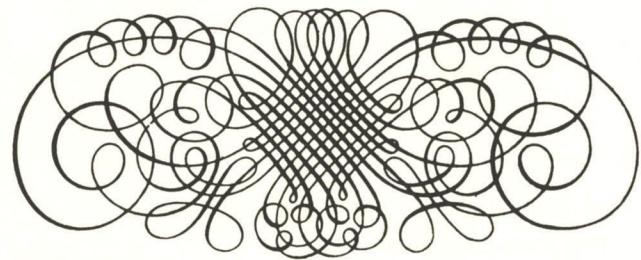


BEGINNINGS

Intention and Method

EDWARD W. SAID



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PREFACE

WHAT is a beginning? What must one do in order to begin? What is special about beginning as an activity or a moment or a place? Can one begin whenever one pleases? What kind of attitude, or frame of mind is necessary for beginning? Historically, is there one sort of moment most propitious for beginning, one sort of individual for whom beginning is the most important of activities? For the work of literature, how important is the beginning? Are such questions about beginning worth raising? And if so, can they be treated or answered concretely, intelligibly, informatively?

For this book these are the beginning questions. Yet once they are taken up a process of delimitation occurs—mercifully, since otherwise they are almost impossibly complex questions to discuss. I have concentrated on beginnings both as something one does and as something one thinks about. The two sometimes go together, but they are always necessarily connected when language is being used. Thus there is a particular vocabulary employed—terms like *beginning* and *starting out*, *origins* and *originality*, *initiation*, *inauguration*, *revolution*, *authority*, *point of departure*, *radicalism*, and so on—when a beginning is being either described or pointed out. Similarly, when one actually begins to write, a complex set of circumstances obtains that characterizes the beginning enterprise. In language, therefore, writing or thinking *about* beginning is tied to writing or thinking *a* beginning. A verbal beginning is consequently both a creative and a critical activity, just as at the moment one begins to use language in a disciplined way, the orthodox distinction between critical and creative thought begins to break down.

Beginning is not only a kind of action; it is also a frame of mind, a kind of work, an attitude, a consciousness. It is pragmatic—as when we read a difficult text and wonder where to begin in order to understand it, or where the author began the work and why. And it is theoretic—as when we ask whether there is any peculiar epistemological trait or performance unique to

beginnings in general. For any writer to begin is to embark upon something connected to a designated point of departure. Even when it is repressed, the beginning is always a first step from which (except on rare occasions) something follows. So beginnings play a role, if not always a very clearly understood one. Certainly they are formally useful: middles and ends, continuity, development—all these imply beginnings before them. A complex form, however, has a logic of its own. Does a beginning?

If we assume the presence of beginnings here and there for the reflective artist, reflective critic, philosopher, politician, historian, and psychoanalytic investigator, a study of beginnings can all too easily become a catalog of infinite cases. My task in this book is precisely to avoid compiling such a catalog (even while being aware of its possibility) and to take up instead the question of beginnings in an interesting, fairly detailed, practical, and theoretical way. I not only try to show what sort of language is used and what sort of thought takes place either as one begins or as one thinks and writes about beginning, but also I wish to show how forms like the novel and how concepts like *text* are forms of beginning and being in the world. Moreover, those changes that occur from one cultural period to the next can be studied as shifts in the notion of what a beginning is or ought to be. When one practices criticism today, for example, a highly circumstantial awareness of beginning to write criticism is in operation; we are less likely now than before to think that a writer's life has an absolute prior privilege when it comes to understanding his work. Why is this so, and what should we now begin with as we study a writer's work? What *are* the privileged terms and the principal aspects of critical awareness today?

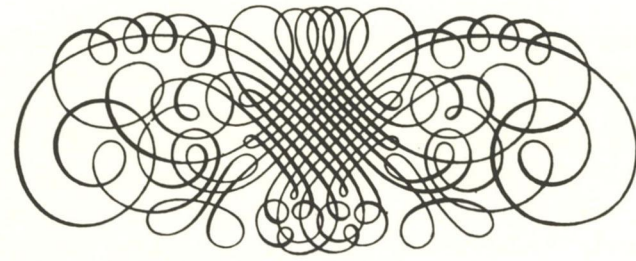
Any work that pretends to deal with such questions risks being embarrassed not only by its beginning but also by its continuity, its choice of subjects, its vocabulary. The potential for such embarrassment with this particular book is something I have not underestimated. My own critical terms (*transitive* and *intransitive beginnings*, *authority*, *intention*, *method*, *beginning*—as distinguished from *origin*—*text*, *structure*) are built upon associations of ideas which, as will become fairly evident, gather in a rather wide range of interests. Each of the book's six chapters, or episodes, has an internal coherence that depends on some aspect of beginning; each covers a historical pattern (the development of the novel, for example) that does not stray very far from the core subject of beginnings, although paradoxically I find it possible in one chapter

(Chapter 3) to discuss both the early *and* the late phases of the European novel. Altogether, these six episodes constitute a structure for studying beginnings, though not in a linear fashion. Perhaps my decision to quote Vico in the epigraph and to make his work the subject of my conclusion makes my (circular) point best—namely, that beginnings are first and important but not always evident, that beginning is basically an activity which ultimately implies return and repetition rather than simple linear accomplishment, that beginning and beginning-again are historical whereas origins are divine, that a beginning not only creates but is its own method because it has intention. In short, beginning is *making* or *producing difference*; but—and here is the great fascination in the subject—difference which is the result of combining the already-familiar with the fertile novelty of human work in language. Each of my chapters builds on this interplay between the new and the customary without which (*ex nihilo nihil fit*) a beginning cannot really take place. The underlying interest of an essay such as this book is its true theme: the community of language and history—from the beginning, *despite* any one beginning. To say this *at* the beginning is hopefully thereafter to avoid the conservative safety of language without history, and vice versa. Thus beginnings confirm, rather than discourage, a radical severity and verify evidence of at least some innovation—of *having begun*.

CHAPTER

ONE

Beginning Ideas



I

THE problem of beginnings is one of those problems that, if allowed to, will confront one with equal intensity on a practical and on a theoretical level. Every writer knows that the choice of a beginning for what he will write is crucial not only because it determines much of what follows but also because a work's beginning is, practically speaking, the main entrance to what it offers. Moreover, in retrospect we can regard a beginning as the point at which, in a given work, the writer departs from all other works; a beginning immediately establishes relationships with works already existing, relationships of either continuity or antagonism or some mixture of both. But the moment we start to detail the features of a beginning—a moment likely to occur in examining many sorts of writers—we necessarily make certain special distinctions. Is a beginning the same as an origin? Is the beginning of a given work its real beginning, or is there some other, secret point that more authentically starts the work off? To what extent is a beginning ultimately a physical exigency and nothing more than that? Of what value, for critical or methodological or even historical analysis, is "the beginning"? By what sort of approach, with what kind of language, with what sort of instruments does a beginning offer itself up as a subject for study?

