There are no more remote and easy perspectives, either artistic or national. Everything is present in the foreground.
Marshall McLuhan, *The Mechanical Bride*

One of the features of titles is the absence of verbal forms. Heavily weighted with nouns and adjectives, they offer the reassuring presence of a stable world, a static moment in the rush of time which the succession of words, pages, chapters, processed in linear fashion, emulates. Here, within the limited and isolated space of the title, we have access to the metalinguistic ground in terms of which we will be able to conceive the whole text. The reasonable assumption, we think, is that the title is a heuristic encapsulement, a point of departure as well as a point of arrival, a delimited and enclosed object. It is this very assumption not only about titles but about any discourse claiming to have ultimate explanatory power that many of the essays brought together in *Identity of the Literary Text* seek to question.

As Jonathan Culler points out in his introductory essay, a reader of thirty years ago, confronted with this title, could safely have assumed that he was being presented with a selection of papers dedicated to the problem of how ‘authorized’ versions of texts are to be established: he would have reasonably anticipated that he was to be instructed in the theoretical, methodological, and practical problems associated with the preparation of the critical editions of texts — a rich field, even today, as the variety of recent writings in English, French, and German testifies. At the same time, a reader of thirty years ago might also have concluded that the operative term in the title was ‘literary’ with the expectation that the terms ‘text’ and ‘identity’ were, by common consensus, relatively unproblematic. He would thus have inferred, with some justification, that *Identity of the Literary Text* was concerned with such perennial questions...
as what identifies a text as literary or what constitutive features allow us to distinguish literary from non-literary texts.

This collection of essays neglects the first question entirely, and if it addresses the second, it does so indirectly either by submerging it, or, in some cases, by validating it within a complex network of problems where more radical issues are at stake. If there exists a unifying factor bringing together the divergent views expressed here, it is the realization that we may no longer relegate such terms as ‘identity’ and ‘text’ to the background of our concerns and rely on their unproblematic meaning and usage. Everything, as McLuhan would say, is present in the title, which is also to say that nothing is present and easily identifiable.

For Robert Weimann, the title itself is open to interpretation, and, if we are to identify the specific issues it raises in the eighties, we must situate it in relation to a historically determined ‘subtext’ which makes the question of textual identity a problem both as an object of communication and as a vehicle of cultural and critical endeavour. In his essay, Weimann provides a very lucid overview of the specific historical situation in which traditional notions and usages of the literary text have been subjected to a radical reassessment in recent years.

1 The demise of Romantic sources of poetic thought have undermined the prevailing idea in New Criticism of the text’s identity as a self-referential verbal structure or as a self-contained organic whole.

2 The formalist criterion of poeticty or literariness has been challenged by speech-act theory and post-Saussurian linguistics with the result that the notion of literature as linguistically autonomous or functionally distinct from other forms of verbal utterance has eroded and, with it, the whole liberal conception of poetic language as a cultural mode of knowledge and value.

3 The radical disintegration of genre, tradition, and the literary canon has weakened the ground in which the literary text might be secured in terms of its identity. Here a variety of forces – the repudiation of standards of high culture, the broadly cultural bases of Rezeptionsästhetik, the anti-humanist bias of post-structuralism, the new interest in Trivialliteratur and the mass-media, the post-modernist exhaustion or parody of traditional literary forms, and finally the rise of a new powerful prose, documentary and autobiographical in nature – has upset the literary traditions and the social contracts between writers and their public.

4 The demise of the notion of individual literary authorship has led to the collapse of the author as an authenticating agent of identity in the text itself and its replacement by notions either that readers experience texts in terms of their own identity or, in Derrida’s words, that ‘writing is an orphan.’
These trends have also eroded the critic’s role as mediator between the literary text and audience expectation with the result that the critic’s credibility as a sensitive vehicle of common literary opinion has been undermined. At the same time the whole project of interpretation and its epistemological status has been challenged from various quarters, among them certain phenomenological theorists and dominant representatives of post-structuralism from Althusser to Barthes. The critic therefore is in danger of losing his authority as a cultural mediator of the text’s identity.

