"Justices"

Jacques Derrida

Translated by Peggy Kamuf

1

J'aurais dû commencer, I should have begun, even before an exergue, by wishing my translator, Peggy Kamuf, good luck, while thanking her from the bottom of my heart.

Je me dis d'abord; I say to myself first that my French *J* will have been lost from the first letter of the first word. I'm not talking here about my first name but about my *je,* my I and my *jeu* with *je,* my play with I. *Je* (I) will have withdrawn, effaced itself from the first letter of the first word. *Je est un autre.* I is another one.

Nevertheless, I and I alone should answer for such an effacement.

J'en suis responsable. I am responsible for it.

The one who says, "je," "I" is responsible for it here, as always. Moreover, responsibility always seems to return to someone who says, "je," "I." This is how what is called law and perhaps justice work. This is how one understands the words of law, right, and *justice* in the culture where our tradition and language draw their breath. Everything in this culture that acts, thinks, and speaks intentionally, everything that does something, and especially with words, in the perfomative mode, must be signed, implicitly or explicitly, by a responsible *je,* I. Austin stresses the point: the condition of the pure performative, the temporal modality of the felicitous and serious performative, is the *present.* At least implicitly. But it is also the full *presence to itself* of a first person, thus of what is called in French a *je.* In other words, of what you call an I, thereby making the *j* of the *je* disappear.

So many untranslatable Js, already!

Critical Inquiry 31 (Spring 2005)

Je me suis si souvent demandé, I have so often asked myself, perhaps for more than thirty-five years, from the depths of my friendship and admiration for him, how one could be J. Hillis Miller. *Quel est son "je" à lui?* What is his own *je,* his I?

And what taste could this *je,* this I have?

The taste I have for him or the taste he has for others and for me, is it the same? Is it the same as the one he has for himself? One may very well doubt that it is. This doubt likewise takes on a very perceptible flavor in me, an obscurely immediate sense. We are moving here in that strange geometry where the nearest and the most distant are but one and the same. The most similar and the infinitely other return in a circle to each other. How does J. Hillis Miller *himself* feel when he says "je," "I" or when he has the feeling of "himself"? These borders of the I are vertiginous, but inevitable. We all rub up against them, make contact without contact, in particular as concerns our dearest friends. This is even what is astonishing about friendship, when it is somewhat alert. It is also vigilant friendship that startles us awake to this strange question: what does it mean, for an I *to feel itself?* "How does he *himself* feel, J. Hillis Miller? J. Hillis Miller *himself,* the other, the wholly other that he remains for me?"

This question is not necessarily a worried or painful one. At bottom, it is rather confident. It even lets itself be overtaken by the contagion of that incomparable serenity that, rightly or wrongly, I tend to attribute to J. Hillis Miller. But it is revived and renewed constantly through all that I have shared with him for so many decades.

"How does J. Hillis Miller *himself* feel *himself?* ": this is a reverie that I would like to share with you today. What is it to *feel oneself* [se sentir]? To *feel* oneself, to sense oneself in the sense in which one lets oneself be affected also by a feeling or a sensation? One cannot imagine this affect without the figure of some *contact* with oneself, without an auto-affection of touching and, more precisely, without the kind of intimate tactile sensitivity that is enigmatically called *taste.*

Perhaps it is a matter here of what Gerard Manley Hopkins, in the great texts that J. Hillis Miller has taught me to read, called "selftaste." Selftaste

Jacques Derrida was director of studies at the École des Hautes Études en Sciences Sociales, Paris, and professor of humanities at the University of California, Irvine. Peggy Kamuf teaches French and comparative literature at the University of Southern California. She has translated several works by Jacques Derrida and edited two volumes of his essays (*A Derrida Reader: Between the Blinds* and *Without Alibi*). She is the author, most recently, of *Book of Addresses* (2005).

constitutes all "selfbeing," all "selving," Hopkins tells us, "my selfbeing, my consciousness and feeling of myself, that taste of myself, of *I* and *me* above and in all things."[1]

How to accede to the "taste of myself" of another? How to feel or get a sense of the "taste of myself" of a very close friend, when proximity does not prevent the altogether-close from remaining also an unknown? This is the question that has constantly plagued me during this long life of friendship I have had the unique chance to share with J. Hillis Miller.

For the exergues—they will be long and there will be two of them—I am going to turn things over, *justement,* to the specter of Gerard Manley Hopkins.

On two occasions, Hopkins appeals to the *just.* On two occasions at least, he names *the just.*

The Just: this is the nickname I am giving today to J. Hillis Miller, from where I think I feel, where I get the sense that he senses himself and has the taste of himself. This taste, his taste, would also have the taste of justice and rightness *[justesse]*. "The Just": this is the name I think I have always set aside for him, in secret. It is the name of a virtue, to be sure, and an exemplary sense of responsibilities before others and before the works, texts, signatures of others. But it is also a gift that cannot be acquired, a simple way of being that one does not choose, a cheerful and natural "that's the way it is."

Hopkins does not name only the just; he also uses the word *justice,* but otherwise than as a noun. He has the magnificent audacity of an unusual verbal form: to *justice, justicing,* the act of doing justice, of justi*fying* justice, of *putting* justice *to work,* operating a justice that, by rendering justice outside, in the world and for others, remains itself, remains the justice it is, carrying itself out in the world without going out of itself. *To justice* is intransitive even if justice, *by justicing,* does something, although it does nothing that is an object. Justice shines forth, it radiates and so does the just. That is what I wanted to say about Hillis. The just one has a gift. For Hopkins, it can only be a gift from God who nevertheless leaves us free to be just in our own names and to say, "je," "I" at the moment of being just. The just one has the gift, the grace, and the power to see to it that justice comes about outside itself in itself. He succeeds in making it happen that justice be justice, that justice *justices* without this being a simple tautology. It is given to the just, and the just gives himself the power to see to it that justice

1. Quoted in J. Hillis Miller, *The Disappearance of God: Five Nineteenth-Century Writers* (Cambridge, Mass., 1963), p. 271; hereafter abbreviated *DG.*

be produced justly, precisely, *by justicing,* as the justice it is, that it must be, and that it will have been. In the beginning will have been the verb: *to justice.*

With extraordinarily complex Latin roots, overloaded with Greek memory, the word *justice,* as we know, can become a common abstract noun. The substantive *justice* names a concept. It says an idea, a value, a quality, a manner of judging, a judicial apparatus, always a juridical figure of right and of law. In its nominal form, justice can also designate in English the title or status of a person. Justice is the first person of a judge who can thus say, "I," which the thing, the concept, or even the allegory that bear the name justice cannot do. I learned this use of the word *justice* the day I was married, in Boston in 1957, by a justice of the peace.

But there is a more important event for me, today, when I want to pay homage to the justice of the just that J. Hillis Miller has always been for me.

Which event? In a very rare case and by grace of a poet justly cited by J. Hillis Miller, *justice* can become a verb. It then designates a way of being, of shining forth, of radiating, and of acting, a way of doing things, most often with words, with the performative force of a speech act: *to justice.* To justice would be to produce justice, cause it to prevail, make it come about, as an event, but without instrumentalizing it in a transitive fashion, without objectifying it, but rather making it proceed from itself even as one keeps it close itself, to what one is, namely *just,* closest to what one thinks, says, does, shows, and manifests. The one who thus justices does not refer in the first or the last place to the calculable rules and norms of law. He is just by essence, just as he breathes. He does what is just, he accomplishes the just in a spontaneous manner. A spontaneous manner means freely but especially as something that flows from the source, that emanates from its own source, *sponta sua.* Justice proceeds and *emanates* (it is thus *emanant*) from the one who justices, but this way of being and of doing, this manner of emanating remains also *immanent,* interior, in any case inseparable from the just himself, from the source of justice insofar as it justices. I will thus speak to you of a "just" who is just with a justice at once *immanent* and *emanant.*

That is why one must go back—this is decisive and will be my point of departure—to the apparently inventive performativity of a poetic event that, in order to say this, enriches the English language with an unheard-of usage. But, through the poet, through his genius and ingenious performance, language itself affects us with this event. Language here is speaking an English that is heavily laden with an obscure Latin memory: *jus, jus jurare,* to swear an oath, an expression that must be understood, Benveniste tells us, as a verbal and ritualized formulation, as speech act, if you will, rather than as the content of the oath (*sacramentum*).

My quotations of Hopkins will have a point in common. They are both expressions of praise. Praise of God, praise of man. God and man, both are just ones. One of these expressions of praise resembles a performative, the other a constative. I say "resembles" because the frontier—and Miller is very aware of this risk—is not very certain between performative and constative, as is so often the case and especially when one speaks *to* God *about* God.

What seems unique, when these two quotations are juxtaposed, is a certain chiasmus. In one case ("Thou art indeed just, Lord"), one seems to be dealing with the performative writing of an apostrophe or a prayer. But the performative of adoration includes a constative description (thou *art* indeed just, Lord). In the other case ("the just man justices"), a statement of the constative type describes a way of being, let's say an ethics, and above all a way of doing that is essentially performative (to justice).

How is that? How does this chiasmus work? In its grammar and its logic, the poetic phrase resembles a constative. It describes the just man, namely, the just man who is today my subject. It also praises this just man. This just man is a man who justices. But because he is just, inasmuch as he is just, in an immanent way and through emanation, he does or renders justice in a performative fashion. As for the other statement, which is just as poetic, it resembles a performative, an address, an apostrophe. The poet is now speaking *to* God; he raises up toward him his praise, that is to say, strictly speaking, a hymn. A hymn is always performative; it is an act of faith, an orison, a prayer. Devotion is engaged there as a promise of faithfulness. But the same statement also claims to *describe,* in a constative manner; here it describes justice as an attribute or predicate of God. It does everything to be just, in a performative manner, with the essence of God thus defined, but in order to adjust the rightness of its statement.