The size of the present book is evidence enough that these are engrossing questions—at least to me. Yet I feel that what keeps the book from being merely a record of preliminary curiosities is that in subject matter, approach, and methodology this study of beginnings aims to contribute, however modestly, to contemporary criticism. It soon will become evident that by the term *criticism* I intend something rather unlike literary history, or *explication de texte*, or cultural generality; in this sense of its own

difference, therefore, this book begins by explicitly venturing a particular ambition for itself, an ambition that finally becomes intelligible only in the book's unfolding and not through first advancing some ideal type which it then seeks to fulfill. It must be added that this manner of criticism cannot claim any ultimate novelty, for its obvious reliance upon many other writers immediately invalidates the claim. But in seeking first to isolate a problem—that of the beginning which appears more abstract than problems dealt with in most criticism—in seeking then to make a selection of issues, examples, and evidence uniquely relevant to the problem, in seeking to work in discursive and conceptual language suited to the problem, in seeking to set the problem in as spacious and yet as pertinent a frame of modern reference as possible, and finally in seeking to learn from itself, to adjust to and change itself in progress: in all these ways this book aims to contribute to contemporary criticism. And since it would take many more pages to round out my prescriptive definition of *criticism*, I shall instead enumerate the questions, circumstances, and conditions that form this study and that influence its trajectory.

II

In each of the following relatively innocuous statements the sense derives prominently from a common sense understanding of the concept of "beginnings": "Conrad began his career with *Almayer's Folly*"; "*Pride and Prejudice* begins with the following sentence"; "Pope began to write at an early age"; "Before he began to write Hemingway would sharpen a dozen pencils"; "*This* is what one ought to do at the beginning"; "Civilization can be said to have begun in the Near East"; "As soon as he began to know Odette better Swann started to suspect her"; "From beginning to end Flaubert was ever the artist." Of quite another order of meaning are such statements as "In the beginning was the Word" or "In my beginning is my end." In both sets of statements, however, variations of the concept "beginning" designate a moment in time, a place, a principle, or an action. Just as obviously, these designations are verbal constructions employing variations of the term *beginning* in a relatively well-defined way: thus, the concept "beginning" is associated in each case with an idea of precedence

and/or priority. Finally and most important, in each case a "beginning" is designated in order to indicate, clarify, or define a *later* time, place, or action. In short, the designation of a beginning generally involves also the designation of a consequent *intention*. We might not actually say as much every time, but when we point to the beginning of a novel, for example, we mean that from *that* beginning in principle follows *this* novel. Or, we see that the beginning is the first point (in time, space, or action) of an accomplishment or process that has duration and meaning. *The beginning, then, is the first step in the intentional production of meaning.*

In Chapters 1 and 2 I describe the conditions that pertain to the designation and the intention of beginnings: in what settings and by what instruments beginnings are formed, for what purposes different kinds of beginnings are designated, and what kind of mind and what kind of work tend to insist upon the importance of beginnings. In describing these I introduce a second sort of beginning, what I call the pure or intransitive beginning, one that has no intention other than simply to be a beginning in the sense of being first. In the major part of the book (Chapters 3, 4, and 5), I develop the consequences of those early adumbrations: how an interest in beginnings entails a certain sort of writing, thought, and meaning, how beginnings relate generally and specifically to different continuities, and how, paradoxically, an interest in beginnings is often the corollary result of not believing that any beginning can be located. All of this depends—importantly, I think—on the following generalization: whether an interest in beginnings is practical or highly theoretical, there is an imperative connection to be observed between the idea of a beginning and an aboriginal human need to point to or locate a beginning.

But all of these general projects of the book can only have at this stage a somewhat rarified significance for the reader. Therefore, it becomes necessary for me first to discuss the circumstances of this study: why such a study proposed itself to its author, why it is pursued in this way in particular, and how a rationale for such a study is arrived at.

III

As a problem for study, "beginnings" are attractive, first of all, because while one can isolate a beginning analytically, the notion of beginning itself is practically tied up in a whole complex of

relations. Thus between the word *beginning* and the word *origin* lies a constantly changing system of meanings, most of them of course making first one then the other word convey greater priority, importance, explanatory power.* As consistently as possible I use *beginning* as having the more active meaning, and *origin* the more passive one: thus "X is the origin of Y," while "The beginning A leads to B." In due course I hope to show, however, how ideas about origins, because of their passivity, are put to uses I believe ought to be avoided.

But even this distinction seems relatively crude when one considers how many words and ideas in current thought and writing hover about the concept of "beginnings": *innovation, novelty, originality, revolution, change, convention, tradition, period, authority, influence*, to name but a few. Altogether they describe the rather broad field in which the present study is located—which should not be surprising, since most writing has kept these notions in mind. I am centrally concerned, however, with what takes place when one consciously sets out to experience or define what a beginning entails, especially with regard to the meaning produced as a result of a given beginning.

When I first became interested in beginnings several years ago, some of the problems struck me as essentially constituting the professional dilemma of the writer interested in "literary criticism": How should he begin to write? I then discovered that this question conceals at least four others: (1) After what training does one begin to write? (2) With what subject in mind does one begin to write? (3) What is the point of departure for writing—a new direction or one continuing from old ones? (4) Is there a privileged beginning for a literary study—that is, an especially suitable or important beginning—that is wholly different from a historical, psychological, or cultural one? Every one of these questions impinges upon the writer today, and what they represent, it is now clear to me, is by no means exclusively a "professional" issue. Rather, each of these questions involves theoretical and practical issues in equal measure.

Consider the general education brought to literary criticism by an individual today. Whatever else he may have been trained in, it was almost certainly not in classical philology, the one discipline in Europe and America that was practically *de rigueur* for the literary scholar until World War II. For studying literature in the

*As for example, in the "origins of Greek tragedy," the "beginning of consciousness," and so on ad infinitum.

university was considered a privilege to be earned by a scholar once he had mastered classical philology in some detail, as well as principles of textual study that were codified by years of practice and therefore not open to subjective "interpretation." The published reminiscences of such scholars as Leo Spitzer, Erwin Panofsky, Erich Auerbach, Ernst Robert Curtius, the volume of work produced by C. S. Lewis, Amerigo Castro, Ferdinand Baldensperger, Theophil Spoerri, and others like them, tell a rather humbling story about the researcher today, who can barely read another language (and certainly not Latin) and who thinks a "text" is one of a paperback series. Spitzer was able in his later years to write hundreds of pages on the meaning of words like *milieu* and *race* as they appeared in a half-dozen languages and literatures over four or five centuries—fully because he was *taught* by Meyer-Lubke "to find etymologies."¹ And for all his meta-physical interest in Man, Spitzer in his authoritative essays brings forth great masses of exact information obviously learned first from a teacher who, says Spitzer, "in reference to a given French form . . . would quote Old Portuguese, Modern Bergamesque and Macedo-Rumanian, German, Celtic and Paleo-Latin forms."² What is impressive here is not only the kind of information possessed by scholars like Spitzer, but also the fact that it was received information, handed down from generation to generation.

