

discussing 'justice' (which, because it cannot be articulated linguistically, lies beyond the reach of the deconstructor) Derrida achieves true fatuousness by insisting that 'deconstruction is justice.'

This is all very silly, and Lilla is right to be exasperated by a philosopher who, despite his pretensions, is of no use to political theory (of any variety). Still, Derrida is an odd man out here. Lilla speculates that he was driven into his recent 'political' writings out of embarrassment with the Paul de Man and Heidegger scandals, as if to show he was a good leftist and that deconstruction is untainted by association with these figures (especially that older one, who should have known better). However, is Derrida not to follow his *daimon* (to introduce another Platonic reminiscence)? Is he not to push his challenge to Western notions of 'presence' with all the force he can muster? He has himself been a fairly modest participant in politics, not up to Foucault's level and by reference to Sartre a mere academic trifle. It is not as if he has been actively 'philotyrannical.' Lilla's objection can only be to his thought, not to his deeds, and in a book that discusses Heidegger and Carl Schmitt, one might not expect to find a mandarin's mandarin like Jacques Derrida. The worst 'deed' Lilla can find seems to be Derrida's influence on what Lilla calls the 'ephemeral disciplines' associated with postmodernism (e.g., women's studies, post-colonial studies, etc), where Derridean reversals of hierarchies have had substantial impact among what Lilla considers marginal intellectual classes.

Here, though, he misses a beat. Although he calls these disciplines 'ephemeral,' it would have been useful to examine the actual political effects of their *transmission* of Derridean teaching. Derrida's own political activity may itself have been 'ephemeral,' but it is not so clear that his disruption of hierarchies has had ephemeral effect in classrooms, especially American classrooms. Nor is it clear that Derrida's effect has only been in those fields lying in the spaces between 'real' disciplines. When Lilla quotes him as defining deconstruction by remarking 'La déconstruction, c'est l'Amérique' (*The Reckless Mind*, 188) he is on to something important. Yes, America may, as Lilla says, have 'something of the decentered, democratic swirl' he [Derrida] tries to reproduce in his own thought, but more importantly, it is the place where Derrida's challenge to all forms of political thought has been powerful. What its long-term influence will be it is to soon to say, but one suspects from the ferocity of the American 'culture wars' that not everyone considers deconstruction's impact to have been 'ephemeral.'

However, Foucault's activism is another matter. Although Lilla bemoans his ill-advised leap to the defence of the Iranian revolution – one of Foucault's several attempts to be the post-Sartre Sartre – his primary objection is to the Foucault 'lifestyle' as this represented an attempt to enact his 'subversive' and 'transgressive' ideas (he is reviewing James

Miller's *The Passions of Michel Foucault*). To this extent, then, Foucault is a more serious example of the 'reckless mind' than Derrida (who seems, in Lilla's reading, more like a frivolous mind). And here the Platonic failure in self-awareness comes into play, as, in Lilla's account, Foucault ignores medical warnings about a new disease ('Je n'y crois pas') but insists on continuing with his sexual adventures in California until it is too late: 'he complained about gay activists who were returning to established medical "power" for help. In the autumn of 1983, after he had already collapsed and less than a year before his own death, he could still be found in the baths and bars. He laughed at talk of "safe sex" and reportedly said, "To die for the love of boys: What could be more beautiful?"' (*The Reckless Mind*, 157). Eventually, he comes under the famous 'medical gaze' – which, after all, sometimes sees non-discursive diseases – he once located in the post-Enlightenment dialectic of 'power' and 'knowledge.'

For Lilla Foucault might count as a classic instance of the intellectual who takes his ideas *too seriously*, thinking that the world is a simulacrum of the drama played out beneath his pen. In short, he may actually have *believed all that*, believed the world to be a tissue of discourses, for, as Mailer once put it, 'nothing is more real to the intellectual than a concept' (16). Once committed to the concepts that earned him glory, he had little alternative but to carry on with the personal project – his transgressive sexual life – that almost certainly fuelled his celebrated insights into the way the West marginalizes the deviant, the mad, and the criminal. However, as with Derrida, it is not clear that this project in itself constituted anything 'philotyrannical.'

Kojève and Schmitt: one on the left, the other so far on the right that he worked for Hitler. Walter Benjamin: the Marxist as Jewish messianic theologian. Of the three, it is the malign Schmitt who is the clearest example of a 'reckless' mind. It is not entirely clear what Benjamin is doing here. Yes, he chose Communism – instead of becoming the Jewish theologian, of messianic cast, that Gershom Scholem thought he was cut out to be – and was silent about the Stalin terror (even though it sent his Latvian lover to the Gulag). But all this means is that Benjamin was yet another 1930s fellow-traveller, of a kind that Whittaker Chambers once memorialized in *Witness*. Placed next to Schmitt, he pales considerably. Lilla has not really clarified the hierarchy of recklessness in his book. In the case of Heidegger, Schmitt, and Foucault recklessness issued in political or 'lifestyle' action. But the worst that can be said of Derrida, Benjamin, and Kojève is that their ideas give intellectual encouragement to belief systems that have issued or may issue in tyranny. Now this is bad, but, apropos Benjamin, it is also easier today than it was prior to 1937 to say that Marxism is a bankrupt theory of social development or of governance and that its messianic aura was bogus. Benjamin may, indeed, be faulted for having waited until the Hitler-Stalin pact to realize there was a problem in the