As far as I know, of these two writings of Hopkins, J. Hillis Miller cites only one, precisely the one that uses in a constative manner the word *justice* as a verb that nevertheless implies an action of a performative type. It is naturally thanks to Miller's book *The Disappearance of God* that I discovered this poem. I repeat that the verb describes a performative but is not itself, in its structure, a performative. It says (and I will come back to this again) "the just man justices."

The contrary is true about the other poem that, in the performative mode of the hymn and of praise, claims to state what is the case. I will first read the several lines that J. Hillis Miller does not quote. I find them in a poem from 1889. It itself carries an exergue of a Latin quotation that will be like the *incipit* of the poem: "*Justus quidem tu es, Domine, si disputem tecum; verumtamen justa loquar,*" which becomes in Hopkins's language and beginning with the poem's first lines:

Thou art indeed just, Lord, if I contend
With thee; but, sir, so what I plead is just.[2]

Since John the Evangelist, it is classic to address God, in the performative form of prayer, praise, and hymn, by calling him "the just," *justus* ("Justus quidem tu es, Domine," "Thou art indeed just, Lord"). Since at least the Gospel of John, to be just is one of the essential attributes, one of the proper names of God to which the prayer is addressed. In his famous *Mémorial,* the little paper found after his death that had been sewn into his garment eight years earlier, Pascal quotes from John's Gospel, when the latter cites the words and prayers of Jesus (we thus have the chain of transmitted words in J: Just [God], Jesus [his son], John [the evangelizing disciple]): *Pater juste, πατηρ δικαιε, "Père juste, le monde ne t'a point connu, mais je t'ai connu."* The King James version translates this prayer by replacing *justus* or *δικαιε* by *righteous:* "O righteous Father, the world hath not known thee: but I have known thee, and these have known that thou hast sent me" (John 17:25).

I insist again that the grammatical and logical form of the statement "Thou art indeed just" is constative. It is a question of describing the essence of God. God, you are always just. Always just, God is always right, *you* are always right even when I contend with you so as to ask you, in a manner no less just, why sinners prosper. But we easily see that this descriptive and definitional, predicative, constative form is carried and contained by a performative address, by an apostrophe close to praise and to the hymn. "Praise him," in the words of Hopkins that Miller often cites. It is an act of faith in God whose designs and whose justice surpass understanding. God is love, he is a friend. He is called with the vocative "my friend." This so very powerful friend could do me more harm than an enemy, but he does not. Here's the continuation of what I just quoted:

Wert thou my enemy, O thou my friend,
How wouldst thou worse, I wonder, than thou dost
Defeat, thwart me?

[*OB*, p. 116]

As for the other lines that I will take as an exergue, J. Hillis Miller cited them and interpreted them in his magnificent reading of Hopkins, at the end of *The Disappearance of God,* forty years ago (see *DG*, p. 316). Many of you were not born then; others were still young students. As for me, I had not yet met the person or read anything of a work that will have mattered so much for me throughout the rest of my life.

2. G. M. Hopkins, *De l'origine de la beauté, suivi de poèmes et d'écrits* (bilingual edition), trans. J. P. Audigier and R. Gallet (Seyssel, 1989), p. 116; hereafter abbreviated *OB.*

the just man justices;
Keeps grace: that keeps all his goings graces;
Acts in God's eye what in God's eye he is—
Christ—

[*OB*, p. 316]

These are poems. J. Hillis Miller specifies the abbreviated reference, *P,* for the edition of the *Poems* he is using. As for all the other citations, by far the most numerous, they are signaled in the body of the text itself by the letter *J* (an abbreviation chosen, as if by chance of course, for *The Journals and Papers of Gerard Manley Hopkins*).

In the luminous and new interpretation that J. Hillis Miller proposes of Hopkins and of these lines in particular, one might see at work, already, forty years ago (but I will not overuse this retrospective teleology) everything that we are now almost accustomed to admire in the most recent books: the inventive rigor of analysis, to be sure, but also the double concern with correctness and justice, the properly ethical care to articulate, out of responsible fidelity to the other's text, theological, ontological, epistemological, literary questions and to do it, preferably, while privileging performativity or rather the question of the performative. There is here a typically Millerian gesture, even if, in 1963, one did not yet have recourse to the lexicon of Austinian speech act theory and, above all, to the problematization of the categories of performative and constative. This is one of the strengths that always impresses me the most and that one must salute as the courage of justice itself, but also (and I'll come back to this) as his ethics of reading, which is also an ethics of writing and of teaching. The Millerian gesture consists of always taking account, in order to render an account, in order to do it justice, of what is most idiomatic in the opus, in the operation itself, in the inimitable signature of the text studied, in what *The Ethics of Reading,* precisely, will call the *example,* the ethical necessity of the singular example. As we read in the first pages of the latter book, "There is no doing, in this region of the conduct of life, without examples."[3] Miller's exemplary justice consists of paying essential attention to the irreplaceability of the example.

In the case of this line of verse, the idiom is not only the unique example, the odd use of the verb *to justice, justicing.* The interpretive approach to this line mobilizes, precisely like its signature, like one of his signatures, another of Hopkins's idiomatic inventions, namely, the strange and uncanny word *scape.*

In the passage I'm preparing to read, the density of a word becomes unforgettable through Miller's grace and work. It is a question of the irre-

3. Miller, *The Ethics of Reading: Kant, de Man, Eliot, Trollope, James, and Benjamin* (New York, 1987), p. 2; hereafter abbreviated *ER.*

placeable singularity of the word *scape*. This word carries an enormous charge. It condenses and concentrates everything at stake in the Millerian interpretation. To put it quickly and abstractly, it is a matter of demonstrating that all the performativity put to work by Hopkins presupposes an ontology, a theology, and more precisely an epistemology, thus a knowledge of the constative type. This then is a presupposition. It is the postulated condition for the event or, even, for the "felicity" of these performatives. There must first be a convention, itself performative, that stabilizes the consensus on the subject of what is presupposed, so that poetic performativity takes on meaning and value. Or perhaps the poem itself is the production of this prior consensus in the very experience of writing-reading. At this point, reading and writing are indissociable. Hopkins's poetic invention, his very *oeuvre,* gives itself as the reading of the work, *l'oeuvre,* of God. The experience of Hopkins's reader is also called on to become writing in the same sense. The poetic act, the experience of the language would thus be inseparable from these acts of Christian faith, in truth, from Christ himself. What is remarkable in the Millerian deciphering is the analysis of a *double performative:* after having elucidated the doctrine, that is, the constative knowledge, the onto-theology, the theology, or the epistemology that serves as presupposition or foundation of the performative stratum of the poetic act, one must bring to light a still more profound foundation. The stratum of the foundation has a constative appearance, to be sure. But it becomes a credible consensus only through a more originary engagement and thus through an initial performative, through the pre-performative of a pre-event that precedes and prepares everything.

All of this comes to be signed, in some way, by the word *scape*. This passage turns around the question of the poetic rhyme. It is above all a question of that which, for Hopkins, makes of all men the rhymes of Christ. "All things rhyme in Christ," Miller recalls (*DG*, p. 313). To demonstrate this practically, poetically, to write it in a language that is at once faithful and new, Hopkins must take a step beyond cognition and recognition, beyond the "recognition that all things rhyme" (*DG*, p. 316). But if I have read Miller correctly, this step beyond "recognition" finds itself guaranteed, assured, founded by a "doctrine," thus by a teachable theory, an onto-theology. This is what Miller then calls Hopkins's "epistemology." I am going to read this passage while interrupting the quotation several times:

> The doctrine of the common nature takes Hopkins one all-important step beyond the recognition that all things rhyme. The latter led to a sense that all nature is integrated, but is foreign to man. Hopkins's doctrine of Christ allows him to integrate man into the great chorus of created things. Man too is a scape of Christ. [*DG*, p. 316]

I interrupt my quotation for the first time.

"Man too is a scape of Christ." What does "scape" mean here? It's a word of Hopkins's that we will elucidate in a moment. We will follow Miller when he analyzes its history and what one could call its reinscription in Hopkinsian poetics. This will be worth a detour. I continue the quotation: "Man too is a scape of Christ, and reflects Christ's image back to Christ at the same time as he affirms his own selfhood" (*DG*, p. 316).

Before I pursue the analysis of this sentence ("Man too is a scape of Christ, and reflects Christ's image back to Christ at the same time as he affirms his own selfhood"), allow me to evoke a memory and to cite a fragment from a long letter Hillis sent me from Yale on 25 June 1977. Just a fragment because I must resist the temptation of anamnesis prompting me to reread the whole letter that recalls for me so many happy memories, between Yale, Paris, Geneva, and Zurich. Hillis says to me, toward the end of his letter:

> I am in the middle of my NEH seminar for college teachers (on narrative theory), am trying (with some difficulty) to write my paper on Béguin [the accent on the é is added by hand because the letter is typewritten and there are no accents on the American keyboard], Balzac and Trollope for the Geneva colloquium. I shall argue that the model for literary creation and for moral action for Balzac, and for Béguin the critic, is God the Father, whereas the model for Trollope and his characters (as well for a different kind of criticism) is God the Son, but that the imitatio dei and the imitatio christi come in the end strangely to the same, since, as you say, all analogy is of the word, and to imitate God is of course to imitate Christ, that is to be Christlike, what G.M. Hopkins calls an "afterChrist." It will be hard to say all this and still keep on the right side of my old friend Georges Poulet, who is supposed to translate my essay into French, because in the end the imitator of Christ is the one who uses language performatively, that is, to bring something absolutely new, without measure, into the world, and at that the point the imitatio Christi and the imitatio diaboli come to be the same thing, as Hopkins, Trollope and Balzac partly knew, though perhaps Béguin didn't. Well . . .