There is not much use in speculating why most people no longer regard education as adding links to a historical dynasty. We expect the student trained in literature to have a smattering of "humanities"—in translation—but an urgent sense of other knowledge, paraknowledge, that he assumes lies naturally alongside literature and in some way bears upon it. He will know a lot about Freudian psychology, about Marxism in some form, about Marcuse, Norman O. Brown, Laing, and so forth. This should not be taken simply as an attack upon either the contemporary student or his sense of relevance. In fact, *our* fate as scholars today is precisely that of our students, for how many of us can do classical philology? At best, we learned Greek or German to pass reading exams, and for most of us Romance philology was something we read about while we took courses in the accelerated reading of French or Italian. The bookstore, with its rack upon rack of translated works (Freud, Nietzsche, Proust, Hesse, Baudelaire), brings us closer and faster to the world of knowledge than any other means readily available. Certainly few students today can move, as Panofsky did, from one university to another, to

listen to eminent scholars, whereas anyone can move very quickly from one book to another, from the study of one period or culture to another.³

One way of mitigating this change and even of enhancing the fact that it has taken place, is to argue that literature itself has gone through the same change. A medieval or Renaissance poet is likely to have been more learned than William Carlos Williams; and in general a Chaucer scholar probably knows Latin and Old English, whereas a D. H. Lawrence specialist need not and probably does not. Yet I am less interested in such generalities than in the fact that if a modern writer like Joyce was less formally learned than Richard Hooker, the former was almost surely equipped with more knowledge, arranged very differently. The problem we face today when we study Joyce, or when, untrained in classics or religion, we read Hooker, or when we deploy psychology in the study of a literary text, is a problem of irregularity, of discontinuity. That is, less background, less formal training, less prescribed and systematic information, is assumed before one begins to read, write, or work. Thus when one begins to write today one is necessarily more of an autodidact, gathering or making up the knowledge one needs in the course of creating. The influence of the past appears less useful and, as two recent critics, W. J. Bate and Harold Bloom, have argued, more likely to produce anxiety.⁴ Therefore, Roland Barthes, paraphrasing Bachelard, has said that the study and the production of literature today is the study and the production of de-formation.⁵ To read Joyce we must follow these de-formations, just as Joyce's reading de-formed the traditional curriculum.

It is less permissible today to imagine oneself as writing within a tradition when one writes literary criticism. This is not to say, however, that every critic is now a revolutionist destroying the canon in order to replace it with his own. A better image is that of a wanderer, going from place to place for his material, but remaining a man essentially *between* homes.⁶ In the process, what is taken from a place ultimately violates its habitual way of being: there is constant transposition, just as when we read an imitation by Pound or by Lowell we read the redistribution of an Anglo-Saxon or Italian original that occupies a wider, less well-charted, and less predictable exterior space than the original.

It is worth pursuing a little further such notions as "exteriority" and "in-betweenness." They do not refer to a sort of fellow-traveling critical eclecticism. Rather, they describe a trans-

formation that has taken place in the working reality of the self-conscious writer. He can no longer easily accept—for many reasons, spiritual or sociological—a place in a continuity that formerly stretched forward and backward in time. Already Eliot had understood that "tradition" was an achievement for the few, not the possession of all. Perhaps, also, today's writer is less comfortable with the unadorned fact of precedence—as opposed to Dante, for example, who had been comfortable with Virgil—and perhaps he can no longer know what it means to stand in a direct line of descent. History and tradition seem less communicable in sequential narrative because, as Foucault says, history appears to us now to comprise very large units of endeavor (the evolution of trade patterns, demographic alterations, slow shifts in agricultural or intellectual habits, and so on) that scant the individual life span.⁷ Knowledge, therefore, is less formally embodied, whether in a subject like philology, a teacher like Meyer-Lubke, or in a traditional plot of unfolding like that of a Dickens novel.

Furthermore, exteriority and in-betweenness in the modern writer are the inevitable results of lacking either faith in or capacity for limited (discrete) but wholly integrated work. The modern writer often feels the urge instead to create new totalities, to cultivate random appetites, to deny forward movement altogether. The historic contest between Wilamowitz and Nietzsche after the publication of the latter's *Birth of Tragedy* in 1872 perfectly symbolizes the distinction I am drawing.⁸ At bottom, their conflict centered around the idea of a "classical text": Was it one in a series to be revered, cultivated, emended, and described in the best scholarly tradition? Or was it rather, as Nietzsche believed (though not at all so simply as stated here), a text upon which, as upon a writing tablet, was inscribed a constellation of forces (instincts, urges, desires, wills) still present in the modern era and still as unseemly in their power to engage and intoxicate? In short, for Wilamowitz a text was a system of boundaries and inner constraints held intact by successive generations (a heritage passed on in time); while for Nietzsche it was an invitation to unforeseen estrangements from the habitual, an occasion for unconditional voyages into what Conrad so aptly called the "heart of darkness." The weight, in quantity alone, of most canonical modernist writing testifies to Nietzsche's victory.

As there is no shortage of criticism proclaiming the triumph, there is no need here to rehearse such themes in modern writing as nihilism, anguish, emptiness, or silence. I am interested, however,

in noting how these themes reflect the critic's impasse, not the literature's difficulty. By using a vocabulary of high spiritual drama to describe what in fact are textual novelties, a great deal of modern criticism has lost the opportunity to rival its subject matter in inventiveness and in the redistribution of textual space. I mean to say that one of the chief characteristics that Joyce, Yeats, Conrad, Freud, Mann, Nietzsche, and all the others share in common has been a necessity *at the beginning* for them to see their work as making reference, first, to other works, but also to reality and to the reader, by adjacency, not sequentially or dynastically. The true relationship is by adjacency, while the dynastic relationship is almost always the one treated ironically, the one scoffed at, toyed with, or rejected. Therefore, the production of meaning within a work has had to proceed in entirely different ways from before, if only because the text itself stands to the side of, next to, or between the bulk of all other works—not in a line with them, nor in a line of descent from them.