Finally the attack of the Nouvelle Critique on the Critique Universitaire in France and the triumph of Reception theory in Germany have created a crisis of social and educational ideology, thus weakening traditional notions of education in the humanities. Radical theories of textuality (especially those proposed by deconstructive criticism) have raised the question whether identity is indeed a meaningful category at all.

From this radical reassessment of the literary text, a reassessment whose international scope Weimann so clearly sketches, two central questions emerge. In his introductory essay, Jonathan Culler has summarized them as follows: (a) What remains the same in the literary text under conditions such as different readings? (b) What is the text’s distinctive unifying force? The issues at stake in the first question involve only to a very limited extent challenging the validity of different interpretations by the same reader, by different contemporary readers, or by historically distanced readers. Nor is there much support in this volume for reaffirming interpretation as a form of uncovering or retrieving some determinate, authorially intended meaning for the text. On these issues there seems to be some relative consensus. What is of concern to the contributors to this collection is whether a reader’s interpretation is more the result of pre-established interpretive strategies than the consequence of some identifiable constraints or regulating features which can be attributed to the text. Specifically challenged is the radical tendency of reader-response theory to move entirely away from the notion of textual constraints and to attribute all acts of interpretation to certain strategic predispositions towards the text on the part of the reader.

The second question raises a different set of issues, though on several points they tend to merge with the first set. What is of concern here is whether or not the notion of identity itself can any longer be held to be a meaningful category applied to the literary text. In other words what is being assessed is whether it is feasible any longer to conceive of the text as a distinct entity, marked by constituent features and viewed in terms of some sort of analogy with personal identity, which itself, to many, appears to be a dubious concept. This does not imply, necessarily, abandoning the term ‘identity,’ but clears the ground for
redefining it in a non-essentialist way, in terms of dynamic process rather than
of static product or object. Finally there is the issue whether the term ‘literary
text’ itself does not promote an internal contradiction in so far as a broad
spectrum of views, sustained mainly by post-structuralist characterizations of
‘text’ and ‘textuality,’ has as its goal the replacement or displacement of both
the terms ‘work’ and ‘literary’; the latter especially is felt to have little validity.

In her excellent introduction to an anthology of some of the most important
theoretical statements on readers and the reading process, Jane Tompkins has
traced the gradual progression of reader-response theory from its beginnings in
New Criticism (Walker Gibson), through its appearance in structuralism
(Gerald Prince, Jonathan Culler), stylistics (Michael Riffaterre), phenomen-
ology (Georges Poulet, Wolfgang Iser, Stanley Fish), psychoanalytic criticism
(Norman Holland, David Bleich) and post-structuralist theory (Fish, Walter
Benn Michaels). What characterizes the evolution that Tompkins traces is the
replacement of the literary text as the centre of critical attention by the reader’s
cognitive activity. ‘If meaning is no longer a property of the text but a product of
the reader’s activity the question to answer is not “what do poems mean?” or
even “what do poems do?” but “how do readers make meaning?”’ Tompkins
attributes this crucial move in reader-oriented theory to Stanley Fish in his
essay ‘Literature and the Reader.’ She notes, however, that this shift of
emphasis from text to reader was merely a preliminary step to a more radical
assertion in a subsequent essay (‘Interpreting the Variorum: part 2’), namely
that a reader’s interpretation of a literary text is the result of the interpretative
strategies that he possesses.

The problem with Tompkins’s account is that, by organizing her selection of
statements in a chronological fashion, she tends to present them with an
evolutionist slant, presumably on the basis of a scientific model, as if each
successive statement represented an advancement of knowledge. Rather than
seeing each position as a different and competing way of conceiving of the
text-reader relationship, she implies that the later and more radical assertions
have in some sense moved beyond the earlier positions and rendered them
obsolescent. Thus many of the essays in Identity of the Literary Text involve a
questioning of the assumptions and directions which the radical tendencies of
reader-response theory have taken over the past five years. Such a reassessment
may be viewed in some quarters as regressive, as a turning back to the heyday of
New Criticism and Formalism. In response, one might argue that an objection
of this sort fails to recognize the speculative nature of much literary theory
today and its own implicit ideological commitment to an evolutionist model as a
strategy to assert dogmatically its own radical premises.