After that, Hillis talks to me about all the work he has underway, including "a long essay on Shelley's 'The Triumph of Life,' which will go in *The Linguistic Moment.*" He ends like this: "It is a way of demonstrating that *I must* [underlined] get out of the chairmanship when my term is up."

"Man too is a scape of Christ, and reflects Christ's image back to Christ at the same time as he affirms his own selfhood."

"His own selfhood": the "selfhood" of man. How is the "selfhood" constituted of a man who is but a "scape of Christ" and a reflecting image of the son of God? The first thing at stake in this great text by Miller is thus the question of the self or, as I would say, of ipseity. In Hopkins's extraordinary lexicon, what comes to effect, identify, think, prove this selfhood, in truth that by which selfhood affirms and produces itself, affects itself, "selves" itself, operates its own "selving," as Hopkins will say, is not thought, consciousness, or reflection, but *taste.*

What is taste?

The great question of taste thus precedes here, and by a long way, all its consequences in the literal or metaphoric experiences of the *langue* (tongue or language), from gastronomy to the aesthetics of the fine arts, to literature, plastic arts, and poetry. I regret not having reread this text of Hillis's when I was writing *Touching, Jean-Luc Nancy,* for I would have learned a lot about the mysterious relations among taste, taste of self; the auto-affection that constitutes selfhood through the sensed experience of self, this auto-affection consists of touching oneself in taste, of tasting oneself in that "selftaste" that Miller tells us is "inimitable" and, quoting now Hopkins, "unspeakable" (*DG*, pp. 272, 271). "When I turn within I find only my own inimitable taste of self," Miller notes. Or yet again, to explicate Hopkins's word "unspeakable," to speak in turn of the "unspeakable," Miller takes himself as example when he says, "I" in what is at once a pedagogical and rhetorical manner, but also in order to signal that, ontologically, grammatically, I am the only one, *un je,* an I is the only one able to say of himself, autoreferentially, autodeictally, that he is himself, in his selftaste, ineffable, that I alone can say and only say what exceeds language in the experience of my selftaste: "If it would be impossible to explain, to someone who had never tasted them, the taste of ale or alum or clove, so it is even more impossible to explain to another man how I taste to myself. My selftaste is, literally, 'unspeakable'" (*DG*, p. 271).

The isolation, the insularity of whoever is "selved"—and one should say severed, separated, cut off, removed—is the experience of a "selfbeing," a "selfhood," a "self-awareness" that, long before *thinking itself,* long before the *cogito,* senses the taste of self. Miller gives the best formulation of the Hopkinsian version of the *cogito:* "'I taste myself, therefore I am, and when I taste myself I find myself utterly different from everything else whatsoever'" (*DG*, p. 271). To be sure, Descartes also defines the *cogito* by a certain "feeling," "sentir" ("But what then am I? A thing that thinks What is that? A thing that doubts, understands, affirms, denies, is willing, is unwilling, and also imagines and *has sensory perceptions* [et qui sent]").[4] But to feel or

4. René Descartes, *Meditations on First Philosophy,* vol. 2 of *The Philosophical Writings of Descartes,* trans. John Cottingham et al. (Cambridge, 1984), p. 19.

to feel oneself, *sentir* or *se sentir,* is not specified by Descartes as taste. Either literally or figuratively.

Speaking dogmatically or elliptically, one could assert in two words that love and friendship are born in the experience of this unspeakable selftaste: an unshareable experience and nevertheless shared, the agreement of two renunciations to say the impossible. As for hatred, jealousy, envy, cruelty, they do not renounce. That is perhaps why they go together more often with knowledge, inquisitorial curiosity, the scopic drive, and epistemophilia.

As concerns selving, the privilege of taste, among the five senses, deserves a minute and patient analysis. Limiting myself to the least one can say, I will underscore that taste is the only tactile sense to share, with the sense of touch in general, the privilege of auto-affection, of the touching-touched for which the most frequently given example is the touching-touched of the fingers. But unlike all the other surfaces of the skin, taste is at once contact with the outside and contact with self inside the *mouth, lips, and tongue.* And the mouth, lips, and tongue are places of passage for speech, voice, and ingested food, thus for interiorization in general—along with auto-affection, idealization, mourning work, introjection, or incorporation, and so forth.

As I already suggested a moment ago, I am haunted by the question that a friend always asks about a friend, at once closer than another and infinitely other: what is J. Hillis Miller's "selftaste"? This question is perhaps more attentive, more surprised, more "interdite" as one says in French about what takes away your breath or speech; thus it is more questioning, more faithful than the question that amounts merely to wondering: "*What* is J. Hillis Miller" or "*who* is J. Hillis Miller? What does he think of this or that? What does he do?" All these latter questions suppose that of selftaste. They all come down to asking oneself first of all: how does one feel within oneself? What is the singular and solitary taste that one feels in contact with oneself, at every moment, when one is oneself J. Hillis Miller? It is as if the question of selftaste went looking *behind* the name of someone to gain access, in secret, to the secret of his forename, his before-the-first first name. Why has the same J. Hillis Miller himself paid such sharp and lucid attention to this question of selftaste? For example and in a privileged way to selftaste in Hopkins, in a singular context where the signature of a great poet remains indissociable from the experience of a thinker, linguist, philological etymologist with a keen passion for Greek and Latin, but above all of a highly cultured Christian theologian, and moreover so very Catholic, which ought to have distanced him from Hillis—not to mention from me.

Since the selftaste of selfhood, in its selving, remains indissociable from the scape, how is one to understand this latter word? One would have to

follow closely here (but I will not be able to do so) all the stages and meanderings of the Millerian demonstration. As one knows, Hopkins, from a very young age, already as an undergraduate and in his first diaries, loved to indulge in etymological speculations. For example, he discovered with glee, in a dictionary by a certain Jamieson, the existence of the word *scape*. It is another form of *skep* or *skip*, meaning "basket" or "cage." Well, Hopkins forges the word *inscape*, the use of which seems to be absolutely determining for his whole discourse, where poetics, the view of the world, and theology are mutually conditioning. They condition each other in truth in the signature of a Hopkinsian invention that came to countersign a possibility of the English language and its whole filiation. Miller goes straight toward this inscape. *Inscape* looks like an inimitable seal; it seals and signs Hopkins's work. The author of *The Disappearance of God* writes for example (but it's just one example among many others):

> His own word inscape always implies the sense of a skeletonlike structure which captures and encloses an inner principle of life, as a basket or a cage may imprison a wild bird of the air. The inner pressure of instress, permeating nature, is the true source of inscape, and brought into the open by it. This word is *in*-scape, the outer manifestation or "scape" of an inner energy or activity—not external pattern which is pleasing to the eye as design: "All the world is full of inscape and chance left free to act falls into an order as well as purpose: looking out of my window I caught it in the random clods and broken heaps of snow made by the cast of a broom." [*DG*, p. 289]

What is it I want to suggest with this reference, in the spirit and the opening of my question, "Who is J. Hillis Miller the Just?" What is the selfhood of his selftaste, of that auto-affection that itself is implicated, precisely, in the performative force of the neologizing and idiomatic statement, "the just man justices"? These idiomatic neologisms *(scape, inscape)* belong to the same series as *selftaste* and *justicing*. Each unique and irreplaceable time, a singularity exceeds the generality of the language. It thus overflows the language itself. The singular says itself, but it says itself as "unspeakable." What is strange and "queer" here is that all this comes down to an experience and, in Hopkins own words, to a sort of theory of the queer, if not to the impossible uncanniness of a "queer theory." And without hesitating to define the taste for the "queer" as a "vice," or rather the becoming-vice of a virtue, the great Catholic poet himself elaborates, theorizes, and formalizes his invention, at once his creation and his discovery, the truth of this "pattern" that he calls the inscape.

How does the word *queer* impose itself on Hopkins? How does it come to qualify a kind of compulsion to vice? A famous letter to Robert Bridges

analyzes the common and analogous "pattern" that is found to be at work in painting and in music as well as in poetry: "'As air, melody, is what strikes me most of all in music and design in painting, so design, pattern or what I am in the habit of calling "inscape" is what I above all aim at in poetry'" (*DG*, p. 281).

This inscape can in no way be reduced to the meaning or the thought-out content of poetry, even if it requires them. Whence its untranslatability, which is very near to its unspeakableness. The inscape exceeds the meaning and is its own end, "inscape for the inscape's sake." "'Poetry is speech framed for contemplation of the mind by the way of hearing or speech to be heard for its own sake . . . . Poetry is in fact speech only employed to carry the inscape of speech for the inscape's sake—and therefore the inscape must be dwelt on'" (*DG*, p. 282).

Miller insists that this motif, this end in itself of the inscape as "uniqueness of pattern," owes a lot to what Duns Scotus calls *haecceitas*, the ultimate principle of individuality. And Miller cites Hopkins again, just at the point where the latter has recourse to the word *queer:* "'Now, it is the virtue of design, pattern, or inscape to be distinctive and it is the vice of distinctiveness to become queer. This vice I cannot have escaped'" (*DG*, p. 281).