A great many illustrations come immediately to mind, all of them combining surface energy and discontinuity with an improbable interest in precedence, in the past. Joyce's choice of the *Odyssey*, for example, does not say, "Look what has happened to the noble Greek idea when it descends to Dublin 1904," but rather, "Odysseus is like Bloom, Telemachus like Daedalus, Ithaca like Eccles Street, Chapter 18 like Chapter 1, and so on." Or take Freud's unconscious: banned from consciousness at the outset, it exerts an influence upon dreams and everyday life by means of distortions, exaggerations, mistakes which do not even deliver the unconscious whole; indeed, the whole of our conscious life is discontinuous with our unconscious principles of order, which in turn repeat and vary that initial rupture ad infinitum. Eliot's *Wasteland* complete with notes, to take a third example, is a collection of voices repeating and varying and mimicking one another and literature generally. Another way of conveying this idea of adjacency is to say that a text can neither be effectively read as commentary nor described by commentary. A text has no central point or central trajectory: it imitates no spatial or temporal object; and its "voice" is more likely to be a doodling pen rather than a narrating persona. From the point of view of the writer, a text is likely to be ink on a page, or folds in a paper, or what Mallarmé called "un espacement de la lecture,"⁹ or a never-ending ambition to be a text; a text is something of a pure sign that the author's career went into making it. From the critic's

point of view, a text is a challenge to provide proof that what he reads there cannot possibly imitate life. Nearly every consciously innovative major writer since Oscar Wilde has repeatedly denied (or even denounced) the mimetic ambitions of writing. A text, then, seems more essentially just itself—a text, with its own highly specialized problematics—than a representation of anything else.

So the critic faces irregularity on all sides. Because he cannot have direct recourse to tradition in solving the problems of writers like Joyce, and because his (and Joyce's) references are to *other* makeshift formalities of knowledge, the critic is aptly characterized in Lukacs's epithet for the novel as being transcendently homeless.¹⁰ He begins each work as if it were a new occasion. His beginning, as much as any modern writer's beginning, takes up a subject in order to begin it, keep it going, create it. As the beginning is related to what immediately follows it, so too are the parts of his writing to one another—irregularly, assertively, eccentrically. But these relationships, while consequent in a very literal sense, are not consequent in any simply causal sense. Such relationships cannot be plotted, any more than the succession of voices in *The Wasteland* can be plotted; neither are they symmetrically subordinate to any fixed central point, just as *Heart of Darkness* makes a deliberate havoc of any simple scheme based on the Quest. Indeed, I shall be arguing later that the order proceeding from beginnings as I have described them cannot be grasped adequately by any *image* at all. While the process of writing a classical novel and the course of its plot may be comprehensible within an image of time unfolding, as a family unfolds and generations are linked, in reading *The Wasteland* or the *Cantos* the critic cannot find, let alone create, an image according to which the writer or his subject can be understood. I shall argue that the composition of modern writing turns away from, conflicts with, any such patterns of imagery, rejecting them as having nothing to do with writing. The same process occurs in the career of the modern writer.

There is a reasonable danger that I will be misunderstood to be saying that no image means, by analogy, no definite intention or purpose. I am saying exactly the opposite. Intention, largely but never exclusively designated by a beginning, is a way of confining a work to one element: writing. With the discrediting of mimetic representation a work enters a realm of gentile history, to use Vico's phrase for secular history, where extraordinary possibilities of variety and diversity are open to it but where it will not be

referred back docilely to an idea that stands above it and explains it.¹¹ In other words, there is only *one* order of reality for writing (not two—idea/image and writing) that includes the production of meaning, the method of composition, the distribution of emphasis, as well as the tendency to produce mistakes, inconsistencies, and so on. That is, we consider literature as an order of repetition, not of originality—but an eccentric order of repetition, not one of sameness¹²—where the term *repetition* is used in order to avoid such dualities as “the original versus the derivative,” or “the idea and its realization,” or “model/paradigm versus example”; and where *eccentric* is used in order to emphasize the possibilities for difference within repetition and to signify that while authors, works, periods, and influences are notions that pertain to writing in specific cases, they are really terms used to describe irregularities of varying degrees and qualities within writing as a whole. As Foucault has shown, the notion “author” admits of such various irregular formations of writing as *The Tatler*, or “Rabelais and rabelaisian,” or “Freud” and “Marx.”¹³ In some cases the term *author* denotes a structure, a kind of work, a style, a kind of language, an attitude, or a collection of miscellaneous writing; this term is an excellent example of repetition and eccentricity.

An intention, therefore, is a notion that includes everything that later develops out of it, no matter how eccentric the development or inconsistent the result. I do not mean, on the other hand, that *intention* is a more precise equivalent of *totality*. (Rather, they are, like the pair of terms *model* and *paradigm*, about as exactly grasped for practical literary use as a cloud. We must, however, try to be precise.) By *intention* I mean an appetite at the beginning intellectually to do something in a characteristic way—either consciously or unconsciously, but at any rate in a language that always (or nearly always) shows signs of the beginning intention in some form and is always engaged purposefully in the production of meaning. With regard to a given work or body of work, a beginning intention is really nothing more than the created *inclusiveness* within which the work develops.

Stuart Hampshire describes this quirky business as follows: “The significance of a writer, whether poet or philosopher or historian, and that which makes him worthy of study now, commonly does not reside principally in the conscious intention behind his work, but rather in the precise nature, as we can now see it, of the conflicts and the imaginative inconsistencies in his work.”¹⁴ I agree completely with Hampshire so far as he goes; but

I somewhat differ with him insofar as he is unwilling to apply intention to conflicts and inconsistencies as well. Moreover, I would add that intention, despite its conscious formulations, is never inconsistent with method, although conscious intention—when is it ever exclusively conscious?—is frequently at odds with method.

Now it is Paul de Man’s thesis that in criticism the very blindness of a theory with regard to certain aspects of literature makes possible that theory’s discovery of the most valuable insights.¹⁵ Intention, then, in my sense of the term, is the interplay between such blindness and such insight. In other words, intention is the link between idiosyncratic view and the communal concern.

IV

I have so far tried to show that when the modern literary critic begins to write he cannot sustain himself at all well in a dynastic tradition. For not only is this tradition foreign to him by training and circumstance, but its repudiation is also the intention, the subject matter, and the method of most modern literature. He must therefore undertake his work with initiative. He, too, must seek a more suitable point of departure, a different *topos*, for his study. I have been hinting very broadly that such a *topos* is the “beginning” or “beginnings,” which presents a problem at once more precise and more exigent than does the “New.” Beginnings inaugurate a deliberately *other* production of meaning—a gentile (as opposed to a sacred) one. It is “other” because, in writing, this gentile production claims a status *alongside* other works: it is *another* work, rather than one in a line of descent from X or Y. Beginnings, as I treat them, intend this difference, they are its first instance: they make a way along the road.