In the first part of his essay, Jonathan Culler takes issue with the tendency of
reader-response theory to resolve the text-reader dualism in favour of some sort of radical monism, whether it be that of textual meaning or reader meaning. Wolfgang Iser’s phenomenology of reading illustrates the former sort of monism while Stanley Fish represents the latter. To interpret a text is to interpret something; one cannot so easily get rid of the something. Thus in Culler’s view one is forced, in the end, out of monism and back into dualism since it seems impossible to distinguish what the text signifies and the reader symbolizes in an act of interpretation. Peter Nesselroth cautions us also to weigh more carefully the shift of reader-response theory from conceiving of a text’s literariness in terms of identifying immanent features to seeing the activity of the reader of a piece of discourse in terms of a priori literary conventions which have been intersubjectively negotiated by a particular ‘interpretative community.’ Whether one claims that certain immanent features incite a particular strategy or whether one asserts that the particular features are discovered by a pre-existent strategy, the fact remains that the constituent features are there, either explicit or implicit. Nesselroth’s argument leads him to ask what we are to do with a text which, while making claims to literary identity (e.g. it occurs in a collection of poems), does not possess any immanent literary features and cannot be forced to reveal any by any interpretative strategy we might call literary. What do we do, he asks, with such ‘poems’ as Apollinaire’s Lundi, rue Christine, which reproduces discursive elements that are immediately identifiable as non-literary and meaningful only at their surface level? Nesselroth’s assertion is that such a text takes on the identity of a poem because of its intertextual relationship within a volume of poems and, in this way, acquires a citational status which establishes its literariness.

Michael Riffaterre’s essay also sets itself against the radicalizing tendency of reader-response theory to shift all meaning production to the reader and to neglect certain constraints imposed on interpretation by constituent features of the text. Riffaterre’s assertion is that there is one specific textual feature which controls reading and guides the reader to the significance of the text. To illustrate his position, he examines two ‘identical’ poems by Rimbaud, both entitled O Saisons, ô châteaux. One single and seemingly insignificant variation, the shift from the definite article ‘le’ to the possessive adjective ‘son,’ leads to two entirely different and incompatible readings, the first mystical, the second erotic. The separate identity of each text is attributable to the significant lexical item which determines the two incompatible interpretations and is perceptible only through an intertextual reading which brings into focus the important function it performs in the poem. The effect of Riffaterre’s essay is to bridge the distinction between the two sets of issues I outlined earlier. On one
hand, the text’s identity is assured by its power to constrain the shape of various readings; on the other, the same significant features confer on the text its unique identity by distinguishing it from other texts.

Félix Martínez Bonati’s essay also represents an attempt to redress the balance by countering the relativist tendency of reader-response theory to insist on the text’s unstable identity and thereby challenge the premises of literary and humanistic education. What works against the traditional view of the text’s stable identity and its enduring power within a continuous cultural tradition is a belief in the historicity and cultural variety of human life and the mutability and plurality of languages. To overcome these objections, one must try to show that readers can adopt transitorily other life-worlds and other semantic systems. Martínez Bonati argues that language survives because there are some permanent features of man’s experience and that these form the basis for transhistorical concepts. He insists equally that, to a certain degree, the semantic aspects of language and the codes of past historical periods may be retrieved through scholarship, though he concedes that, even if the referential core of language is recoverable, the stylistic aura is less easily accessible. His contention, however, is that literature, as an institutional form of writing, demands some sort of subjection to institutional will and that it would not have survived if principles of universality and objectivity were illusory. Thus part of literary identity involves precisely the search for transcircumstantial significance and for the universal possibility of meaning. Martínez Bonati’s stance is essentially polemical. He is not arguing for a return to an exclusively text-oriented approach to meaning; rather, like Culler, he sees that total emphasis on the reader’s individual activity leads to a radical monism which overstates its case and needs some sort of corrective to redress the balance.