It is his destiny, his virtue but also his vice, not to have managed to escape the inscape. He was not able to escape the becoming-vice, the becoming-queer of this virtue. Well, at the precise moment at which the poem puts to verbal work such an inimitable pattern, it begins to resemble what remains unspeakable in the selftaste of a man. When Miller notes this by saying, "a poem should have the same unspeakable stress of pitch that a man's selftaste has" (*DG*, p. 281), he remobilizes Hopkins's words in a passage where the latter is questioning himself, as I was doing a moment ago by wondering, in a childlike fashion, *"comment, justement, comment au juste,"* "how precisely can one be J. Hillis Miller the Just," "how can one be someone other than oneself while one is oneself," "how can one be someone other than one's friend?" This is also to say, "How can one not or must one not, necessarily, be like him, oneself as himself?" It is thus that Hopkins describes at the same time his solitude and the unspeakable singularity of this selftaste on the basis of which all the same he speaks, addresses himself to another, and gives to be shared just that, the unshareable of his own taste. This radical solitude, the isolation or the insularity he analyzes belongs to the tradition of the *ultima solitudo* of Duns Scotus. I cite here again J. Hillis Miller so as to honor the key that was generously confided to me for this keynote address. Here is a key to Miller by Miller:

> The selftaste of Hopkins is what Scotus calls the *ultima solitudo* of man. At the deepest center of selfhood a man is alone. Each member of a

> group of such selves will be completely isolated from all the others. God must now be defined as the most individualized and unique person. As the most exquisitely tuned of all, God is the most isolated of all. God is the key which fits no finite lock. [*DG*, p. 330]

What is thus given to us to think, to the point of vertigo, is perhaps the divine character of solitude. But it is above all this, which we are not always ready to think: the terrible and uncanny solitude of God. God is alone. Of course, the solitude of human singularity is in the image of that of God. But God is the most solitary of all his creatures. As he is unique, exceptional, as he is alone in being God, by essence, by definition, par excellence, as he is all alone, as he is alone in being so alone, he is more alone than anyone, and he feels alone, so alone. His selftaste must have the terrifying flavor of solitude. But each time that we ourselves are alone, we begin to resemble him a little, he who is, himself, absolutely alone, isolated, insulated, or even abandoned in his absolute uniqueness, and in the hyperbole of his very ipseity. And if he is the just, he is that insofar as he is alone and exceptionally alone. A just one is always more alone than any other. Whence arises in us, by virtue of this analogy, a kind of pity, compassion, and thus love for what must be the suffering of such an implacable solitude as that of God. We are tempted to pity God, who is infinitely alone, still more alone, infinitely more alone than each of us. The movement of praise, prayer, hymn, address to God-the-Just thus proceeds also from this compassion that is born in us from the very solitude of our own selfhood, our own selftaste. If we are alone in our ipseity and in our selftaste, how still more alone God must be, but also how well we understand him, how consenting and compassionate we are!

But this very compassion cannot cross the abyss of solitudes. On the contrary, it only makes the abyss deeper. It is a little as if we were asking ourselves: how can one be as alone as God? How to endure this uniqueness? And what can be the selftaste of God the Just?

It is still the same question. If it is the same, that is because it is borne by this doctrine of the univocity of being according to which the word *being* has the same sense for God and for his creatures. God *is* God, therefore God *is* alone, alone in *being* God, and he *is* alone *as* we *are* alone, and each time the word *being*, the copula *to be* in "he is alone" and "we are alone," has the same sense. Being is there *univocal,* and that is why, by analogy, we understand the solitude of God; he is alone like us, which pains us very much, and that is why we love him. We do not love him (this is at least the hypothesis I am risking for the fun of it) because he is a sovereign and all-powerful father, generous and formidable, giving and forgiving. We love

him because he is alone, the poor fellow, the loneliest of all beings, and thus as vulnerable, in his divinity, as an abandoned child. This is not necessarily Christian thinking, as you might well suspect, even if it could become so, for example, for a Catholic like Hopkins, although it is not exactly his argument or his language here. This solitude of the unique, at once ineffable, abandoned, and vulnerable, mute as a child, is also what we imagine with regard to all those we love, friends and lovers. It is here that arises the "queer," the properly onto-theological dimension of which I will specify in a moment, but also perhaps its excess, in prayer, over onto-theology. And because it's a matter of representing to oneself God, this other, as an abandoned child, infinitely unique and vulnerable, thus mortal to the point of an immortality that can also look like hell, the thinking that I am describing in this way resembles the thinking of an old man. At whatever age it comes to us, it is the thinking of the greatest old age. Is it not the thinking of someone who is already, since forever, older than what he or she loves or pities in this manner?

Still according to the powerful gesture that consists of exhuming a constative or preperformative stratum of presupposed knowledge beneath the layer of poetic performativity, Miller is right to insist, here again, on the Scotist onto-theology that subtends this whole poetics of the inscape. As we know, Scotus, the thinker of the univocity of being, the thinker for whom the word *being* has the same meaning for God and for creatures, was Hopkins's indisputable master. Hopkins misses no opportunity to recall this. And precisely on the subject of the inscape. He writes for example: "'just then when I took in any inscape of the sky or sea I thought of Scotus'" (*DG*, p. 314).

One could demonstrate, although I won't have the time to do so here, that this doctrine of the univocity of being is the ultimate origin and the very experience of absolute solitude that we were speaking of a moment ago. It is the origin of what is queer in the inscape but also in *being*. To be is to be queer. Is it the equivalent of uncanny or *unheimlich* according to the use Freud and Heidegger make of these words? The question is unlimited. If it's a question of translation, it will remain open, beyond the multiplicity of languages, where the analogic transfer involves also the equivocity or univocity of being, where selftaste exceeds both the analogy and language:

> "And [my isolation] is much more true when we consider the mind; when I consider my selfbeing, my consciousness and feeling of myself, that taste of myself, of *I* and *me* above and in all things, which is more distinctive than the taste of ale or alum, more distinctive than the smell

> of walnutleaf or camphor, and is incommunicable by any means to another man (as when I was a child I used to ask myself: what must it be to be someone else?). Nothing else in nature comes near to this unspeakable stress of pitch, distinctiveness, and selving, this selfbeing of my own. Nothing explains it or resembles it . . . searching nature I taste *self* but at one tankard, that of my own being. The development, refinement, condensation of nothing shews any sign of being able to match this to me or give me another taste of it, a taste even resembling it." [*DG*, p. 271]

What is the paradox of these statements? To be sure, they depend, as Miller has clearly shown, on Hopkins's whole poetics, which itself implies an ontology, the one that poses the univocity of being. And yet they constitute an exception to that ontology as soon as no taste of self resembles any other, neither from one man to another, nor from one living being to another, nor from a finite living being to God. There is only the unique. The law is always a law of exception.

One of Miller's daring moves that most seduced, convinced, and impressed me, and not only in the reading of Hopkins, is the articulation of this poetics of selftaste and inscape with the *thought* of the hidden God. I say "thought" of the hidden God because it is perhaps more and something other than a knowledge, a philosophy, or even a theology, including a negative theology. It is a question of thought, experience, the experience of thought and literary writing, of the very literary experience that, throughout *The Disappearance of God,* Miller interprets so lucidly and faithfully, so justly, with *justice et justesse,* justice and correctness, in the works of five English language writers, so as to uncover there an inflexible necessity.

God is hidden not only because one never sees him himself but because he never *responds* to anyone in person. This is what we are taught by the thinking of literature, by literary responsibility, on the side of the writer and of the reader. Just before citing Hopkins once again ("God, though to Thee our psalm we raise/ No answering voice comes from the skies"), Miller had described in a striking fashion this situation of modern literature, beginning in the nineteenth century. He calls it a "religious situation," but it is a religious site whose place is, by essence, deserted. It is a nonplace deserted by God who has withdrawn from it or separated himself from it. Like the most solitary anchorite in the world. And like a writer. What Miller then says about presence, and above all about impossible presence, involves his discourse, quite evidently, already in 1963, in a deconstruction *avant la lettre:* deconstruction, therefore, as justice. I no longer remember who it was who dared to say that deconstruction is justice. Contrary to the persistent rumor, Miller did not convert, one fine day, to deconstruction. The latter is already

at work beginning with his first book. One has just to read. One recognizes the taste of it in what he says about the singularity of taste, the limits of language, *logos,* thus logocentrism, and especially about what exceeds and divides presence:

> God does not exist as a manifest being, immanent in the works of the creation. When I ask where my throng and stack of being comes from, nothing I see can *answer* me. When I turn within I find only my own inimitable taste of self. Neither within nor without is God anywhere *directly present to me.* He exists only as a necessary deduction from my discovery of myself as the most highly pitched entity in the creation. Having created me and the rest of the world, he has apparently withdrawn from his handiwork, and lives somewhere above or beyond or outside, occupied with his own inscrutable activities. He is a God that hides himself. This is the religious situation in which many men of the nineteenth century find themselves, and it is the situation which is described in Hopkins's early poems. [*DG*, pp. 272–73]

And, after the blank between two sections of his essay, Miller quotes Hopkins. The latter is speaking *to* God, who does not answer; he addresses the other *performatively* in order to point out *constatively* that the other never answers (as many, indeed almost all philosophers, say about the animal, in sum—the animal can make signs but never knows how to answer—and as Lévinas says of the dead, who are not annihilated but simply no longer answer; I believe there is much that can come from following the path that leads us to this historical observation: the so very heedless attribution of nonresponse to the animal, to God, and to the dead). Hopkins speaks *to* God and of God; he invokes and states:

> God, though to Thee our psalm we raise
> No answering voice comes from the skies
> [*DG*, p. 273]

2

Have I reached the end of my exergues and thus of my *hors d'oeuvres?* Is there room, in a poetics of the "queer," like that of Hopkins's, for some *hors d'oeuvre* (*ex ergon*)? In truth, there is nothing but *hors d'oeuvre* and nothing is *hors d'oeuvre,* nothing is outside the work. My epigraphs, in sum, were but a preliminary reflection on this at once interminable and impossible thing that is called the exergue. Every *hors d'oeuvre* (*ex ergon*) resembles first of all the reflecting part of that about which or the one about whom he is speaking or to whom he addresses himself, namely, *par excellence,* the work of the other that is hidden and does not answer, even if I cannot dispense

with answering to it and for it. To abandon or pursue an exergue is finally the same renunciation and the same insistence.