A beginning, therefore, is a problem to be studied, as well as a position taken by any writer. For the critic a novel begins, as it does for the novelist who wrote it, with the intention to write a novel and not a play or a poem. As a problem, beginnings seem to have a sort of detachable abstraction, but unlike an idea about which one thinks at some distance from it, a beginning is already a project under way. Two examples to which I shall refer periodically are *Tristram Shandy* and *The Prelude*: each at the outset is only

a beginning, each is preparatory to something else, and yet each amasses a good deal of substance *before* it gets past the beginning. How does this happen? Or more precisely: if the critic is studying beginnings, how does he go about bringing together material "for" his study? How is his material arranged? Where does it begin?

In the case of this book I have apparently begun with the present chapter, which anatomizes and intends what is to follow. But in fact my first formal step is taken in Chapter 2, "A Meditation on Beginnings," about which I should like to speak briefly here. After the problem of beginnings first suggested itself to me it became fairly clear that my reading and teaching were increasingly addressing the question, sometimes directly and sometimes obliquely, but always in terms of auxiliary questions. I then sought a way to treat these auxiliary questions in and of themselves, as matters confronted in the practice of criticism. I also looked for a way of connecting them to the principal issues to which they are related. For example, every student of literature necessarily deals with originality and with the related subject of influences and sources; yet very few critics have systematically tried to examine originality in secular, as opposed to magical, language. I then found that critics like Paul Valéry, for whom the imaginative abstraction or the speculative generality was not an obstacle to thought but rather an enhancement and a provider of thought, suggested a kind of writing I might learn from directly. Valéry's critical prose, for all its sophistication, is virtually free of cynicism. It never resists purity as a subject, and yet it never refrains from submitting purity to a web of circumstances, most of them culled by Valéry from the immediate pressures upon him. In his relationships to Leonardo and to Mallarmé we can see how the weight of philosophical and personal intellectual pressures, respectively, bore down upon him. As a poet indebted to and friendly with Mallarmé, Valéry was compelled to assess originality and derivation in a way that said something about a relationship between two poets that could not be reduced to a simple formula. As the actual circumstances were rich, so too had to be the attitude. Here is an example from the "Letter About Mallarmé":

No word comes easier or oftener to the critic's pen than the word *influence*, and no vaguer notion can be found among all the vague notions that compose the phantom armory of aesthetics. Yet there is nothing in the critical field that should be of greater philosophical interest or prove more rewarding to analysis than the progressive modification of one mind by the work of another.

It often happens that the work acquires a singular value in the other mind, leading to active consequences that are impossible to foresee and in many cases will never be possible to ascertain. What we do know is that this derived activity is essential to intellectual production of all types. Whether in science or the arts, if we look for the source of an achievement we can observe that *what a man does* either repeats or refutes *what someone else has done*—repeats it in other tones, refines or amplifies or simplifies it, loads or overloads it with meaning; or else rebuts, overturns, destroys and denies it, but thereby assumes it and has invisibly used it. Opposites are born from opposites.

We say that an author is *original* when we cannot trace the hidden transformations that others underwent in his mind; we mean to say that the dependence of *what he does* on *what others have done* is excessively complex and irregular. There are works in the likeness of others, and works that are the reverse of others, but there are also works of which the relation with earlier productions is so intricate that we become confused and attribute them to the direct intervention of the gods.¹⁶

Valéry converts "influence" from a crude idea of the weight of one writer coming down in the work of another into a universal principle of what he calls "derived achievement." He then connects this concept with a complex process of repetition that illustrates it by multiplying instances; this has the effect of providing a sort of wide intellectual space, a type of discursiveness in which to examine influence. Repetition, refinement, amplification, loading, overloading, rebuttal, overturning, destruction, denial, invisible use—such concepts completely modify a linear (vulgar) idea of "influence" into an open field of possibility. Valéry is careful to admit that chance and ignorance play important roles in this field: what we cannot see or find, as well as what we cannot predict, he says, produce excessive irregularity and complexity. Thus the limits of the field of investigation are set by examples whose nonconforming, overflowing energy begins to carry them out of the field. This is an extremely important refinement in Valéry's writing. For even as his writing holds in the wide system of variously dispersed relationships connecting writers with one another, he also shows how at its limits the field gives forth other relations that are hard to describe from within the field.

Learning what I could from Valéry, I embarked on what I called a meditation on beginnings. Because the *topos* is neither a traditional nor a usual one, I could not geometrically define it beforehand. I undertook, however, to let it make possible a system of relationships, a field or constellation of significance in which my writing moved in order to gather in both the grosser and the

more rarefied thoughts, images, and instances that crowd around beginnings. The logic of exposition I follow is not precursive; that is, my exposition follows no course determined in advance by convention, imitation, consecution, or thematics. The form of writing I chose was the meditative essay—first, because I believe myself to be trying to form a unity as I write; and second, because I want to let beginnings generate in my mind the type of relationships and figures most suitable to them.

Let me be more explicit. Every sort of writing establishes explicit and implicit rules of pertinence for itself: certain things are admissible, certain others not. I call these rules of pertinence *authority*—both in the sense of explicit law and guiding force (what we usually mean by the term) and in the sense of that implicit power to generate another word that will *belong* to the writing as a whole (Vico's etymology is *auctor: autos: suis ipsius: propius: property*). The job of an initial meditation is to sketch this authority with regard to "beginnings" by allowing it to be set forth as clearly and in as much detail as possible. To do this as freely as possible, while preserving the necessary formalities of clarity, I did not confine myself to "the novel" or to "poetry." I make no claims of startling originality, and so far as possible I concern myself with works and figures of fairly wide currency. But it is no use looking in these pages for evidence arranged or amassed in familiar ways.