Lubomír Doležel’s essay also takes issue with the tendency of the radical side of reader-response theory to emphasize the role of the reader and thus end up in a teleological type of criticism where everything is recuperated in terms of individual or collective ego-identity. Though he does not mention them by name, it is fairly clear that he has in mind the psychoanalytic theories of critics such as Norman Holland and David Bleich, though it is with Stanley Fish that he takes up the question of whether or not interpretive procedures are independently specifiable or not. Doležel’s contention is that, if meaning is the product of the reader’s interpretive procedures rather than a product of the text, it is not necessary to conclude that such procedures cannot be rationalized and clearly designated by models which text semantics has constructed or is in the process of constructing. His argument is that reading is a practical activity based on semantic competence and that the interpretive strategies of the reader need themselves to be explained by semantic and pragmatic theories.
Doležel considers also that the ultimate goal of literary semantics is to give to the text its individual identity, which he conceives as being analogous to personal identity to the extent that they are both constituted by a set of permanent and recognizable features differentiating one entity from another. He does qualify this position, however, by suggesting that the analogy with personal identity does not commit one to the search for singularity or uniqueness as part of textual identity. On this point, he parts company with Riffaterre. For Doležel, the two aspects that define the text from the perspective of literary semantics are its capacity to construct its own circumscribed fictional world and to display its own idiosyncratic literary style.

Doležel’s conception of textual identity on an analogy with personal identity brings us not only to the second set of issues raised earlier but also into sharp conflict with the position espoused by other contributors to this volume. There can be no doubt that a powerful link exists between theories of the self and theories of the text. In fact such a link seems a crucial aspect of the contemporary insistence on notions of textuality and the metamorphosis of the ‘literary work’ into the ‘Text.’ The rejection of the text as an autonomous entity, as a self-regulating organic whole, seems logically consistent with the demise in belief in the Romantic notion of a discrete, independent, enduring self. It is therefore no coincidence that a strong correlation exists within the framework of post-structuralist thought between Derrida’s concept (or anti-concept) of the text and Lacan’s concept of the self. As Susan Suleiman points out: ‘If Derrida sees the internal difference and the continual deferring of presence as constitutive of the literary text, that is precisely how Lacan sees the human subject.’ But it seems paradoxical, to say the least, to dismiss on one hand all concept of the text as a self-sufficient entity and to claim on the other that a deconstructive strategy, at work in all texts subverting identity, is ‘constitutive’ of the new sense of textuality.

The essays of Patricia Parker and Hillis Miller offer readings of specific texts in what might broadly be called a deconstructive mode. Barbara Johnson has very lucidly explained the notion of ‘textual difference’ which underlies the process of deconstructive criticism and which runs counter to the conception of reading as the search for some uniquely different quality in each text:

a text’s difference is not its uniqueness, its special identity. It is the text’s way of differing from itself. And this difference is perceived only in the act of re-reading. It is the way in which the text’s signifying energy becomes unbound, to use Freud’s term, through the process of repetition, which is the return not of the same but of difference. Difference is not what distinguishes one identity from another. It is not a difference between (or at least not a difference between independent units). It is a difference within. Far from
constituting the text's unique identity, it is that which subverts the very idea of identity, infinitely deferring the possibility of adding up the sum of the text's parts of meanings and reaching a totalised, integrated whole.\(^3\)

It is clear that much of the difficulty we encounter in speaking of the text in deconstructive terms derives from our having recourse to a nominal form which reifies it into a concept or an object. Thinking of it in terms of an activity, a process, a strategy, or even a methodological field (i.e. as textualization or textuality) is merely to shift from one level of conceptualization to another. If 'textual difference' is a marker of all texts, it must be 'conceived' of as a constitutive feature that confers on all texts a distinguishing identity. If texts and works are to be distinguished (and Barthes is ambiguous on this point), then 'textual difference' acts as a marker (of degree or kind) of difference between some verbal artefacts and others; in short it acts as a marker of a group identity.

Patricia Parker's reading of Emily Brontë's *Wuthering Heights* illustrates how the novel seeks to establish its own unified identity as an Enlightenment narrative where its sequentiality, order, and closure is secured by its generic patterning and by the 'narratorial voice' of Lockwood. At the same time those very features in the novel which ensure identity – proper names, property, and propriety – are subverted by the 'narrative voice,' which Parker, drawing on a Derridean distinction, calls 'a neutral voice that utters the work from the placeless place where the work is silent.' Thus the text, through its exclusions, calls into question its own epistemological claims; it illustrates the notion of identity and simultaneously transgresses it.

