

CONCLUSION

This book about the economy of literature seeks to understand dialectically the relationship between thought and matter by looking from the formal similarities between linguistic and economic symbolization and production to the political economy as a whole. We have seen that literary works are composed of tropic exchanges (for example, the simile and metaphors of Heraclitus's Fragment 90 and the plot of Sophocles' *Oedipus Tyrannus*), some of which can be analyzed in terms of economic content and all of which can be analyzed in terms of economic form. The economy of literature seeks to understand the relationship between literary exchanges and the exchanges that constitute a political economy.

The chapters in this book pose specific questions. For example, why did coinage, tyranny, and philosophy develop in the same time and place? What is the sociology of the distinction between the invisible, private realm and the visible, public one? What is the semiology of coins as material media of exchange and as symbols or works of literature? What is literary disposition and dispensation? What are the relationships among verbal, monetary, and political representation? Other problems and other times and places might have been considered.¹ Those discussed here, however, should be representative enough to suggest the general way of the economy of literature.

Aspects of the money of the mind toward the analysis of which the chapters in *The Economy of Literature* move include the internalization

1. For the medieval period and the *topos* of the cornucopia, for example, see Marc Shell, "The Economy of the Grail Legends," *Canadian Review of Comparative Literature* 5, no. 1 (Winter 1978); and on modern propaganda and the relationship between economic form and language, see Marc Shell, "The Forked Tongue: Bilingual Advertisement in Quebec," *Semiotica* 20, nos. 3-4 (1977).

of monetary form in the modern dialectic and the internalization of monetary inscription in the modern critique of the concept of truth.

"The Ring of Gyges" noted the symmetries in Plato's *Republic* between economic hypothecation and philosophical hypothesizing and between moneychanging and dialectical division of genres into species. Similar symmetries in the dialectics of Kant and Hegel elucidate their ideologies and theories of production. For example, Kant defines *Aufhebung*, or sublation (the principal movement or trope in later German dialectic), as the mutual cancellation of real opposites. His necessary illustrations of such opposites are debt (*Aktivschuld*) and credit (*Passivschuld*), when both *Schulden* are predicates belonging to a single subject and are quantitatively equal to each other.² Hegel, on the other hand, defines *Aufhebung* as the cancellation and transcendence of opposites. Relying on the meaning of *Aufhebung* in eighteenth-century commercial discourse, he treats it as a "cancelled (*aufgehoben*) note or bond which still has positive value as a receipt or discharge from debt."³ In the *Phenomenology* Hegel would demonstrate how this simultaneously negative and positive bond helps to articulate genres and species, to explain metaphorization, and finally to reveal absolute truth.

"The Language of Character" proposed a numismatic "epigrammatology"⁴ or logic of the relationship between inscription and in-

2. In *Versuch, den Begriff der negativen Grössen in die Weltweisheit einzuführen* (in *Werke in zehn Bänden* [Darmstadt, 1968], vol. 2) Kant applies Newtonian physical mathematics (in the terminology of which *Aufhebung* means "cancellation") to the metaphysical world. He considers two kinds of opposition: logical opposition, or affirming and denying something about a single subject; and real opposition, which arises when two predicates of a single subject are opposed, but without logical contradiction. Kant exemplifies real opposition by referring to the two directions in which a physical body (for example, the earth) may be pulled, and to debt and credit. "A person who owes a debt to another person of 100 florins must find the sum. But suppose that the same person is owed 100 florins by another. The latter is then held as reimbursing the former. The two debts united form a ground (*Grund*) of zero. There is no money to give and no money to receive" (my translation). In economics, as in physics, the zero produced is supposed to be a relative nothing, the final result of monetary *Aufhebung*.

3. Cf. W. T. Harris, "Note," in *Hegel: Selections*, ed. J. Loewenberg (New York, 1929), p. 102. The similarity between Hegelian *Aufhebung* and Aristotelian *anaïresis* (an opposite of *diaïresis*) is suggested by the latter's meaning "taking up a lease," "withdrawing money from the bank," or other acts of economic cancellation, and also "taking up bodies for burial." Antigone, for example, does this to the body of her brother (cf. Hegel's analysis of *Antigone*, in *Phänomenologie des Geistes* [Frankfurt-am-Main, 1970], ch. 6) and all people must do this with those things that they wish somehow to incorporate and transcend.