Since every beginning is different, and since there is no hope of dealing with every one, I arrange examples in *series* whose internal rule of coherence is neither a logic of simple consecutiveness nor random analogy. Rather, I adopt a principle of *association* that works, in a sense, *against* simple consecution and chance. For a subject like beginnings is more a structure than a history, but this structure cannot be immediately seen, named, or grasped. Moreover, as Roland Barthes has said of structure: "Tout concourt en effet à innocenter les structures que l'on recherche, à les absenter: le dévidement du discours, la naturalité des phrases, l'égalité apparente du signifiant et de l'insignifiant, les préjugés scolaires (ceux du "plan," du "personnage," du "style"), la simultanéité des sens, la disparition et la résurgence capricieuses de certain filons thematiques."¹⁷ As I have said, there is no

*"Everything conspires to make the structures one looks for appear either innocent or absent: the unwinding of the discourse, the naturalness of the sentences, the apparent equivalence of signifier and signified, scholarly prejudices (those of *composition*, *character*, or *style*), the simultaneity of meanings, the capricious disappearances and re-appearances of certain thematic strands."

precursive model to follow. Most important, since the whole field of possibilities for a beginning is so vast and detailed—so irrational—and since I am basing my study upon what is rationally apprehensible, the links between steps in the argument are struck according to what is allowable—according to what the subject of "beginnings" *authorizes*.

Much of this authorization is provisional, and even seems fortuitous in the meditation. But its value can be gradually established in the chapters that follow, chapters in which I will go on to make the association of ideas firmer. I want to insist that this is not a question of *proving* the meditation concretely, and still less of allowing the meditation to act as a "paradigm" for empirical study—unless by *paradigm* one very loosely adopts Thomas Kuhn's definition of the term as a "research consensus."¹⁸ For me it is rather a question of letting the structure multiply itself into more branches, into projects that I believe it makes especially interesting (and that in some cases even makes possible): fiction, the making of texts, and the criticism, analysis, and characterization of knowledge and language.

V

As mentioned earlier, the inaugural meditative essay (Chapter 2) sets forth an intellectual and analytic structure for beginnings, a structure that moreover enables and *intends* a particular philosophical and methodological attitude toward writing. In the three chapters following Chapter 2 I investigate the importance of beginnings—as laid forth in the meditation—to prose fiction, to the historical and modern problems of producing and determining a (primarily) literary text, and to criticism broadly considered. In each of these three chapters there is an equal emphasis upon *what* the work in question begins and *how* that beginning implies, on the critic's part, a particular methodology for understanding that kind of work.

To ascertain what constitutes a beginning is very much to intend a particular course. Why and how a beginning is determined—intention and method—comprise a complex act of knowledge, experience, and art. Chapter 3 examines how the classical novel formalized, in textual form, a peculiarly social, historical, and psychological vision of beginnings: the novel is the major attempt in Western literary culture to give beginnings an authoriz-

ing, institutional, and specialized role in art, experience, and knowledge. Chapter 3 deals with beginning and continuity in the novel up to the time of Freud's discoveries, whereas Chapter 4 treats beginnings as aspects of the function of what we may call the postnovelistic text. Here we shall see how the text, which is a principal locus for either finding or putting beginnings, began undergoing a special process in modern writing once writers felt that the biographical form demanded (and exhausted in a way) by the novel no longer deserved their exertions. Initially the outcome of knowledge and art in writing, the text has become the beginning of an effort to achieve knowledge and art through writing of a violently transgressive sort.

Finally, Chapter 5 takes up the beginning in one of its most explicit contemporary forms, as a problem of discursivity. That is, as the problem of how one locates or designates a beginning *about* or *for* critical knowledge, knowledge of a kind that comes after the texts described in Chapter 4.

Chapters 3, 4, and 5 therefore comprise a unit that progresses more or less chronologically; Chapter 3 very roughly covering the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, Chapter 4, the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, and Chapter 5, the mid-twentieth century. Such a unit aims to consider beginnings as a subject for study by seeing how their meaning and form have been intentionally and methodically worked out and transformed in time.

Despite the appearance of range and variety in these three long chapters, it is obvious that their focus excludes sustained analyses of the sociopolitical circumstances that bear upon fiction, criticism, and texts in general. Indeed, as linguists from Humboldt to Marcel Cohen have so convincingly shown, these circumstances bear intimately upon language itself. Foregoing an examination of these circumstances is, the reader may be assured, a sacrifice, not an act of laziness or of caprice. In common discourse, mention of a *beginning* (as well as *beginnings* in general) immediately suggests pinning down a single date or event, an exercise which, considering the kind of enthusiastic interest in beginnings I have, is too restricting. This is not to say that I have placed myself beyond the pale of concreteness and objectivity and embraced vagueness or airy speculation. Rather, beginning is a creature with its own special life, a life neither fully explained by analyses of its historical-political circumstances nor confinable to a given date in time called "*the beginning*."

Beginning is an activity, and like all other activities there are associated with it a field of play, habits of mind, conditions to be fulfilled. That these associations are set in time and society—that in a larger sense they "take place in" time and society—is of course something to be continually reaffirmed. Yet since a study of beginnings is, for better or for worse, mainly about the language used by anyone who begins (or talks of beginning), the intimate yet apprehensible circumstances of a beginning are verbal. While these circumstances cannot be detached from sociohistorical time in the widest sense, they do have a coherence and even a history of their own. It is this history and coherence of beginnings that I am concerned with here—specifically, *the history and coherence of beginnings as a fact of written language*. Such a setting of beginnings, as opposed to the history and coherence of social reality, is rather more internal; for as I discuss the activity, beginning is doing—intending—a whole set of particular things primarily *in writing* or *because of writing*. Thought, emotion, perception are functions of the beginning act of writing.

Is such a position too rarefied, too scanting of "larger" concerns? For most of my generation, *mind*, *culture*, *history*, *tradition*, and *the humanities*, both as words and as ideas, carry an authentic ring of truth, even if for one or another reason they do not lie easily within our grasp. I have no desire to have done with them, if only because as words and ideas they still seem partially to anchor the world we inhabit, if only because they also are still objects of our regard—and also because, to adapt a phrase coined by I. A. Richards, they are machines to think with. Temperamentally, I have an equal amount of intolerance, on the one hand, for manifestos of delight in the culture, history, and tradition of a given society, and, on the other hand, for vehement attacks on culture, history, and tradition as instruments of outright repression. Both these moods—and they are scarcely more than that—are irresponsible; worse, they are uninteresting. Occasionally they are useful as reminders—of the fact that the tradition somehow continues to exist, and that it can sometimes also be repressive. More often, however, it is better not to treat such attitudes simply as objects of praise or blame at all—in order, as Merleau-Ponty says of a verbal phrase, *to hear what they say*.¹⁹ This approach is not a matter of passive receptivity but of active endeavor. As Merleau-Ponty explains: "Acquired ideas are themselves caught up in something like a second life [when they are heard] and perception."²⁰ Thus I use the word *writing* to indicate

sometimes the first but more often the second life, and *beginning* as the act that joins them irregularly. Rilke's description of "the fundamental element" of Rodin's art captures the essence of my ideas regarding writing and beginning at just that point where they come together: "This differently great surface variedly accentuated, accurately measured, out of which everything must rise."²¹