Let us insist. For someone who, like me, writes only in French; for someone who, like me, was raised in the cult of the idiom and in the culture of French letters; for someone who, like me, has been confused for almost his whole life by the immemorial and uncanny *règle du jeu,* the rule of the game between the French *G,* which is pronounced like the English *J,* or the English *G,* which is pronounced *J* in French; for someone like me whose selftaste has always distilled its nectar from a certain taste of the French language; for someone like me who, for better or worse, mixes the taste of the French language with everything, it is difficult, without first having strayed in the labyrinth between the two languages, between the two ways of speaking, to accept to pronounce the same letter from one language to the other. It is difficult, I say to myself, to begin imprudently to say, "je," as I did by saying:

> *J'aurais dû commencer,* I should have begun. . . . *Je me dis d'abord*; I say to myself first that my French *J* will have been lost from the first letter of the first word. I'm not talking here about my first name but about my *je,* my I and my *jeu* with *je,* my play with I. *Je* (I) will have withdrawn, effaced itself from the first letter of the first word. *Je est un autre.* I is another one.
>
> Nevertheless, I and I alone should answer for such an effacement. *J'en suis responsable.* I am responsible for it. . . .
>
> So many untranslatable Js, already!

So many letters involved, already, *dans le jeu,* in the game we are asked to play and in the rules of the game, *les règles du jeu* that are imposed on us here.

Among so many letters, and among those that I have received, for thirty-five years, from Hillis and that are all very dear to me, there is one that seemed to forecast today's lecture and keynote, from more than thirty years' distance. It dates from 1969. In a moment I will read its postscript. This postscript came down like a verdict on my original sin, on the first wrong against friendship I committed against Hillis, against his name, his hidden first name, precisely, *justement,* as to his letter J. I still blush when I think of it.

When the rules of the game impose the use of certain letters of the alphabet on a Frenchmen or a nonnative speaker, allowing, for example, *J* to make the law, the *règles du jeu,* these rules are perverse. They invite us to cheat; they provoke us to break the law by speaking a language other than the language of the law. That all laws are perverse is no doubt something that will have always kept J. Hillis Miller going. Among all the originalities

that are increasingly recognized in his immense *oeuvre,* Miller is well known for having constantly exposed his work as theoretician of language and of literature, within and beyond the Anglo-American and Victorian fields, to the question and the demands of the law (and not merely the ethical law but also the juridical and political law). None is presumed to be ignorant of the law, as we say. The terrible paradox of the law, what destines it to terror and terrorism, is that, despite its universal structure, it is formulated always in the performative of an event in a national language or in a singular idiom that none is presumed to ignore. That is to say, in the literality of a letter. Is the literarity of literature simply foreign to the literality of this letter? This is another question that, in so many diverse forms, will have traversed, criss-crossed, tormented Miller's very singular work.

This paradox is further sharpened when the content of the literal prescription is the privileged use, in the title and in the name of a text, and thus in its dominant theme, of a single letter: *J.* And not merely of a letter that is not pronounced the same from one language to the other, but that twice comes at the head: at the head at the head, *en arkhē.* At the beginning of the beginning, at the beginning as title and at the beginning of the word must be, not the *logos,* but the letter *J.* For example, "Justices."

For two reasons. First of all, because the title is the heading on the letterhead, *l'entête,* of the text (*Entête* is moreover a possible French translation, literal and published by A. Chouraqui, of *Genesis,* at the beginning of the Bible). But also because this letter must figure the initial of a common noun or a name, even of a proper first name. And when it is the initial of a proper first name it lets itself be heard as what I will call an absolute, sovereign letter. The use of this singular initial, especially in the Anglo-Saxon world, has always seemed to me obscurely related to the subtle rites that oversee, in certain Hebrew traditions, for certain mystics or apophatic theologians, the approach to or avoidance of the name of God, of the God hidden, precisely, among living speech, appellation, and writing. In the name *J.* Hillis Miller, the *J.* is never completed; it interrupts its own movement, remains alone, followed by a kind of final period or expectant point. In French, one might call it a *point de suspension,* but a single suspension point that therefore resembles a full stop. Closure, absolute interruption, separation, secret. This is indeed what happens with the *J.* of J. Hillis Miller, at least in ordinary situations, whether one writes it, sees it, or hears it mentioned. In all these cases, in all these uses, which are uses of mention (that's right, I said *mentioning* uses), and, I suppose, except for official documents like a passport, the *J.* remains alone and stands like the absolute initial the rest of which one does not have to know. The *J.* remains without the rest. But this situation is restricted, I repeat, to uses that consist of *mentioning*

the name, whether on the cover of a book, some document or other, or as an address on an envelope, or else orally, when one mentions it to designate J. Hillis Miller as a third person: for example, if one says or writes, "He, J. Hillis Miller, is the great professor and the famous great theoretician of literature and of so many other things, who, and so forth." On the other hand, the *J.*, as initial of a first name, is never *used;* one never makes *use* of it; it is always silenced. It is always passed over in silence when, performatively, one *calls* the bearer of this name, J. Hillis Miller. When one calls him, one calls him Hillis, or Mr. Miller, or Professor Miller, but never J. Hillis or J. Hillis Miller. Here is someone, close to us, a great friend, an eminent colleague, a respectable professor, whose work we are going to celebrate under the sign of his *J.,* the ineffaceable initial and the absolute incipit of all his names. Well, throughout his whole life, this man, J. Hillis Miller, will never have been *called J.* or *J. Hillis.* No one, I assume, will ever have addressed him by saying, "Hi, J.!" or, "Hi, J. Hillis!" *J.* is like someone to whom one will never be able to speak. *J.* is a phantom whom no one will ever have dared to address in a vocative fashion, in the space and time of a performative apostrophe. It is like a hidden God in his name, a God to whom one would not even be allowed to destine a prayer, a hymn, a praise. This is to say that today, because I intend to praise him, I will perhaps speak *of J.* and *of J.* Hillis Miller, but I will never address him, I will in no case speak *to* J., only *to* Hillis. I will speak *of* J. Hillis Miller, but I will speak only *to* Hillis.

Now, with your permission, I confess and make public my original sin, namely, the first wrong I committed against *J.* as against the hidden God of this first name. In 1969, I had known Hillis for a year; we were already linked by friendship, thanks to another Hopkins, this time Johns Hopkins. We were then teaching together and we already had our Tuesday lunches, a tradition that continued from Hopkins to Yale and still continues at Irvine thirty years later. Well, I was at the time foolish enough and thought myself clever enough to believe I was capable of deciphering on my own the hidden first name behind the *J.* I was also ignorant enough of American customs to exhibit presumptuously the result of my supposed discovery. I thus wrote to Hillis, no doubt more than once (I have no archive of this), letters whose envelopes bore the address: John Hillis Miller. I probably committed this wrong very many times, to Hillis's amusement or irritation, when I received from him, on 2 June 1969, a long, beautiful, and richly detailed letter (where it was a question of Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil,* of différance, of the *cogito,* of Poulet once again, of time and space, of an article soon to appear by de Man on Poulet in *Critique,* and so on). Then, in two lines, came a postscript. Here it is: "By the way, my first name is 'Joseph,' not 'John,' not that it matters in the least, since I've never used that name in any case!"

Exclamation point. By saying that he had "never used" it, he meant that no one, no one in the world (except me, in sum, and then wrongly!) had ever used it to call him, in the performative, vocative, and apostrophizing mode of address. No one had ever addressed him by calling him "Hi, J. Hillis!" or "Hi, Joseph Hillis!"

