your body's whitest song  
upon my mind--if i have failed to snare  
the glance too shy--if through my singing slips  
the very skilful strangeness of your smile  
the keen primeval silence of your hair

--let the world say" his most wise music stole  
nothing from death"--

you only will create  
(who are so perfectly alive) my shame:  
lady through whose profound and fragile lips  
the sweet small clumsy feet of April came

into the ragged meadow of my soul.

E. E. Cummings

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