VI

Hugh Kenner's book *The Stoic Comedians* identifies a recurring motif in the work of Flaubert, Joyce, and Beckett: the bookishness of books.²² The extent to which the writer's imagination is engaged by his particular medium of expression is not to be underestimated, and in one way or another the medium is a kind of practical spur for the writer, or at least an Aristotelian *material cause* in the most direct sense. Not only Flaubert, Joyce, and Beckett but also Dante, Shakespeare, Yeats, Goethe, and many others are enlivened in their imagination by other writing—as writing—that moves them to various responses, also in writing. I am not sure that this type of specialized interaction between writings, which is admittedly perhaps somewhat restricted, has ever been studied as a general phenomenon, although obviously E. R. Curtius's *European Literature and the Latin Middle Ages* studies the problem during a specified period with matchless erudition.²³ Both Kenner and Curtius give one an excellent account of the extent to which the writer's energies are caught up in writing over, rewriting, writing about, or writing to other writing. The polar extremes of writing's cosmology are writing-as-mere-writing (to which belong the images of the Book ridiculed and the Book glorified—by Beckett and Mallarmé, respectively), and writing-as-permitting, writing-as-making-possible, writing-as-beginning other forms of human perception and behavior (Keats's "On First Looking into Chapman's Homer" is an example). In between exists the whole field of other possible relationships between writings, which Borges, among modern authors, has exploited the most insistently in his clever *bibliofables*.

If we preferred to use a less literary or less sentimental vocabulary to describe the processes involved in such relationships, we could say that writing is a ceaselessly changing triangle of

encipherment, decipherment, and dissemination. Yet this makes what I think is a fascinating, turbulent, and thick business sound like a bloodless mechanism. One has only to read Harold Bloom's "interchapter" on antithetical criticism to remark how deeply and interestingly influential can be the notion of writing against writing.²⁴ Some of the more egregious examples of what I am discussing can be noted here. The narrator/author of Swift's *Tale of a Tub*, perhaps the most thoroughly imagined bibliomysth ever produced, explains his career as a writer in very uncharitable terms. When he says that he "cannot imagine why we should be at Expençe to furnish wit for succeeding Ages, when the former have made no sort of Provision for our own," he speaks as a true modern who is literally prevented from finding a place for his writing by the accumulation of past writing.²⁵ Just as the modern writers in *The Battel of the Books* precipitate a quarrel with the Ancients because the latter block their view, so too does the hungry Grub Street scribe wish to write in order to prevent other writing from first occupying the space he hopes to find for his own. Every bit of writing is imagined as mass which occupies scarce space. It is the duty of writing, therefore, to admit no other writing, to keep all other writing out.

Opposed to this attitude is the spaciousness of Coleridge's writing, which in a poem of welcome like "To William Wordsworth" recreates the recital of another's "long sustained Song" in the verse. "The truly great," says Coleridge,

Have all one age, and from one visible space
Shed influence! They, both in power and act,
Are permanent, and Time is not with them,
Save as it worketh for them, they in it.
Nor less a sacred Roll, than those of old,
And to be placed, as they, with gradual fame
Among the archives of mankind, thy work
Makes audible a linked lay of Truth,
Of Truth profound a sweet continuous lay,
Not learnt, but native, her own natural notes!²⁶

Greatness obliterates both the sequence and the displacements of time. Great poetry is its own continuous place and time that incorporates—blends "in one thought"—other writing. For Swift's Grub Street scribe, existing writing occupies the rightful place of other, newer writing and selfishly defends itself against the latter; while for Coleridge, writing is capable of evoking the spoken voice, it revives life in all its complexity (love, fear, knowledge, pain, and

so on), it permits the illusion of living presence ("yet thou thyself/Wert still before my eyes, and round us both/That happy vision of beloved faces").²⁷ Whereas Swift's author/narrator ends up writing about "Nothing," Coleridge finds himself somewhere between deep self-concentration and prayer, emerging, we may surmise, a better, fuller person for the experience of another's poetry.

Both Coleridge and Swift are extraordinarily addicted to quotation, as if to illustrate the literally unsettling effect—whether welcomed or not—that other writing has on their own. Throughout the whole range of experience of writing—that is, between and including the two extremes mentioned above—quotation is a constant reminder that writing is a form of displacement. For although quotation can take many forms, in every one the quoted passage symbolizes other writing as encroachment, as a disturbing force moving potentially to take over what is presently being written. As a rhetorical device, quotation can serve to accommodate, to incorporate, to falsify (when wrongly or even rightly paraphrased), to accumulate, to defend, or to conquer—but always, even when in the form of a passing allusion, it is a reminder that other writing serves to displace present writing, to a greater or lesser extent, from its absolute, central, proper place. Using a different vocabulary, Bate describes the burdensome effect of other writing upon romantic and postromantic artists—that it gave a neurotic cast to the problems of originality and sincerity.²⁸ Practically speaking, "originality" and "sincerity" signify the threats confronting a writer when he quotes others or is quoted by them: Will his writing appear less his, more derivative, than Homer's, or Milton's, or Dryden's?

The greater the anxiety, the more writing appears to be quotation, the more writing thinks of itself as, in some cases even proclaims itself, rewriting. The utterance sounds like—perhaps even is—a borrowing from someone else. Prophecy is a type of language around which this issue of originality perpetually lurks in many forms: Is the prophecy absolutely authentic and original? Does it speak to all men at a common level, or only for one, too original (i.e., alienated) man (the "prophet")? Yet *understanding* other writing prophetically is quite another matter for the writer, although most of us would not call understanding writing a prophetic enterprise. When, however, the writer's aim is an "orderly and systematic understanding of fixed and relatively permanent expressions of life," then the writings of previous eras

become "those residues of human reality preserved in written form." And so system, understanding, and human reality together form an extraordinary prophetic whole. Dilthey then puts it this way: "The ultimate goal of the hermeneutic process is to understand an author better than he understood himself."²⁹ Thus the fear of being unoriginal is superseded by an ambition to be, in a sense, more original and more prophetic than even the first man who ever wrote.