Here then is the initial of a name before the name, here is the initial of a hidden first name that, by a sort of sacred prescription, it is forbidden to approach or pronounce in ordinary life and every day. Something like a divine first name hidden in the name. Is it forcing things to sense here an analogy with everything Hillis has taught us to think, from the beginning, under the title of *The Disappearance of God?* For a long time, I have wondered, in general and not just on the subject of the strange phenomenon of his *J.*, how Hillis felt, how he lived, within himself, between him and himself, this singularity of the relation to the singularity of his name. And I still wonder if, and how, across the incredible richness, impressive diversity, and secret continuity of all his works, one can identify, as one might identify a key, the law of this relation to self, this taste of self that must link him to something that, before the name, would resemble a hidden first name. The theme of what he calls, in 1963, the "gradual withdrawal of God from the world" (*DG*, p. 1) is recalled once again beginning with the exergue of the final chapter, the one Hillis devotes to Hopkins. It is a quotation from Isaiah 45:15: "Verily, Thou art a God that hidest thyself." Address to God: the hidden God is apostrophized, he is called by his name, but called at the very moment when this performative appeal describes, states, defines the absence, withdrawal, separation, the inaccessible secret that forbids us the very essence of God, thus the form of his substantial presence. The essence always says a presence. Here, the essence is called absence, *in absentia.* To say to God, "you are hiding" is another way of saying, at least in the language of onto-theology, as for you, you are not, you do not even exist. A performative contradiction, *n'est-ce pas.* How can one say to someone "you do not exist"? Unless behind the aspect of a peaceful constative, this declaration were a declaration of war, a threatening or murderous performative. This is the whole history of relations between faith and prayer, on the one hand, and onto-theology on the other. I think it was, from the beginning, a focal point of the Millerian meditation. As Heidegger notes in *Identität und Differenz,* to the God of the philosophers, to the God of onto-theology, to the *Causa Sui,* to the Ground of what is, one can address neither prayers, nor sacrifices, nor music, nor dance. I would add: nor a poem, nor literature in general.

What then is one doing when one makes a mistake with the hidden name of God? I don't know if Hillis kept my letters and my envelopes. I hope he has not preserved the archive of the offenses I committed against his hidden

first name. The wrong of which I repent did not consist merely in having claimed to reveal publicly and display a hidden first name on an envelope readable in the world and by everyone. But also to have done so, in the very act, doubly wrongly: by exhibiting the presumed body of his first name and by substituting for it another. According to a Jewish tradition that Lévinas discusses, when a mistake in spelling or transcription of the name of God comes to alter a manuscript, this manuscript must be neither destroyed or burned (for one does not annihilate the name of God) nor preserved (for one does not keep the trace of such a blasphemy). The parchment must in that case be buried. One must hide it and put it in a safe place, but keep it at the same time invisible and illegible. Moreover, a mistake with the name of God can be destined only to illegibility; it is illegibility itself. But there are veritable cemeteries of faulty manuscripts, underground libraries, special collections, and they are earthquake-safe. What is more, are not all our libraries made up of, even full of such buried blasphemies? What I have just done by confessing is a little like the burial of a bad J, an intruder, John having come to usurp the legitimate place of Joseph.

This is a violence that befell so many Josephs in the Bible. Concerning Joseph the fiancé or the husband of Mary (not to be confused with Joseph of Arimathea, the one who asked Pilate for Christ's corpse), the New Testament, as has often been remarked, has finally too little to say. That constitutes a first injustice. But it is true that Matthew describes him, *justement,* as a "just" man. When Mary discovers she is with child by the Holy Spirit, "Joseph her husband, being a *just* man [Matthew underscores *δικαιοσ*, *justus*], and not willing to make her a publick example, was minded to put her away privily" (Matt. 1:19). As for the other Joseph, the first one, the one from the Old Testament and Genesis, the favorite son of Jacob, the one who was called "master of dreams," Freud's ancestor, you recall that his brothers threw him into a pit and sold him for twenty pieces of silver to a caravan of Ishmaelites that took him to Egypt (Gen. 37:23–28).

It is thus under the sign of these two testaments and these two Josephs that I wanted to inscribe this admiring and grateful homage to my friend Joseph Hillis Miller: Joseph the carpenter, Joseph the Just, on the one hand, and Joseph the reader, the master in deciphering, on the other, the one who, like Hillis, knew how to recognize the stakes and the political future of his decipherings, how to take into account the evolution of sciences and techniques, of modes of production and archiving of knowledge and who in Egypt was also, as is well known, that incomparable man of the institution who, in the words of a pharaoh vis-à-vis whom he jealously kept his independence up until the end, passed for "a man discreet and wise."

To these two Josephs from the Old and the New Testaments, I could have

added or even preferred other Josephs. These other Josephs are the inhabitants of a literature with which Hillis is familiar, authors or heroes of fiction who, each one in his irreplaceable singularity, all had the privilege of being recognized and seeing a place set aside for them in the Millerian architectonics. I am not suggesting that the first name Joseph is the key here of a crypt (for if I had to bury my fault, namely, the guilty substitution of the name John for Joseph, one can also say that Joseph had already been encrypted and reduced to silence in the initial J. because Hillis tells me he "never used that name"; well, I say to myself in order to lessen my guilt somewhat, without this strange crypt I would never have made the fatal mistake). Although I have resisted it, the temptation would have been great to bring back under the first name Joseph, as with the key to a crypt, all the voices that are crossing in Hillis's work. For despite the immensity of the trajectory and the impressive diversity of so many works devoted to Victorian literature, more generally to English, American, German, and French literatures, to literary theory, to rhetoric, to linguistics, but also to teaching, to the university institution, to the history and the problems of canons in mutation, to so-called cultural studies, to new technologies, to ethics, politics, painting, all of these new advances putting to work theology, philosophy, linguistics, the pragmatics of speech acts, and so forth, one may wonder if, across the incredible multiplicity of these voices some invariable signature, for which one would search out precisely the key, the musical key, does not come to seal and dissimulate the unity of a selfhood, of a selftaste, but also and by the same token of a single vocal timbre, of a single character, in the sense at once of personality, soul, psyche, or psychology—and of the literal graphism. Is there, in this sense of the word *character,* a characteristic seal of Joseph Hillis Miller? By convoking here so many witnesses named Joseph, haven't I, by means of successive approaches and variations, been conducting a sort of experimentation that attempts to identify such a "character"? When I formulate such a question in this way, I am referring once again to something Proust said and that already in 1963, more than thirty years before his wonderful studies of Proust (among the most remarkable I have read, even in my language, and I am thinking in particular of "Fractal Proust" in *Black Holes*), Hillis placed in exergue to the very opening of *The Disappearance of God.* As translated by Miller, Proust said in his *Pastiches et mélanges:* "For a writer, as for a musician or a painter, the multiplicity of works provides that variation of circumstances which makes it possible to discern, by a sort of experimentation, the permanent traits of character."

Before I greet in passing the other Josephs that I thought I should invite by confiding to them the key to this celebration, allow me to confide in you what I have the effrontery to believe, despite or because of my original sin.

This: it would be just to grant me here, besides the privilege of seniority, a few other privileges. My right to the key, to the keys, would be first of all the right of my discourse to link indissociably emotion to reflection, the personal inflection of admiration and affection with the more neutral tonalities of theoretical, philosophical, even institutional analysis. For nothing in the world would I have passed up the chance to recall publicly that it has been given to me, like a benediction, to know Joseph Hillis Miller for more than thirty-five years, to have had the honor of teaching at his side and most often thanks to him in all the American universities that have welcomed me, from Johns Hopkins, between 1968 and 1974, to Yale, from 1975 to 1986, to Irvine, since 1987; the honor also of having shared with him more than with any other, through I don't know how many countries, colloquia, meetings of all sorts, the intellectual adventure that signs and seals our lives—and this always while breathing with him the air of serene friendship and unfailing loyalty. Those who know the world a little, and within it the academic world, will agree with me: the thing is more than rare, no doubt it is unique, exceptionally exceptional. Whether it is language, history, style, gesture, character, all kinds of idiosyncrasies, selfhood and selftaste, so many differences separate us, Hillis and me, which is all too obvious and everyone here knows this, in the first place both of us know it. Well, never has the shadow of a dispute, never has the least cloud transformed these singularities into discord. The credit for this goes to what I call Hillis's justice and, what is not to be distinguished from it, his ethics of friendship. Hillis is just in friendship and first of all in his work of reading and writing. I dare to think that it is the same thing, the same spirit and the same law. The same relation to the law.

I want to speak now of this probity by evoking, besides the two eponymous Josephs of the two Testaments, a few Josephs who are more literary, who were no doubt, in one regard or another, their descendents. As I tried to show elsewhere, in *The Gift of Death,* literary writing, in the strict and modern sense of the word, remains, whether it knows it or not, the child of the Bible, an at once faithful, sacred, attested, and unforgivably unfaithful heir of the holy scriptures from which it constantly, without confessing it, asks forgiveness for a perjury, while repenting before them.

I could have looked for these heirs of the Old and New Testament Josephs, and I would have found them, in the person of Joseph Conrad, for example, the author of *Lord Jim* (here we have already two Js, one of which, Jim, forenames all the Jameses that haunt Miller's work, starting with a certain Henry, not to mention a certain Joyce). As regards Joseph Conrad, Joseph Hillis Miller has luminously reinterpreted what is called his "nihilism," but especially what *Victorian Subjects* mentions in passing, namely, "the

complex use of multiple narrators."[5] This allusion is meant to draw our attention again to the braiding and bunching of the multiple narrative voices to which Miller, in every reading, is intent on doing justice and to all the keys that might have set the musical key, today, for my modest lecture.