What is left open in Parker's paper is whether *Wuthering Heights* is to be considered as a general paradigm of textual functioning or whether its paradoxical claim to, yet transgression of, identity derives from its specific historical situation, i.e. its challenge to the classical episteme which it both embraces yet distances itself from. If the latter is the case (and it would seem to be so) then it could well be argued that the novel's location within a historical framework where the problem of identity itself is being questioned distinguishes it from other texts situated at a different historical moment; in short *Wuthering Heights* may have an identity after all, marked out by its historical situation and its very questioning of identity. Hillis Miller's deconstructive reading of Thomas Hardy's *In Front of the Landscape* raises a similar problem. In Miller's view, 'the identity of the literary text for Hardy is the proliferating act of translation.' What is left unclear by this statement is whether a deconstructive reading of the poem has ramifications beyond it. Is the 'proliferating act of translation' a marker of *In Front of the Landscape*, of Hardy's view of textuality, or of textuality in general?
Miller's starting point is the experiential effect of the formal rhythms of the poem: the organization of stanzas and rhymes creates the pattern which the figure of the poem, 'a tide of visions,' names. This pattern repeats itself from stanza to stanza as if engendering through repetition its own form and language while at the same time laying the ground for the reader's experience of the poem. Certain words embedded in the text, such as 'misprision,' capture the process that is being played out in *In Front of the Landscape*. In Miller's view, the poem communicates the sense of writing as translation, as tropology where the linguistic moment is seen as a triple act of translation of the phantoms of the poet's mind: into words, into metaphor, into the formal order of the poem. The tropological or translative act, far from putting the phantoms to rest, reveals itself as a misreading, a distortion, giving them life again and leading inevitably to a new poem which will proliferate the same problem. The reader's experience of the poem parallels the act of writing. In searching for a whole that will put the poem to rest, the reader lives the experience of writing. The images do not hold together either individually or collectively; they respond to the reader's search for a comprehensive logic that will shape the poem's identity, but in doing so they undo his attempts to translate them into an order satisfying to the mind. Thus the reader is caught in the proliferating act of translation or interpretation which defers any way of delimiting the text's identity.

It would be difficult to argue that, whatever other effects it may achieve, Miller's deconstructive reading of *In Front of the Landscape*, through its attention to the formal and thematic aspects of the poem, does not confer on it some very specific qualities which distinguish it from other poems and secure for it some sort of identity. Yet Hardy's poem enacts at the same time that rejection of boundaries or closure which defines the older notion of text. As Vincent Leitch has cogently expressed it: '[The new notion of textuality] touches and tampers — it changes and spoils — all the old boundaries, frames, divisions, and limits. The identity of "text" alters. The overrun of all old borders forces us to rethink the "text" … The new text consists of differential traces that refer to other differential traces: it is a differential network. Its excesses complicate all borders, multiplying and dividing them in a process of luxurious enrichment.' It is small wonder then that 'translation,' 'transgression,' and 'tropology' are favoured words in the deconstructive lexicon, undermining not only the identity of the text but the very notion of identity itself.

It would be misleading, however, to conclude that the attack on textual identity is restricted to critics of deconstructive persuasion. Cyrus Hamlin's essay takes issue with the burgeoning senses that the term 'text' has been made to assume in recent theory and suggests that we should restrict the term to the
verbal artefact, which in no way prejudices a hermeneutic or semiotic approach. Having taken aim at deconstructive criticism, Hamlin nevertheless concludes that the ‘very notion of identity, as it applies to the interpretation of art, is anti-hermeneutical.’ What works against conceiving any traditional notion of identity for the text is its mobility, by which he means its mediating function within two axes of communication: the presentational, between speaker and audience and the representational, between verbal code and world. In Hamlin’s view, our concern for the identity of the text is, in a sense, misplaced, since it rests on the presupposition that we are to conceive of the text as a static entity. We should, he argues, view the text, dynamically, as an event, in a mobile process of reflectivity. Identity is thus not something to be found in the text but is constituted by the experience of reading. His conclusion is that the measure of identity for the reader of poetry is a reflective knowledge to be achieved paradoxically in the radical breakdown and destruction of identity itself.