4. On the term "epigrammatology," see Geoffrey Hartman, "Monsieur Texte: On Jacques Derrida, His *Glas*," *Georgia Review* 29, no. 4 (Winter 1975): 761. Hartman plays

scribed thing. As we saw, a coin is a numismatic epigram that cannot be thought of apart from the material where it is inscribed. A coin comprises both an inscription and a thing on which the inscription is stamped, to which the inscription refers, and together with which it becomes legal tender. This epigrammatology is internalized in the definition of truth. Many works of literature and philosophy compare coins to truth.⁵ Nietzsche, for example, would upset the West by metaphorizing that "truths are . . . metaphors worn out and without sensuous power; coins which have lost their impressions and now matter only as metal, no longer as coins."⁶ Heidegger adapts the Nietzschean argument and takes issue with the traditional concept of truth as adequation of intellect and thing (*adaequatio intellectus et rei*).⁷ His principal essay on the essence of truth, however, relies uncritically on propositions about coins in order to exemplify the possibility or impossibility of such adequation. Heidegger fails to note that a coin is not only a thing (an ingot) but also a proposition (an inscription) about, and even part of or "adequate" to, this thing.⁸ He does not see the relationship between epigrammatology and adequation. The essay systematically and symptomatically distorts things, metaphorization, and the concept of truth. The economy of literature sets out to reveal the philosophical and political tendencies of such distortions. It warns against adopting theories that ignore the economics of dialectic and truth to which *The Economy of Literature* is prospective.

Some thinkers may try to nullify this economics by noting that *The Economy of Literature* begins with a mere story whose historical content can be disproved or whose political tendency can be disapproved of. Rousseau himself exhibits a sophisticated distrust of stories and a classical distrust of classical wisdom. Yet his critique of La Fontaine's translation of a fable of Aesop, who was a foxy slave during the age of

on the title of Jacques Derrida's *De la grammatologie* (Paris, 1967). Cf. Eugenio Donato, "'Here, Now/' Always Already': Incidental Remarks on Some Recent Characterizations of the Text," *Diacritics* 6, no. 3 (Fall 1976): 25.

5. For example: G. E. Lessing, *Nathan der Weise*, act 3, scene 6, in *Werke* (Köln and Berlin, 1962), vol. 1, and *Briefe antiquarischen*, in *Gesammelte Werke* (Berlin and Weimar, 1968), vol. 5, pp. 604–5, letter no. 52; F.W.J. von Schelling, *Vorlesungen über das akademische Studium* (1802), in *Werke* (Munich, 1927–28), vol. 3, p. 290; and Hegel, *Phänomenologie*, p. 40.

6. F. Nietzsche, "Über Wahrheit und Lüge im aussermoralischen Sinn," in *Werke in drei Bänden* (Munich, 1966), 3: 314.

7. Martin Heidegger, *Sein und Zeit* (Halle, 1929), pp. 212 ff.

8. Martin Heidegger, *Vom Wesen der Wahrheit* (Frankfurt-am-Main, 1954). See Marc Shell, "'What is Truth?': Lessing's Numismatics and Heidegger's Alchemy," *Modern Language Notes* 92 (1977): 549–70.

the Greek tyrants, displays the tyrant-sophist of the modern world. Our tale of the ring of Gyges or of the origin of the moneying of the mind is a similarly theoretical inquiry. It is a rhetorical trope which we set up and put down. In the end, Gyges the tyrant is a fall guy. But tyranny, which the tale of his ring sets forth, has made its pratfall neither in literary nor in legal theory and practice.⁹ We still look for ways to reform the political economy, as does Ruskin, or to free men, whom Rousseau says are born free,¹⁰ from the visible chains by which some men, and from the invisible chains by which all men, are bound.¹¹

Thinkers may wish to avoid the economics of literature. Like the speaker in Archilochus's poem, they may insist that to them things Gygean are out of sight or invisible: "I care not for the wealth of golden Gyges, nor ever have envied him; I am not jealous of the works of gods, and I have no desire for lofty tyranny; for such things