I could have looked for other heirs, and once again I would have found them, in the direction this time not of authors, like Joseph Conrad, but of characters. Think, for example, of the *Joseph* in *Wuthering Heights.* In *Fiction and Repetition,* this Joseph rejoins a theory of phantoms, precisely, but also a theory of literary and novelistic spectrality. One sees there a cohort of egos pressing together, a lively crowd of singular *je* or Is; one witnesses their *unheimlich* return in the figure of the living dead come out of their crypt:

> With that "I" the reader brings back also the moment in the fall of 1801 when his "I have just returned" is supposed to have been written or spoken. By way of that first "I" and first present moment the reader then resurrects from the dead, with Lockwood's help, in one direction Hindley, Nelly, Joseph, [and so on].[6]

Or, again, the conclusion of the chapter, that moment where the dispersion of the Josephs, the infinite solitude of the homonymous Josephs engages the play, *le jeu* of the multiplicity of *je,* of Is, of the words (*je,* I), where the anguish of justice, of the universality of the law kept at bay by dissociated singularities, tightens in our throat and cuts off our breath. We have difficulty speaking and breathing each time a *je entre en jeu,* each time an I enters the game, that is, when what is most universal, the most commonly shared thing in the world, namely, the possibility and the right to say, "I," the very condition of the homonymy of all the *je* and Josephs, is also reduced to the most singular, the most solitary, the most untranslatable, the most unshareable, the most "unspeakable," like selftaste itself. This nameless taste, this incommunicable taste will always prevent homonyms or homophones from becoming synonyms.

Joseph is anyone whatsoever. A pseudonym for anyone whatsoever. Me or the wholly other. But Joseph is all the same irreplaceable. *Comme tout autre:* like every other as being wholly other. And every other is anyone whatsoever. There are only exceptional *examples* that at the same time found and defy the universal law. One day it will be necessary to study the untiring work on the question of *exemplarity* from one end to the other of Miller's work. To read a text, to respond to the injunction of its singularity, is always to bind and bend oneself to an example. In a very fine essay destined first

5. Miller, *Victorian Subjects* (Durham, N.C., 1991), p. 95.
6. Miller, *Fiction and Repetition: Seven English Novels* (Cambridge, Mass., 1982), p. 71.

of all for the University of California Humanities Research Institute (UCHRI) on the theory of translation, on the translation of theory and the "travel of theory," an essay that is itself the unprecedented study of an example, the biblical Ruth, where "the story of Ruth can be taken as a parable of the translation of theory," Hillis writes: "There is no work of theory without examples. The examples are essential to the theory."[7] But, at the same time, *The Ethics of Reading* reminds us that

> no choice of examples is innocent. It is a somewhat arbitrary selection for which the chooser must take responsibility. On the other hand, there is no doing, in this region of the conduct of life, without examples. This is as true of philosophical treatises on ethics as it is of literary study, as I shall demonstrate by means of an example from Kant . . . . Without storytelling there is no theory of ethics. [*ER*, pp. 2–3]

Isn't this the best way of saying at the same time the origin and the end of ethics? Its end as eschatology and its end as limit, its term and its death? The limit itself? Isn't this the condition of any ethical injunction? Of any meta-ethical question about ethics? But also the inevitability of a failure, of an intrinsic betrayal and perjury, which are immanent to fidelity itself? Isn't it above all what gives us to think justice in its essential link to law, as well as its irreducibility to law, its resistance, its heterogeneity to law? Which would come down to seeing a suddenly looming justice break the surface, a justice that will always exceed law but without which law itself, *by justicing,* would never begin to exhaust itself going after justice.

That, it seems to me, is the endless path Miller is pursuing. After having named Joseph in this discourse on the spectral resurrection of the dead (I cite again: "By way of that first 'I' and first present moment the reader then resurrects from the dead, with Lockwood's help, in one direction Hindley, Nelly, Joseph"), Miller concludes, and it is as if the word "I" were inaugurating, in the first person, the very grammar of all spectrality, as if the "I" still wore, like a mask, the "I" of a revenant:

> Words no different from those we use in everyday life, "I have just returned," may detach themselves or be detached from any present moment, any living "I," any immediate perception of reality, and go on functioning as the creators of the fictive world repeated into existence, to use the verb transitively, whenever the act of reading those words is performed. The words themselves, there on the page, both presuppose

7. Miller, "Border Crossings, Translating Theory: Ruth," in *The Translatability of Cultures: Figurations of the Space Between,* ed. Sanford Budick and Wolfgang Iser (Stanford, Calif., 1996), pp. 219–20.

> the deaths of that long line of personages and at the same time keep them from dying wholly, as long as a single copy of *Wuthering Heights* survives to be reread.[8]

Among so many other originalities, I would like to insist on what is most singular in Miller's work, on what detaches itself remarkably, as inimitably Millerian, within the landscape of the most notorious affinities, proximities, resemblances of the last two or three decades. What calls and is called, under the name and the signature of J. Hillis Miller, would be an untiring and permanent urge to *answer*. To answer responsibly in his name, for his name, to be sure, but while answering for responsibility itself. To answer for responsibility, and for what ties and obligates it to justice, is to think responsibility by formulating and formalizing its possibility, as well as its aporia. Ethical responsibility (which is also to say juridical and political responsibility) that is exposed not only in what is called life or existence, but in the task of deciphering, reading, and writing. This is a task to which, as we know, Miller has devoted, that is, given all his gifts: as teacher and writer, but also as citizen, and citizen of the world, and even beyond all citizenship, without any other title. No one says better than he this *necessity,* if not this *truth* of response. The distinction of necessity from truth appears in the very epigraph of the Wellek Lectures, delivered at University of California, Irvine, in 1985, under the title *The Ethics of Reading*. A quotation from *The Trial* by Kafka says something about this tension between *truth* and *necessity*. What the priest confides to Joseph K. remains in a certain way without any response other than a melancholy sigh: "'No,' said the priest, 'it is not necessary to accept everything as true, one must only accept it as necessary.' 'A melancholy conclusion,' said K. 'It turns lying into a universal principle'" ("'Trübselige Meinung,' sagte K. 'Die Lüge wird zur Weltordnung gemacht'") (*ER*, p. xi). In the last chapter of the book, "Re-vision: James and Benjamin," Miller, like the man and like Joseph K. before the law, explains to us why he must answer before the law that is the other's text, but also how, having to respond by adding something of his own, by countersigning, he risks, he *even must* risk, with the performativity of his response, doing more or less than answering faithfully to the text's demand; he must risk lying, then, by not responding loyally even while responding in the most upright manner possible—that is, also while reading himself, while analyzing vigilantly his *selftaste,* while also analyzing, through examples, writers who likewise, already, read and analyze themselves:

8. Miller, *Fiction and Repetition,* p. 72.

> My question throughout this book has been whether reading can also be an ethical act, a performance, part of the conduct of life, with its own measurable effects and consequent responsibilities. My focus throughout has been on only one corner of this field, those places where we can see an author reading himself or herself . . . . Such passages, I have implicitly claimed, are therefore exemplary for interrogation of the question of the ethics of reading. In following through one small arc of the trajectory of that prodigious act of re-reading as re-vision which is recorded in James' "Prefaces," I want to make James' text my law. I want to follow what he says with entire fidelity and obedience, to see whether what he says about the ethics of reading may be made the basis of a universal legislation. This book has explored various acts of self-reading in Kant, de Man, Eliot, Trollope, and now James. It has also been itself all along an example of what it is about. I have performed acts of reading of my own which are both responses to an ethical demand made by the texts I have read and at the same time ethical acts themselves which may have performative force in their turn on my readers. This power of acts of writing and then of reading to engender a limitless chain of *further* such acts is in fact one theme of that last paragraph of all in the last preface, the preface to *The Golden Bowl.* [*ER*, p. 102; my emphasis]

It would be interesting to reread, in the same spirit, Miller's own rereading of himself, here as well in a preface: the 1975 preface, written at Yale, to the second edition of *The Disappearance of God.* Among so many other things, one is convinced of the necessity of conceiving literary criticism as an "international enterprise"; of the necessity of "generosity" in reading, "a willingness to accept what one finds in an author and to go all the way with him"; and finally the necessity of "self-subverting insights," "the analogue in literature and in criticism for Gödel's incompleteness theorem," according to which "any formal system will lead ultimately to conclusions which cannot be encompassed within its original assumptions."

The risk and the aporia will always have to disturb this responsibility. It will always be deprived of certitude, knowledge, and assurance. To be sure, it must surround itself with science and vigilance; it belongs to the *Aufklärung* of modern times and times to come, but nothing ought to dissipate every shred of darkness in it. To respond faithfully, to obey loyally the text's demand, as with any injunction whatsoever, I must not only listen and read, I must also write in order to put to work and to the test the maxim of a universal legislation. I must sign a new text, issue another pledge that, however faithful it may be, will still signify something else as well and thus will risk betraying the demand, betraying it out of fidelity, in order to exert an

unforeseeable and, by definition, improvident "performative force" on readers, to convince them of what I write and give myself to be interpreted, for example as reader and decipherer of James, and so forth. And when I speak here of writer and reader, I could just as well speak of professor and student, lecturer and listener. On the next page, analyzing the necessarily religious character of this "vocation," of this "response to a demand or a call," Miller declares that the "I must," in the case of James or Kant, is "free and bound at the same time." How can one be free and bound at the same time? How can one not be?

That is why I wanted to associate here the two figures of Joseph: that of Joseph the Just from the New Testament (*dikaios, justus,* says Matthew) and the other, older figure of Joseph the decipherer from the Old Testament, this favorite son of Jacob, the reader and incomparable interpreter of oneiric or fantastic texts that were also laden with ethico-political significance, as close as possible to what orders the decision of the state and the sovereign, namely, the pharaohs of every age.