The effect of Hamlin’s essay is not to reject identity as a meaningless category applied to literary texts. What he does assert is that psychological identity is an inappropriate model in so far as it treats the text as a static unity to support Romantic mystifications of poetic individuality and organic whole. Identity only becomes a meaningful concept if we conceive of it as dynamic process and the text as event. What it left unclear in Hamlin’s account is whether he envisages that, in the final analysis, the reader constitutes some identity for the text, provisional though is may be, or whether interpretation should rather be conceived as an unending process of identification, never to achieve even provisionary consummation. If his position is the latter, then it would seem that we are faced with a situation not unlike that of deconstructive ‘textual difference.’ In short, Hamlin’s notion of ‘dynamic identity’ seems very much to emphasize the reader’s activity and thereby to join the radical trend of reader-response theory.

Paul Ricoeur’s essay also introduces the notion of ‘dynamic identity,’ but he gives the term a very different slant. His point of departure is a search for a middle path between logical identity, the assertion of minimal criteria of identification, and the radical notion of identity (or difference) advocated by deconstructive criticism. His field of investigation is narrative, both historical and fictional. The operative concept which he explores, at various levels, is that of emplotment, which he conceives as a dynamic and integrative process of structuring. Though the emphasis is on narrative, Ricoeur’s essay envisages a broader vista which sees the act of poetic composition in general as having features which support procedures of identification, yet are compatible with various modes of historicity.

The structuring process of emplotment is at work in the text mediating
between the scattered events and the whole story. It also involves the process of ‘narrative intelligibility,’ which generates rules to be systematized at the level of philosophical discourse. It draws on the notions of sedimentation and innovation to illustrate how the text becomes integrated with, yet at the same time diverges from, other texts that constitute historical tradition. Finally it brings into play the reading act’s own dynamism, which is grafted on to the configurational act of emplotment. Ricoeur’s notion of dynamic identity opts for a dialectical tension within the text, between a text and other texts, and finally between text and reader. It carefully steers a middle course between text-oriented and reader-oriented theories. At the same time it avoids the lack of concern for criteriology reflected by deconstructive criticism without falling back into the affirmation of identity as a non-contradictory, tautological acknowledgment of an a-temporal entity.

Both Hamlin’s and to a lesser degree Ricoeur’s essays emphasize the presentational axis of communication, the mobile situation of the text between writer and audience. Wolfgang Iser’s paper explores the representational axis where the text mediates between verbal code and world. He accepts fictionality as a marker of literary identity but challenges the real/fictional dichotomy which constitutes the basis for the traditional boundary between the fictional and the non-fictional text. Iser argues specifically for a triadic system: the real/the fictional/the imaginary. A text’s identity cannot, from this perspective, be confined to real or fictional elements, but derives from their interaction, which brings into play the imaginary. In an argument reminiscent of Ricoeur, Iser speaks of fictionalizing as a process rather than of fiction or the fictional as an independent, autonomous entity. At work in the act of fictionalization are processes of selection of systems outside the text and of combination which produces relationships within the text. Thus the text’s identity, created by simultaneous processes of selection and combination, involves the boundary crossing of literary and socio-cultural systems on one hand the intratextual field of reference on the other. The final feature of the act of fictionalizing is the process of self-referentiality, or, as Iser calls it, the principle of disclosure, the as-if construction, whereby the text reveals itself, or is to be unmasked, as fiction. Though insisting on fictionalizing as a process of mediation between text and world, Iser leaves open the role of the reader to produce the meaning of the text and thereby its identity, which may differ from reader to reader and in different historical situations. In this, his essay finds common ground with those of both Hamlin and Ricoeur.

