Introduction

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Friedrich Nietzsche in *Thus Spake Zarathustra* proposes this as the sole regulative certainty governing all things in the world: "that they prefer—to *dance* on the feet of chance" (186). As Jacques Derrida puts the point in *Of Grammatology*, "The supplement to Nature is within Nature as its play"(258). Derrida's term *différance* might be a name for the indeterminacy, "supplement of deviation," that inhabits (haunts) every system in its constitution and that makes of every text an intertwining, *entrelacement*, of the other-in-the-same. Contemporary French criticism investigates and performs the play of *différance* in various signifying systems, and as the essays in this issue suggest, the French-critical interest in *différance* is changing the way "literature" gets written and read.

In this, its first issue of the millennium and with a new Editor in place, *Mosaic* brings together ten essays that are, in varying ways,informed by contemporary French theory and its critical notion of *différance*, or of what Jean-François Lyotard calls *le différend*: a distress in the sign/signifying system wherein something that cannot be represented, something "sublime," shows itself only in retreat/*retrait*. In the third essay in this issue, Eric Wilson argues that Ralph Waldo Emerson, despite traditional readings of him as a transcendentalist, is an advocate,

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before his time, of such a "postmodern," paralogical sublime. Emerson's sense of the sublime is informed by postmodern physics which for him, Wilson says,implies that the world,also writing, is not a fixity so much as a dynamic condition, an interplay, intertwining, of sameness and difference: "phenomena, ranging from the ant to the Andes,are simultaneously discrete and continuous, stable and unstable, local and global, attractive and repulsive." What is "postmodern" for Wilson as for Lyotard, is what "emancipate[s] forces *incommensurable* with unifying concepts," forces that are not spiritual or metaphysical but *physical*, beyond *logos*. It's a view that today's academics are responding to in different, not always positive, ways. In the sixth essay in this issue for instance, Nicholas O. Pagan,taking Roland Barthes as his case study, argues for the presence of a locatable *logos*, "an underlying logical structure," to which literary criticism must be held accountable. Typically read as a postmodern proponent of the Nietzschean aesthetic, Barthes,in Pagan's essay, is "made to face up to the rigors of logic," and at the same time, "the logical status of contemporary literary criticism" is said to be established.

As a word that signals differences, and debate, "postmodernism" has occasioned what Foucault would call a "discursive proliferation" around questions of sexuality and sexual difference. David Landrum's essay explores ways in which the genre of the postmodern novel, in this case John Fowles's *The French Lieutenant's Woman*, at once sets up and subverts prevailing heterosexist assumptions; and the essay shows how ideas about the nature of sexuality depend on some theory of the text. In another essay in this issue, David Wayne Thomas, by way of approaching "musicality," the association of music and words in Oscar Wilde's *Salome*, considers "the uncertain condition of interpretation" today, especially where representation of sexual subjectivity is concerned. What gets dramatized in Thomas's reading of *Salome* is not only Wilde's resistance to Victorian conventions, including its "schematizing, anatomizing impulses of representational thought," but also the "impasse," the "perpetually unfulfilled aspirations of representation itself."

Four of the essays in this issue deal with what Mohammad Kowsar calls "the thematic of the father." Opening the issue, Kowsar reads Jacques Lacan reading the father figure in Paul Claudel's play, *Crusts*, and in the process, Kowsar elaborates on the central yet empty place of the father in Lacan's psychoanalytic theory. Lacanian theory also informs Keren Smith's study, in this issue's seventh essay, of the spatial dimensions of *La Princesse de Clèves*. Working with Lacan's post-Freudian account of the mirror stage as productive of the fortress that is the father's ego, Smith

relates the architecture of the ego in *La Princesse de Clèves* to the built structure of 17th-century Versailles. With Didier Maleuvre's essay on Gide's intellectual debt to Nietzsche, we are given an intricate analysis of a "father" issue that is introduced by Kowsar: the question of generational haunting—and of parricide. Here again, "the father really is no more than an empty costume," voiceless, only a name, yet a ghost whose memory must be honored. With Maleuvre, as with Don Fletcher and Kate Feros in their study of Gore Vidal, the "father" question always involves the meaning/status we give to (patriarchal) history and tradition—and, I would say, to the bastard figure of chance.

The issue closes with two essays on chance and how it enters the game of theory today. Brian Cooper and Margueritte Murphy in "Taking Chances," approach Dashiell Hammett's *Red Harvest* through contemporary game theory. Their analysis recalls the point with which I opened this Introduction: that in current literary critique, the idea of indeterminacy, while discomfiting to some, is occasioning "a partial abandonment of economic postulates of rationality, purposeful behavior and equilibrium." Eyal Dotan concludes the issue with a study of Paul Auster's *The Music of Chance* that draws on Jean Baudrillard's theory of chance and seduction. Among other things, Dotan's essay problematizes the meaning that has been given to "postmodernism" by Marxist theorists such as Fredric Jameson. The essay ends where I began: with a postulate concerning play and the game.

Let me say that I am delighted and proud to be editing *Mosaic*, and that I want to invite you all to join the dance. To read and subscribe.