One would be wrong to see in Joseph Hillis Miller, the author of *The Ethics of Reading* (the book that could have given its metonymic subtitle to all other books by the same author), a pacified, serene, confident, even moralizing or right-thinking thinker, a thinker who would have sought to moralize a deconstruction so often and so stupidly accused of being perverse or amoral, cynical, skeptical, nihilist, or relativist. The interminable debate with ethics remains for Miller, it seems to me, a fight that is tormented, risky, bold, aporetic, constantly obliged to reinvent probity and loyalty with every "example," with every "I," with every "text," with every singularity, with every "other"—and this does not enclose him either in the library, in bibles, in what are called books, in the books of literature, or especially in the university.

I will not be able to give here the long demonstration that would be required—and that I believe possible, of course. I must be satisfied in conclusion with evoking its spectral and metonymic silhouette by recalling for you the passage of Kafka's Joseph K. in the Millerian corpus. To simplify things, I could have followed the continuous thread that, over thirty years, goes from the *Deus absconditus* of Hopkins to the *Deus absconditus* of Kafka and Joseph K. as these are read in *Tropes, Parables, Performatives* (1991). This book, coming almost thirty years later, is the faithful heir of *The Disappearance of God* (1963). For this time again, whether it is poetic or narrative, the literary experience is given to be deciphered as the undecipherable justice of a being *before the law* of someone (Joseph, in other words, anyone), for whom the law never presents itself in person and withdraws while deferring itself forever. What counts here above all, in this wandering that we

are familiar with today, is that the name of Joseph K. becomes in Miller's view the pseudonym or the metonymy, the other name or even the nickname of *all* Kafka's characters. Without exception, even though each one of them is exceptional. For they are all, like all *je* and all Is, without exception, exceptional. All are Josephs, and we are all the Josephs of this allegorical metonymy. To the point that the superpower of the name Joseph is right away lost in anonymity. And, I would say in French, "c'est justice." Justice is thereby rendered. The becoming-anonymous of these pseudonyms, of these homonyms, of these eponymous metonymies, makes me think of that cryptic operation in which the forename Joseph came thus to hide itself, *Josephus absconditus,* behind its initial, in the full name of J. Hillis Miller. And one of the sins that I must have committed at the origin, by substituting John for Joseph, will have been to risk evangelizing and Christianizing a name that hovered at the frontier between the Old and New Testaments. Like Kafka and like the Joseph K. deciphered by Joseph Hillis Miller. Kafka would never have been able to "make the leap from the tragic vision to Christian faith, or even to the point at which the possibility of Christian faith might be entertained. His closest approach to Christianity is probably to be found in an important chapter of *The Trial,* 'In the Cathedral.'" This is the moment when Joseph K. sees on the wall of the cathedral "a picture of Christ being lowered into the tomb." Miller deciphers there the most "dreadful" moment in the history of Christianity. It is the unique moment when the intercessor dies, the disappearance of the man-God. The unique instant when the translation between human and divine speech gets interrupted. Like this analogic translation or transfer, the deciphering then risks becoming impossible. Returning to the Scotist doctrine of Hopkins, one could say that along this seismic fault the very univocity of being, and thus the inscape, is no longer reliable. Is this not the origin of modern literature? It is the time, says Miller,

> which Hölderlin's poems describe, the hard time, when the gods are no longer present and are not yet again present to man. And this is Kafka's time too. For it is as though not only Joseph K. *but all his characters* had been condemned to endure permanently the terrible time between the death of Christ and his resurrection.[9]

This time opens and sketches out, for the being "before the law," a space, a placeless place, an endless spacing. Miller continues:

9. Miller, *Trope, Parables, Performatives: Essays on Twentieth-Century Literature* (Durham, N.C., 1991), pp. 29–30; hereafter abbreviated *TPP*.

> This is the time when, as in the priest's parable to Joseph K., one stands forever at the door which is the beginning of the way to the Law, the promised land, and yet forever put off by the statement that this is indeed one's very own door, but that one may not yet enter it. [*TPP*, p. 29]

You recall that the guardian in fact says to the man from the country: "No one else could ever be admitted here, since this gate was made only for you [*nur für dich bestimmt*]. I am now going to shut it." The prison chaplain also says to Joseph K.: "I belong to the law. So why should I want anything from you? The Law wants nothing from you. *Das Gericht will nichts von dir. Es nimmt dich auf, wenn du kommst, und es entlässt dich, wenn du gehst.* It receives you when you come and dismisses you when you go."[10]

And here is the return of the *Deus absconditus:*

> One may compare Kafka, then, with Pascal, for whom the mystery of Incarnation, the joining of the two worlds through the God-Man, alone could provide an escape from the contradictions of the two. Only Christ, the *deus absconditus* made present and manifest, could, for Pascal, provide an avenue from the world of *divertissement* and ambiguity to the higher realm which is the simultaneous affirmation of the yes and the no . . . . For Kafka God remained *"absconditus,"* yet, in making this testimony, he did, in a way, testify to God's presence. [*TPP*, pp. 29–30]

Hopkins, Kafka, Kafka's Joseph K.

In the filiation of Joseph the ancient, the Egyptian Jew, the political sage, the interpreter of the dreams and phantasms of sovereigns, I would be tempted to inscribe, so as to pay him the most admiring tribute, all the political, politico-institutional, geopolitical, technopolitical vigilance of Joseph Hillis Miller. This is not talked about enough as I see it. I hope that people will soon reread and take away the lessons from all Miller's texts on the ongoing transformation of geopolitical life, on the effects of new technologies in the university institution and in democracy, on the political stakes and implications of "cultural studies" in the university, and on so many other burning questions. As a very rich bibliography and dozens of titles could attest, these political questions, in both the wide and the narrow senses, have never been dissociated, in his work, from so many readings that will have opened the most necessary paths within literary fields (and not just Anglo-American or Victorian), in the fields of philosophy, psychoanalysis, painting, architecture, and so forth. One of the latest proofs is to be found in *Black Holes,* in particular in the chapter titled "Literary Study

10. Franz Kafka, *Der Proceß,* ed. Malcolm Pasley, 2 vols. (Frankfurt am Main, 1982), 1:149; trans. Willa and Edwin Muir under the title *The Trial* (New York, 1956), p. 278; trans. mod.

in the Transnational University," with its subchapters on "Cultural Studies and the Ontopolitological," "The Other Other," and "The University of Dissensus."[11]

I do not have the time to enter the rich territory of so many texts like this. Permit me, in conclusion, to leave the last word to Hillis. He recalls, better than anyone else, the sociopolitical and historical stakes, the extralinguistic, extrarhetorical, and especially extra-academic stakes that one must learn once again how to analyze rigorously *within* what is thus being exceeded. I purposely cite two relatively old texts (1987–1988) so as to underscore that it is not a matter of some recent evolution. And the second of my quotations will make apparent a continuity that goes back to *The Disappearance of God,* from forty years ago.

In *The Ethics of Reading,* Miller explains how the responsibility of the response exceeds *on the one hand* the presumed interior of a purely internal reading, such as the interior of a text or of an academic institution. *On the other hand,* it exceeds the limits of an ethics in the direction of politics, the social, or the juridical. I say it without intending any ironic provocation: *The Ethics of Reading* exceeds the ethics of reading; it overflows both mere reading and morality in a narrowly conventional sense. It goes "further" than a mere ethics of reading and in the following passage I will underscore the word *further.* Miller writes:

> By "the ethics of reading," the reader will remember, I mean that aspect of the act of reading in which there is a response to the text that is both necessitated, in the sense that it is a response to an irresistible demand, and free, in the sense that I must take responsibility for my response and for the *further* effects, "interpersonal," institutional, social, political, or historical, of my act of reading, for example as that act takes the form of teaching or of published commentary on a given text. [*ER*, p. 43]

The other quotation would no doubt go in the same direction. But, *on the one hand,* over and above a second essay on Hopkins, in *Victorian Subjects,* it links up again with *The Disappearance of God* (especially as regards the interpretation of an epistemology and an onto-theology subtending the poetic performative, which Miller unmasked beneath Hopkins's poetics, a layer that he here calls, in the text I am going to cite, "ideology"); and *on the other hand,* it suffices to dissuade us from thinking that, beneath the more or less clandestine name of Joseph, which has been our guide throughout, hides "some identifiable secret behind any veil," or even, on my side,

11. See Miller and Manuel Asensi, *Black Holes and J. Hillis Miller; or, Boustrophedonic Reading* (Stanford, Calif., 1999).

a secret original sin that it would be a matter of bringing to light or, still less, of psychoanalyzing. I read in conclusion a few lines from "Literature and History: The Example of Hawthorne's 'The Minister's Black Veil.'" This was a lecture given in 1987 to the American Academy of Arts and Sciences; but I refer, of course, to the later book, published in 1991, *Hawthorne and History,* and especially to the chapter "De-facing it: Hawthorne," which considerably enriches and systematizes this question. I remember having heard at University of California, Irvine, one of Hillis's most stunning lectures on "The Minister's Black Veil." Here finally is this excerpt. Hillis is in the process of rereading himself and, as he so often does, he takes the measure of the responsibilities of his reading:

> Certainly my reading of "The Minister's Black Veil" would exemplify this claim for an indispensable social function of "rhetorical reading." I have shown that Hawthorne's story does not merely reaffirm the Puritan version of the traditional language of parable and apocalypse, the notion that here below, in this mortal life, each of us veils a secret sin that will be unveiled at the general resurrection. At the same time, such a reading shows, the story puts that ideology in question. In doing that, the story functions as a powerful uprooting of the ideology of an opposition between realism and allegory on which Hawthorne's own self analysis and deliberate procedures as a writer depend.[12]

12. Miller, *Hawthorne and History: Defacing It* (Cambridge, Mass., 1991), p. 121.