Both Ricoeur’s emphasis on emplotment as process of structuring and Iser’s concern with the process of fictionalizing redefine the notion of identity in what I have called, in my own paper, relational rather than constitutive terms. For
Iser, textual identity is not a question of isolating entities (the real and the fictional) but involves a relational process in which both entities are apprehended only in an interactive process that dissolves boundaries. Similarly, Ricoeur's notion of dynamic identity explores relational tensions between continuity and discontinuity at various levels: within the text, between the specific text and textual models, between texts themselves, and finally between text and reader. My own essay in this volume explores identity in terms of the relationship between texts, in terms of what it has become fashionable to call intertextuality. Intertextual concerns are implicit in both Nesselroth's and Riffaterre's essays, but my own perspective differs in several aspects from theirs. The demise of source-influence studies corresponds to the need to replace the author as the 'authenticating source of identity' (to use Weimann's expression) by the reader as the agent who confers identity on the text by locating it within the co-ordinates of his own literary repertoire of texts. In my perspective, the text does not have a fixed stable identity but is protean in nature, taking its shape in terms of other texts to which the reader chooses to relate it.

Such a perspective does not undermine the notion of identity itself but rather enhances it while insisting that the text is capable of revealing many differing identities, realized in a variety of intertextual relationships. Consistent with a reader-oriented theory of intertextual identity is the necessity to abandon, with certain reservations, the constraints of both causality and temporality. On the other hand, to avoid being counted among the more radical advocates of reader-response theory, I have advanced the notion of 'plausible intertextuality,' by drawing, paradoxically, on Derrida's notion of the supplement, and suggesting that there are some constraints imposed on the text in the reading process and thereby on the differing identities that the text may assume.

For Hans-Robert Jauss, intertextuality is only one aspect of a far broader context for a discussion of identity. At the centre of his concerns is the notion of 'horizon' to which he has so splendidly contributed. For Jauss the notion of 'horizon' in its broadest sense 'constitutes all meaning in human behaviour and in our primary understanding of the world.' It accounts for all historical understanding as well as all understanding of culturally different worlds. It is the problem of aesthetic experience when one reconstructs the horizon of expectations deriving from contemporary experience of reading texts. The notion of 'horizon' is the problem of intertextuality when other texts constitute a special horizon. It becomes the problem of the social function of literature when the text mediates between the horizons of aesthetic and everyday experience. It involves the problem of historical understanding when the
diachronic dimension of texts is brought into play. And finally it is the problem of ideological criticism when the text is seen against the latent horizon of concealed interests and repressed needs. From this it follows that the only identity a text may possess is a relational one, established between it and the various horizons which bring it into focus and shape its varying identities. For Jauss, literary communication is dialogical and, in this, he concurs with the general hermeneutic position espoused by other contributors such as Hamlin, Ricoeur, and Iser. His contribution to the problem of identity is to trace historically how contemporary notions of the dialogical nature of literary communication have evolved over the past fifty years and to survey how his own work has progressed in developing and refining the notion of horizon.

It will be clear from the foregoing discussion that the most serious challenge to literary identity or textual identity derives from the deconstructive camp. Most of the contributors to this volume recognize in varying degrees that, if the text is conceived of as a self-sufficient and autonomous artefact with determinate meaning which it is the task of interpretation to recover, then indeed the notion of identity can no longer hold much sway as a valid concept in literary theory and criticism. What emerges from this consensus is not the abandonment of identity per se, but a reformulation of it as a relational rather than a constitutive notion. The belief that textual identity is not an a priori given but a process worked out in the act of reading would seem to be a position likely to command fairly widespread acceptance in today's intellectual and cultural climate. Deconstructive criticism, however, seems unrecoverable within any consensus. Impervious to assimilation or accommodation (to use Piaget's terms), it represents a frame of reference which speaks its own language and establishes its own epistemological claims. In one sense it is unchallengeable, for it is founded on the negation of any meta-discourse capable of transcending it and thereby mounting a critique from the outside. Like all the great Western ideologies - Christian dogma, existentialism, Marxism, and Freudianism - it retains, within its frame of reference, strategic mechanisms to ensure that its opponents will reveal themselves as dependent on assumptions which are the very object of its specific critique. Unless one is to dismiss it entirely, one's only recourse is to mount a critique of deconstructive criticism from within. Such a strategy, while on one hand granting it some sort of credence, seems also capable of exposing its limits and establishing its historical relevance.