Wherein, then, lies the *authority* of writing? How does one get hold of the principles that authorize writing? Does it reside in the man who existentially wrote? Or in the one who existentially writes? Or in neither, but in some common principle shared by both, but spoken only by one? The critic's role has traditionally been to pose these questions and to make these differences lively ones. Nevertheless, as with the Nietzsche-Wilamovitz dispute, such questions make sense only if the writing in question is considered stable and documentary. Once writing-as-text is thought of as energy on the one hand, or as a monument belonging to a specific series of like monuments on the other, authority cannot reside simply in the speaker's anterior privilege. Either authority is, as Foucault has been trying tirelessly to demonstrate, a property of discourse and not of writing (that is, writing conforms to the rule of discursive formation), or authority is an analytic concept and not an actual, available object. In either case authority is nomadic: it is never in the same place, it is never always at the center, nor is it a sort of ontological capacity for originating every instance of sense. What all this discussion of authority means is that we do not possess a manageable existential category for writing—whether that of an "author," a "mind," or a "*Zeitgeist*"—strong enough on the basis of what happened or existed *before* the present writing to explain what is happening in the present writing or where it begins. Our experience of writing is so varied and complex as to beggar any integral explanation of, for example, why and how *Vanity Fair* was produced as a novel and not as a musical score or a play.

I think that writers have thought and still do think of writing as a type of cosmos precisely because within the discontinuous system of quotation, reference, duplication, parallel, and allusion which makes up writing, authority—or the specific power of a specific act of writing—can be thought of as something whole and as something invented—as something inclusive and made up, if you like, for the occasion.³⁰ Anterior authority or any rationale based

on the prior existence of something else, is thus minimized. It can never be eliminated entirely, for certainly one's childhood, one's present social circumstances, and the historical period in which one lives make their pressures felt regardless. The *beginning* of writing, however, is not something to be pushed further and further back until a set of forces is identified as having determined that beginning. "A book," said Conrad in a late essay, "is a deed, . . . [and] the writing of it is an enterprise." We need not take this mainly as still another reminder of writing-as-*ascesis* (denial) in the Flaubert-Joyce tradition. Rather, it is more positively an assertion of writing-as-action, albeit action of a fundamentally particular sort. To begin to write, therefore, is to work a set of instruments, to invent a field of play for them, to enable performance. "Every art then and every work of art has its own play or performance," wrote Hopkins in 1885 to his brother.³¹

If writers today do not explicitly invoke the Muse at the outset, they are nevertheless still perfectly aware that some force other than physiological causation usually impels them to write. Writing is not a fact of nature, just as reading is a highly sophisticated skill acquired only with difficulty. Writing has its own kind of action, its own dreams, its own restrictions—all doubtless acquired, all doubtless intimately connected to a psychological, social, and historical context. The same is true of reading. But to begin to write—and this is equally true for the novelist and for the "critic"—the old Muse is still necessary, in order to signify and dedicate the redirection of human energy from "the world" to the page—perhaps also, if Genet is to be believed, to signify the birth of a different sort of pleasure, the pleasure of writing in order to read oneself.³² From then on, however, *free* writing—that is, as Barthes has said, words conceived aside from any demands made upon them, demands for form, meaning, experience³³—is only a dream that is scarcely realizable. As I try to show, the classical novel was at once an attempt to dream the dream as embodied in the novelistic hero and a deliberate instrument for "molesting" or prodding the dream away from its privacy and freedom. In the movement from a dream of pure authority to a jolting molestation that brings writing back to its existence as a text, there is invention.

It is probably too much to say that the classical novel goes on today in the form of the critic's enterprise. Yet this is not so far off. For is not the invention of a "field" of study (English, the novel, the Faust theme), the invention of methods of study

(historical, archetypal, Freudian), the invention of goals and conventions—are not all these inventions of the kind that permit visions within them of pure continuity, progress, activity, and even achievement? Furthermore, the critic today is molested in actuality as the fictional hero was. He is harried by the counterknowledge of psychology and linguistics, by the wideness and the detail of contemporary pressure, and most of all, as writer, by the library, that special monster of his working reality that tells him of other writers, which secludes writing and thus, in that partial seclusion from violence and disease, stands, at bottom, for writing only.³⁴ Hence:

L'écriture est précisément ce qui excède la parole, c'est un supplément où s'inscrit, non pas un autre inconscient (il n'y en a pas deux) mais un autre rapport du locuteur (ou de l'écouteur) à l'inconscient.

Donc la parole ne peut rien ajouter à l'écriture. Ce dont j'ai écrit m'est dès lors *interdit la parole*: que dirais-je de plus ou du mieux? Il faut bien se persuader que la parole est toujours *en arrière* de l'écriture (et donc de la "vie privée," qui n'est que le déploiement d'une parole: "je" suis toujours, par statu, plus bête, plus naïf, etc., que ce que j'écris: je ne suis pas *comme* j'écris). Le seul genre d'entretien que l'on pourrait à la rigueur défendre, serait celui où l'auteur serait sollicité d'énoncer ce qu'il ne peut pas écrire.*³⁵

The presentation of these "beginning ideas" about beginnings, the subject of this book, has been the means of setting forth upon the essay by writing. For me, probably as much as for the vigilant reader, what I write says what I am about and reminds us both of what I have not been able to write.

Conrad and his Marlow so beautifully catch the writer's predicament. A man *speaks* to other men, in their presence. The writer declares his ambition to make the reader see. What is spoken of takes time and many words: Jim and Kurtz are no clearer objects of vision than are the meanings of the words used to describe them. A printed record—a novel, a short story, some pages—is the locus of this paradox in which speech writes and where words remain to commemorate what was not, after all, said. The poignancy of beginnings:

*"Writing is precisely that which exceeds speech; it is a supplementary space where what is inscribed is not another unconscious (two do not exist) but another relationship between the speaker (or hearer) and the Unconscious. Therefore speech can add nothing to writing. What I write, from the moment I write, *forbids my speech* from existing: what can I say more or better than what I have written? One should persuade oneself that speech always *lags behind* writing (and therefore behind "private life," which is no more than the deployment of a sort of speech: 'I' am always, by definition, more stupid, more naive, etc., than what I write: I am not *like* what I write). The only sort of interview that one could, if forced to, defend would be where the author is asked to articulate what he *cannot* write."

BEGINNINGS

And later on, many times, in distant parts of the world, Marlow showed himself willing to remember Jim, to remember him at length, in detail and audibly.

Perhaps it would be after dinner, on a veranda draped in motionless foliage and crowned with flowers, in the deep dusk speckled by fiery cigar-ends. The elongated bulk of each cane-chair harboured a silent listener. Now and then a small red glow would move abruptly, and expanding light up the fingers of a languid hand, part of a face in profound repose, or flash a crimson gleam into a pair of pensive eyes overshadowed by a fragment of an unruffled forehead; and with the very first word uttered Marlow's body, extended at rest in the seat, would become very still, as though his spirit had winged its way back from the past.³⁶

CHAPTER

TWO

A Meditation on Beginnings