9. The tale is a trope, but the economics of language that it tells is not merely topical. In the work of some thinkers, perhaps, economics appears to be merely one *topos* among many similar *topoi* (for example, the sexual). Geoffrey Hartman thus interprets Derrida's turn toward relating esthetics and political economy (in *Glas*) and Lukács's turn toward relating the experience of art and the lessons of political economy (in his "große Ästhetik"): "Any grand Aesthetics, I suspect, will turn out to be an Xthetics: where 'X' signifies something excluded, something ex-d from a previous system and now redeemed: the 'ugly,' for instance, or 'low' or 'mad' or economic factors" ("Crossing Over: Literary Commentary as Literature," *Comparative Literature* 28, no. 3 [Summer 1976]: 275–76). The economy of literature does not need to exclude from consideration the troping of specific *topoi* (Aristotle, *Rh.* 1.2.21) such as those to which Hartman refers. As I have noted in the Introduction, however, there is a theoretical necessity for, as well as the historical fact of, the internalization of economic form in language. Unlike specific *topoi*, this internalization is general; it invades and pervades everything. Whether or not we employ terms like "rhetoric" (the Platonic knack [*tribē*] or the Aristotelian art [*technē*] of making persuasive tropes) and dialectic (of which rhetoric is supposed to be the counterpart [*antistrophē*] [Plato, *Grg.* 465d; Aristotle, *Rh.* 1.1.1, cf. 1.3.9]) or "poetry" and "philosophy," and whether or not we pretend to synthesize them, theory fulfills itself (if at all) only in its encounter with and account of its own internalization of monetary form, which is the architectonic *poseur par excellence*.

10. Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Du Contrat social*, in *Oeuvres Complètes*, 4 vols. (Paris, 1959–), 3: 351.

11. Jean de La Fontaine ("La Vie d'Esop, le phrygien," in *Oeuvres complètes de La Fontaine*, ed. René Groos and Jacques Schiffrin [Paris, 1958], vol. 1) tells how Aesop freed himself from slavery. Aesop, who was born mute, learned to use his tongue (*langue*) so well that he could tell how tongues (*langues*)—the human kind by which men speak and the animal kind that men eat—are, like human languages (*langages*), both the best and the worst of all things (p. 19; cf. p. 14). When the seal-ring of his master's polis (Samos) was lost, Aesop had an opportunity to speak slyly enough to "purchase" his freedom (pp. 22–23). La Fontaine notes that the freed Aesop sent fables to Croesus of Lydia (p. 24), the fifth descendent of Gyges. (Cf. Jean de La Fontaine, "Le Roi Candaule et le maître en droit," in *Oeuvres complètes*, 1: 576–84.)

are far beyond my sight."¹² The speaker denies that he desires the wealth and tyranny of Gyges and asserts that he would not wish to be an "equal to the gods" (as Gyges is called in the Platonic inquiry). Like Ruskin, however, he knows enough to see what not to see on the horizon. He is already uneasy about Gyges or else he would not speak these words. The speaker's protests are, like the *mensonges* of Ruskin, symptoms of his Gygean entrapment.¹³

The critical thinkers I have studied in *The Economy of Literature* know and are uneasy that a special logic, the money of the mind, informs and cannot be expelled from their thinking. As a god or an "equal to the gods," Jesus tried to eject from inside the walls of the Temple the classical moneychanger (*kermatistēs*) and his changing coins (*kermata*).¹⁴ He wanted to keep the monetary agents of homogenization and uniformity out of view of the ark where he supposed the divine One to dwell. Plato, however, knew that money could hardly be eliminated from the Academy where human lovers of wisdom conversed. He knew that hypothecation informs hypothesization and that change-making informs the dialectical division of the One (*kermatidzesthai*). Plato recognized and took into his account of metaphorization and truth the symmetries between money and the Idea or between rhetoric and its counterpart, dialectic.

The history of theory from Aristotle to Hegel and Heidegger is a series of swollen footnotes to Plato. These notes try—as does this book—to understand and define themselves against his thought. In the end, however, there is no easy way out of the field where theory encounters and tries to account for its own internalization of economic form. Wagner's operatic characters, perhaps, could return to the Rhine maidens the gold from which was fashioned the ring of the Nibelungen, and perhaps Rousseau could reject the hypothetical offer of a ring of Gyges. The literary and political theorist, however, cannot ignore the economy of literature. There is no retreat from, no safe lookout onto, no island in the midst of, this intellectual battlefield.

12. Archilochus, frag. 25.

13. Archilochus's metaphorization does, perhaps, resemble the exchanges of a barter economy and not those of the monetary economy of Gyges' Lydia, and Longinus does call his poems uneconomic and sublime, but the content—if not the form—of Archilochus's work is already affected by the powers of Gyges.

14. John 2: 14–15. Cf. Matthew, 21: 12.