Geoffrey Waite concurs with the consensus view that textual identity, in the sense of the recovery of determinate meaning, has been shattered. He expresses some reservations, however, about the way this has been accomplished within the framework of deconstructive criticism. Waite sees Nietzsche and his analysis of style as a forerunner of current trends to shatter the notion of textual
identity; but his critique takes issue with Nietzsche and the recent reception of
Nietzsche, specifically Derrida's reading of the Nietzschean text. His conclusion
is that such ways (both that of Nietzsche and that of those who 'misread'
Nietzsche) must be rejected to the extent that both obscure the ideological and
political impact of their formulations. The necessary corrective, in Waite's
view, is to distinguish between Nietzsche's own mode of posing the question of
style and the criminal insanity of his proposed solutions. We must face the
ideological dimension of Nietzsche's work and its reception rather than attempt
to elevate objective, historically determined conditions to general conditions
of human existence. 'Deconstruction and post-structuralism always pull up short
and by their symptomatic silences seem to collaborate with that ideology, its
sources, its influences, its reception. ... They end up only by celebrating the
break-up of the identity of Nietzsche's text as open and undecipherable ... To
read Nietzsche from an essentialistic point of view, to take him literally in terms
of his style, whether displacing political ideology with misogyny or repressing
the persuasive aspect of rhetoric, is to risk again and again the dangerous
consequences of irrationalism.'

Robert Weimann's essay, which concludes this volume, insists on the
speculative nature of much contemporary theory and on the necessity to be
aware of the historical circumstances that have given birth to this mode of
questioning and speculation. What is needed is less a dogmatic and exclusory
adherence to one specific conception of textual identity than an awareness of the
differing and competing formulations of the notion of the text. In this way we
will be more conscious of the critical assumptions upon which each is founded
and the historical conditions pertinent to the cultural and pedagogical
institutions of Western culture that make the identity of the text a problematic
issue. With this in mind, Weimann proceeds to bring out the incompleteness of
post-structuralist differentiations between 'text' and 'work.' Having explored
some of the dubious aspects of Roland Barthes's use of these terms, Weimann
seizes on one crucial passage where Barthes speaks of the work as an object of
consumption while the text 'decants the work from consumption, gathering it
up as play, task, production and activity.' Weimann turns this argument against
itself, pointing out that the self-isolating tendency of this view of the text could
well be seen, in many cases, to inhibit the very values of 'play, task, production
and activity' that it seeks to promote. The process of purification, implied in the
metaphor of decanting, needs a complementary reverse process, a movement
from text back to work, a reabsorption of the text into the 'impurity' of
historical situations and communicative relationships. 'If the methodological
trajectory from work to text involves the textualization of all discursive
practices, the trajectory from text to work involves the actualization of the
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inscribed discourse and its subtext.' Thus, for Weimann, the identity of the literary text is to be engaged at the intersection of these two different operations. The intersection will be revealed at the point in history where the process of textualization and that of actualization establish a reciprocal relationship.

Weimann’s essay brings us to the central paradox of this volume. If deconstructive criticism, supported by many other positions of different persuasion, has sought to dismantle textual identity in terms of determinate, authorial-intended meaning or of a self-sufficient, autonomous, unique whole, it has done so by revealing that such notions have no universal claims to validity but arise out of specific critical endeavours (Romanticism, New Criticism, Structuralism, Formalism), located at particular moments of cultural history. But by raising the historical question, they insert themselves into history, which becomes the marker of their own identity. More important, however, is the challenge of historicity to all attempts to dispense with the identity of the text as a meaningful category. For if we confer on the reader the source of all meaningfulness of the text, we cannot escape from the historical dimension of reader-strategies themselves, which in a circular movement confers identity on the text. Moreover, textual difference, which, we are told, undermines identity, must postulate itself as a trans-historical, constituent feature of texts or work its way out through specific texts in terms which are comprehensible with their historical circumstances. In either case the text will be seen to have some form of identity.

NOTES

1 Jane Tompkins, ed., Reader-Response Criticism from Formalism to Post-Structuralism, Baltimore 1980, p. xvii.